ABSTRACT. What is it for a bodily movement to be effortless? What are we appreciating when we admire a dancer’s effortless leaps, a basketball player’s effortless shot, or even a seagull’s effortless soar? I propose to explore the notion of effortlessness by distinguishing various kinds of effortless bodily movements, examining the idea that effortless movements are smooth, predictable ones, discussing the relations between effortlessness and difficulty and effortlessness and actual ease, and speculating briefly about how we perceive and why we take pleasure in watching effortless movements.

According to the Renaissance theorist Baldassare Castiglione, perhaps the most important quality to cultivate in oneself is effortlessness, what he refers to as “sprezzatura.” In his *Book of the Courtier*, he writes,

I have discovered a universal rule which seems to apply more than any other in all human actions or words: namely, to steer away from affectation at all costs, as if it were a rough and dangerous reef, and . . . to practice in all things a certain nonchalance (sprezzatura) which conceals all artistry and makes whatever one says or does seem uncontrived and effortless.\(^1\)

But just what is it for an action to be effortless? What are we appreciating when we admire Castiglione’s effortless courtier, a dancer’s effortless leaps, a basketball player’s effortless shot, or even a seagull’s effortless soar? For Castiglione, effortless-
ness was socially valuable; the façade of effortlessness enabled individuals to gain recognition, approval, and promotion to higher positions in the Royal court. Though perhaps no less relevant to politics now than it was in Castiglione’s day, my concern is more with aesthetic rather than social value, and it is with movements rather than manners.² I want to understand what it means for bodily movements to be effortless and what makes such movements aesthetically valuable.

The concept of aesthetic effortlessness is rarely discussed in academic circles today, and contemporary artists are often less interested in creating works that are effortless than ones that are provocative, powerful, shocking, or insightful. Nonetheless, effortlessness still has its allure, as is apparent in the media today where one frequently finds various athletes, artists, and artworks praised for their effortlessness. Recently in the New York Times, for example, the ballerina Natalia Osipova’s grand jetés were extolled for their effortless elevation, soaring “through the air with so little effort that the sight of her lithe form hanging high above the stage is a shock every time,” and the recent U.S. Women’s Open champion, Na Yeon Choi, was lauded for her “easy swing that makes her game look effortless.”³ How should we understand such comments? What is being attributed to an action when we call it effortless?

I propose to address these questions by pulling apart various notions of effortlessness, examining the idea that effortlessness movements are smooth, predictable ones, discussing the relations between effortlessness and difficulty and effortlessness and actual ease, and speculating briefly about how we perceive and why we take pleasure in watching effortless movements. Although thoughts and questions will feature more prominently than arguments and answers, and although some topics are touched on much too briefly—such as my discussion of why we value effortlessness—and others not at all—such as the relative importance of nature versus nurture in effortless actions (Castiglione, whose book in part teaches one how to become effortless in one’s manners, stands, of course, as a champion of the nurture side of this issue)—my hope is that my sparse conclusions and more frequent thoughts and questions will serve as an entryway into further work on this topic.

I. MOVEMENT, REPRESENTATION, PROCESS

Effortlessness, if the current media is any guide, is valued in a wide variety of endeavors, objects, and ideas. Not only are certain bodily movements described as effortless, but we ascribe effortlessness to intellectual insights, poetry, prose, and paintings. Even the Golden Gate Bridge has been extolled for its “seeming effortlessness,” being described as, “Grace Kelly in Rear Window.”⁴ However, my focus is on effortlessness in bodily movements, for it is in this arena that effortlessness is perhaps the most salient.
What, then, is an effortless bodily movement? It seems that we can apply the accolade of effortlessness to a bodily movement itself or to the process of creating the movement, specifically, the process as the movement is being created rather than, say, the long hours spent in the rehearsal room. In other words, we might say that a movement looks effortless or that an individual seems to be creating her movements effortlessly. In many, perhaps even most cases when we ascribe effortlessness to bodily movements, we understand the movements as being both effortlessly created and effortless themselves. Fred Astaire, the king of effortlessness in dance, seems to move effortlessly and to come up with his ideas about how to move, or about which steps to do effortlessly (and this last effect may be apparent despite his following set choreography).

When our focus is on bodily movements, it is somewhat difficult to see the difference between process (the process of creating a movement) and product (the bodily movement itself); however, this difference is apparent in other realms. The Golden Gate Bridge may appear effortless, yet it does not appear to have been created effortlessly; a rock garden may appear effortless while also appearing to have been created with great care; a Glen Gould performance of Art of the Fugue may sound effortless, but, especially upon watching him play, it may not seem that his creative process is effortless. With bodily movement this divide is clearest when we distinguish the thought a dancer or athlete might put into coming up with a movement, as she is moving, from the bodily movement itself. In classical ballet, for example, it might seem that a dancer is exerting utter cognitive control to create apparently effortless movements. So even in thinking about effortless bodily movements, there is a distinction between an effortless movement itself and an effortless process.

Though I shall have less to say about this, besides the effortlessness of product and process, we sometimes admire the effortlessness of what the movement represents. Just as there are statues and paintings of people in effortless bodily attitudes, there are dances that represent effortless beings. The female dancer in La Sylphide, for example, represents a being who floats effortlessly through the air. Effortlessness of movement, then, is found in either the movement itself, the process of creating the movement, or the representation created by the movement. But what is it that is found in these various locals?

II. BERGSON ON EFFORTLESSNESS AND GRACE

One thought as to what counts as effortless bodily movement is, as Henri Bergson held, that an effortless action is smooth and flowing. On Bergson’s view, effortlessness, which he closely aligns with grace, is the spilling of one movement directly into another. With effortless movements, according to Bergson, you expect what
is going to happen next: “perception of ease in motion passes over into the pleasure of mastering the flow of time and of holding the future in the present.” Music that accompanies dance, for Bergson, adds to this effect. As he says, “the rhythm and measures ... [allow] us to foresee to a still greater extent the movements of the dancer.”

This is an appealing idea, for many of the bodily movements we think of as effortless have a smooth, flowing, predictable quality and many smooth, flowing movements we dub as effortless. For example, when we think of the effortlessness of great athletes or dancers, we might imagine a smooth, perhaps even slow motion, picture of their movements, and when we see someone walking in an even, perfectly coordinated way, we understand the gait as effortless. Additionally, smooth actions not only appear to be effortless but also generally take less effort to produce than sharp ones, which require a burst of energy at each start and stop. However, although many actions that we understand as effortless do appear smooth and flowing, it is not clear that all effortless movements are like this. A breakdancer’s movements, for example, may appear effortless yet include at least some sharp, jerky movements, similarly in fencing, where a riposte may be quick, sharp, brilliant, and effortless. True enough, Michael Jackson’s breakdancing was preternaturally fluid, but, arguably, even he could include a sharp, effortless, accent now and again. If these examples are accurately described—and there is room to question them, of course—not all effortless actions are smooth. In addition, the sharp accents or quick ripostes, though effortless, may not be predictable from looking at the current movement.

Perhaps more apparent, not all fluid movements look effortless. For example, if one notices a tense expression on a performer’s face, a smooth and flowing movement might appear effortful. Or if a movement is smooth, yet extraordinarily slow—not slow as seen on a slow motion film, but physically slow—it might look effortful. This is especially evident in the Japanese dance form Butoh, in which performers often move at a glacial pace. Butoh can be smooth and beautiful, yet look extremely effortful. Moreover, effortful actions, such as Butoh, might also contain, as Bergson saw it, the future in the present. You might know, for example, that a Butoh dancer is going to fall, in an excruciatingly painful and protracted way, to the bottom of a staircase. Yet you may also feel that this fall takes all his effort and then some.

Predictability might also occur without either smoothness or effortlessness. A toddler’s steps do not appear effortless, yet an observer often knows what is coming next; and a parent might sometimes rush over to get ready to catch before the fall has even started.

Thus, though often found together, it seems that smooth, flowing, predictable actions are neither necessary nor sufficient for effortless actions. Nonetheless, it may be that smooth, flowing movements, done at a normal pace, without any facial signs of effort, at least often seem effortless. But why might we attribute effortlessness to a sharp movement and why do glacially slow yet smooth movements sometimes appear effortful?
III. THE EFFORTLESS BODY AND THE EFFORTLESS MIND

I think that we can begin to answer this question by making a further distinction. Effortless bodily movements must, in some sense, involve reduced effort or an appearance of reduced effort, and such effort can be bodily or mental. For example, we tend to ascribe bodily effort to individuals when we observe them breathing hard, sweating profusely, contracting their muscles forcefully, grimacing, grunting, groaning, or simply doing something that we know requires a great deal of muscular strength; in contrast, we tend to ascribe mental effort when we notice such things as signs of concentration (a furrowed brow, perhaps) or determination (a serious countenance, perhaps combined with not quite achieving one’s aim) or, simply, when we know that the mental task is very challenging.

The line, here, between mind and body need not be that of Descartes’, where the mind is immaterial and the body material, but can be the ordinary one in which we think of the mind as the part of us which, among other things, thinks, feels, emotes, wills, and attends (be it embodied as you like), and the body as the part of us which, among other things, jumps, runs, and dances. Whether dualism is true, and the mind is immaterial—as well as, for that matter, whether idealism is true and the body and mind are both immaterial—is irrelevant to our concerns; regardless of the metaphysical truth about these issues, we can still distinguish mind, as what thinks and feels, for example, from body, as what, for example, jumps and runs. Thus, when I contrast mind and body, I intend to understand the mind in this metaphysically neutral way. However, as we shall see, it is not always easy to make this contrast in the first place since in thinking about bodily effortlessness, what counts as mental and what counts as bodily can seem to blur.

In praising the effortlessness of a dancer or athlete’s movements, we may be noting, among other things, an apparent reduction in bodily effort. We may not see his or her movements as requiring little bodily exertion—it would be hard to explain all that sweat if that were the case—however, it may seem that the effortless individual has some energy left over. This effect is often created in ballet by the dancer maintaining a relatively relaxed upper body, evincing neither muscular strain nor even exertion. The legs may seem to be working at full capacity, while the arms, neck, and face give the impression of ease. For athletes, it might seem that they are using just the muscles necessary for the job, and their facial expressions give no indication to the contrary. For example, from what I can tell (from my admittedly limited experience in watching this sport), wrestlers whose facial muscles contort and whose groans are audible, never seem to be performing their claw-holds and bear hugs effortlessly.

Effortless dancing might also seem to use just the muscles necessary for the job. As Bergson’s contemporary Herbert Spencer noted, “a good dancer makes us feel that . . . an economy of effort has been achieved.” And indeed, dancers often hear that their movements should be “efficient.” Efficient bodily movements in
dance are not necessarily ones where the body moves in the most direct way possible from one point to another. In a *pas de cheval*, for example, the foot moves from a standing position, sensuously wraps around the ankle and then, after a slight lilt, is extended from the body, clearly not the most efficient way to get from point A to point B. Rather, in this context, it seems that an efficient movement is one that involves no superfluous muscle tension. Raised shoulders, for example, will not help one to jump higher and so raised shoulders indicate superfluous muscle tension. As superfluous muscle tension is a sign of effort, efficiency, then, seems to facilitate the appearance of reduced bodily effort.

While we tend to attribute reduced bodily effort to the movements themselves, we tend to attribute reduced mental effort to the process, to the creative act. For example, it might seem that Fred Astaire can perform his steps, while engaged in a difficult calculation, which requires most of his mental energy; he just tosses them off, it seems, without thinking about them. Or as mental effort also involves the will, we might appreciate the way in which he seems to not really even try to perform his movements. Rather, the movements just flow out of his body without him exerting his will to produce them. Twyla Tharp also comes to mind in this context; her movements seem to just happen, without her trying to make them happen. (To be sure, no one believes that developing the ability to create art—the years of training—does not require some amount, indeed most likely a great deal, of will power, but in claiming that a work of art is mentally effortless, one may have the feeling that in the moment of creation, neither the creative process nor the work itself reveals will power.)

In many sports, the bodily movements involved are not the aim of the activity. Rather, you move your body in order to, say, get the ball through the hoop, score a home run, or pin your opponent. In such sports, part of the process of achieving one’s aim (or creating the product) is bodily and as such, what we see as an effortless arc of a ball, for example, might, in part, involve apparently reduced mental or mental bodily effort in the process of creating the arc. In various arts bodily movements are also understood as part of the process of creating something else. For example, musicians create music, and in watching or even merely listening to a pianist you might sense that the piece is tossed off without deep thought (that is, with little mental effort in the process of creating the music) or you might sense that little bodily effort went into this (that is, you might see or even just hear the pianist’s fingers moving with seeming effortlessness across the keys). Here, as with the sports, bodily effortlessness is sometimes seen as a feature of the process of creation.

In dance, however, it is a bit more difficult to say what the product of creation is. In one sense, it can be thought of as the bodily movements themselves. The dancer aims to create bodily movements. But in another sense, as is the case with music, a dance might aim to create, with those bodily movements, fear, beauty, or, indeed, effortlessness. And one could also attribute bodily effortlessness in dance (and music) to the process of creating the relevant representation, such as the sylph. As such, it is possible to attribute not just mental, but also bodily effortless-
ness in dance to the process of creating the intended emotional experience in the audience or the intended representation.

A further complication arises in dance at least, and perhaps other bodily endeavors as well, because there are times in which the very distinction between mental effort and bodily effort seems to blur. Sometimes, we have what seem like clear cases of mental effort: for example, a dancer may think verbally about, say, whether to time her movement so that it extends beyond a musical phrase. But sometimes the thinking for dancers, and perhaps for athletes and other artists, seems to occur in the bodily movements themselves, when, for example, it is the bodily movements that explore the music, perhaps pressing forward, then pulling back and floating on top of the music (or so it seems to the dancer). Perhaps the effort involved here softens the line between mind and body, making it difficult to distinguish bodily effortlessness from mental effortlessness.13

Although clearly more can be said about mental and bodily effortlessness, I think we are already prepared to address the question of why sharp movements may sometimes appear effortless and slow, smooth ones, sometimes effortful. Perhaps the breakdancer’s sharp movements appear effortless because we attribute mental effortlessness to her actions and perhaps a glacially slow yet smooth movement may appear effortful, even when the performer maintains a calm visage, because we sense both the strong will power as well as the strong bodily control that is required to maintain such a pace.

The appearance of reduced effort, then, is part of effortless actions in a variety of ways: seemingly reduced effort can be mental or bodily (or perhaps, when “thinking with the body,” a fuzzy case of both) and found in the process of creation or in the bodily movement itself. And we seem to identify it based on a variety of clues—such as calm facial expressions and no apparent excessive muscular tension—and background knowledge: movements we know require great control, such as glacially slow movements, are more difficult for us to see as involving reduced effort, while if we think that a certain movement can, with practice, be made easy, seeing it as easy is not such a stretch. Yet, clearly, the appearance of reduced effort does not suffice for effortlessness. When I ask my ten-year-old to clean up his room, he not infrequently appears to put little effort into the job. But I do not praise his behavior for its effortlessness, for though he put in little effort, it is not effortless. What else, then, must be present if we are to understand a bodily movement as effortless?

IV. EFFORTLESSNESS AND DIFFICULTY

Although there is aesthetic value in artistic representations of everyday activities performed in utter repose, and while we find beauty in the way certain individuals perform everyday activities without effort, giving the impression of feeling entirely
comfortable in their bodies, it is not just lack of effort that we admire in, for example, an effortless dancer’s movements or a baseball players effortless swing. Rather, in dance and sports, effortlessness is the quality of being in some sense difficult yet appearing easy.\textsuperscript{14} Performing a grand jeté that hangs high above the stage is no easy feat, and very few, if anyone, can swing a golf club like Na Yeon Choi.

Of course, effortlessness in ballet and golf would always involve an element of difficulty since they are difficult endeavors, but what are we to say of the connection between effortlessness and difficulty in artworks where the bodily movements are, at least in some sense, not difficult to produce? For example, what are we to say of the movements of dancers who are dancing in pieces choreographed using everyday movements, such as walking, running, or even sweeping the stage? In certain cases, the value of such dances has nothing to do with the effortlessness of the bodily movements of the dancers. However, in other cases, it may. For example, it would be quite difficult to perform the everyday sorts of movements that show up in some of Merce Cunningham’s work in the way his dancers perform them; the movements may be ordinary walking or running, but the dancers perform them in an extraordinary way.\textsuperscript{15}

Something similar may be true of that charmed individual walking effortlessly down the street. It is not just lack of effort in the sense of not trying that we admire. Rather, it is doing something in a way that not everyone can, with little apparent effort. The seagull spreads its wings and effortlessly soars. It’s not hard for the seagull to do this, but it is an impossibility for us, and so we see it glide unencumbered.

\section*{V. OBJECTIVE, APPARENT, AND INTENTIONAL EASE}

Effortlessness involves an element of difficulty, or so I have argued, but what is it that we admire about this difficulty? In certain cases of natural effortlessness, such as the seagull’s effortless soar, the action is not difficult to perform for the one who is performing it. Yet we are in awe that it can be done at all—we certainly could not soar—and done with such ease. However, how are we to understand the effortlessness of actions that require long hours of deliberate practice to perfect? In particular, when we admire the effortlessness of a dancer or an athlete, do we marvel at the fact that someone has mastered a movement to such a high degree that it has actually become easy for her to perform? Or is it that we value the appearance, that is, the artist or athlete’s ability to make what is difficult for her appear easy? In most sports, athletes do not deliberately try to make their movements look easy (exceptions might be gymnastics, figure skating, and other such endeavors).\textsuperscript{16} However, even in basketball, one can still ask: do we cherish the actual ease of the athlete’s movements, or the (unintentional) appearance of effortlessness in movements that are, for the athlete herself, extremely difficult to perform. Finally, in cases where
there is a deliberate attempt to create effortlessness, do we, in addition to treasuring the beauty of the apparent effortlessness of the movement, treasure the ability to create the guise of effortless?

Whether one admires the objective or apparent (whether intentional or not) ease of a movement seems to depend on how familiar one is with the movements performed. Or at least, this is what my own experience suggests. With movements that I am very familiar with, as I am with ballet movements, I am less likely to think that the movements have actually become easy for the performer, and I relish the apparent ease of those movements. With movements I have little or no practice performing, I am more likely to see and admire what I take to be objective ease. In watching basketball, I wonder how Kobe Bryant can get the ball through the hoop so easily, while in watching a ballet dancer, I wonder how the dancer is able to make, what is for him, difficult movements, look easy. Moreover, sports journalists, who I assume frequently have practical knowledge of the skilled movement they write about, often do couple their praise of an athlete’s effortlessness with an acknowledgment that the effortlessness is only apparent. Choi’s game may have looked effortless, “yet,” it is pointed out, “it was anything but.” It seems that what is being noted in such cases is not that the athlete’s movements are easy for her to perform, but rather that they appear easy. Thus, it might be that the more one knows about a type of highly skilled movement, the less likely one is to see it as actually easy rather than as merely appearing easy.

When I watch a great ballet dancer, I am awed, in part, by his apparent bodily ease; amazed at how he makes the bodily movements look so physically easy. However, rarely do I see what I take to be effortless or apparently effortless thought. In watching a ballet dancer perform, the movements might seem effortless, yet I nonetheless typically have the sense of intense thought occurring. This is not necessarily so with dance forms I know less about. Fred Astaire, as I see him, seems to move without any mental effort at all. Thought, however, is only one aspect of the mind, and with ballet, while I tend to not experience effortless thought, I may very well feel that the will of the dancer works effortlessly. And this, indeed, is how I’ve experienced ballet dancing myself. Once on stage, the dancer needs to think and work her body; however, she might not need to force herself to do these things.

It may be that in thinking about the effort of one’s own movements, we place more weight on whether the task requires effortful will power than on whether it requires great muscular strength or thought and thus whether we judge an action as requiring a great effort often turns on whether we judge it to require great will power. And whether we determine that an action requires great will power often depends on whether the action is pleasurable. Doing the dishes, though in some objective sense an easy task, is an activity I find unpleasant—especially when I have waited until midnight—and thus it requires will power to do and, and thus I judge it as effortful. A dancer, in contrast, may perform something that is in some objective sense effortful, yet in watching him I might think of his movements, not as
presenting the guise of effortlessness, but as truly effortless (with regard to the will) since I judge the movement as pleasurable and thus as requiring little will power.

Over and above the appreciation of apparent ease, is the appreciation of the guise of ease, that is, the deliberate creation of ease. Castiglione held that a courtier’s manner should not only appear effortless but also give no indication of the great pains the courtier must take in order to create this appearance, for it was believed by him that the courtier’s effortlessness, or sprezzatura, would be destroyed by any suggestion that the process of creating an effortless manner itself required effort. The great artists of his time, such as Raphael (who was greatly influenced by Castiglione’s work), believed this as well and kept their labors carefully hidden from view in order to preserve the effortlessness or sprezzatura of their paintings. No doubt, these great Renaissance artists were on to something; as I have been emphasizing, our background knowledge seems to affect our attributions of effortlessness. However, it might be that one can see a bodily movement as effortless, even if one knows that it was produced by mental effort; we might call such bodily effortlessness a “studied effortlessness” (in contrast to unstudied effortlessness, which does not appear to have been produced by mental effort). At times, however, when the labors are apparent, one might appreciate the guise of effortlessness, that is, not the effortlessness of a movement, but the difficult process of making an action appear (to those not in the know) effortless.

VI. THE PERCEPTION AND PLEASURE OF EFFORTLESSNESS

How is it that we perceive effortless movement? Most simply, while an effortless piano cadenza is heard, an effortless bodily movement is seen. But is there something special about the way we see effortless movement? Bergson thought that our perception of grace had to do with “physical sympathy”; we feel, in watching a graceful movement, that our body, though stationary, is in some way attuned to the body of the graceful individual. This notion of physical sympathy is similar to what I’ve called in other work “proprioceiving someone else’s movement,” which I understand as the process by which upon watching someone else move, one feels as if one were moving in a similar way oneself. Is proprioceptive sympathy relevant to our perception of effortlessness?

The question is not easy to answer. It does seem that part of the experience of watching effortless dance involves an experience of one’s own bodily ease. However, while knowing that someone is putting large amounts of effort into a movement reduces the appearance of effortlessness, the more practically familiar you are with the movement you are seeing, the greater your proprioceptive sympathy with the movement. In watching a ballet dancer, for example, I am less likely to sympathetically proprioceive her effortless bodily movements, though I do feel a strong pro-
prioceptive sympathy with her movements. So proprioceptive sympathy would appear to be only part of the story.

For Bergson, however, proprioceptive sympathy accounts, at least in a large part, for our pleasure in watching what he thought of as higher grace. Such movements, he seemed to think, were effortless but not just effortless. We take pleasure in them, he seems to think, because of their “affinity with moral sympathy”; he tells us that “anything that we call very graceful we imagine ourselves able to detect . . . some suggestion of a possible movement towards ourselves of a virtual even nascent sympathy,” and he criticizes Spencer for claiming that what we appreciate is merely reduced effort. How could we account for why grace affords us such pleasure, Bergson asked, if it were merely the saving of effort? 21

I think Spencer’s view, however, might have something to recommend it since if the movements we dub as effortless are movements that would be for us difficult to perform yet appear to be performed with reduced effort, then part of the reason why effortless action is attractive could be that it reveals a superfluity of fitness. Of course, proprioceptive sympathy could be part of the reason we admire effortless movement as well. Whether this is in part because proprioceptive sympathy makes us feel as if we were attuned to our fellow human beings, as Bergson seemed to think, I cannot say, but it does seem that upon watching effortless movement, one of the things we enjoy is the feeling of performing difficult movements in a smooth, coordinated, efficient way (and this, perhaps, can be experienced even if we know great work was put into creating this coordinated efficiency).

But perhaps most important, effortless movements are pleasurable because they are beautiful. And it may be that we recognize them as beautiful because we both sympathetically proprioceive them and see them as revealing a superfluity of fitness. 22

VII. ENDINGS AND BEGINNINGS

What exactly is effortlessness? How, precisely, do we perceive it? And, ultimately, why do we like it? Although I hope to have made some headway in answering these questions by distinguishing an effortless product from an effortless process and mental effortlessness from bodily effortlessness, by discussing the relation of effortlessness to difficulty, actual ease, apparent ease, and the guise of ease, and by briefly speculating as to how we perceive and why we value effortlessness, I realize that this is only the beginning of an inquiry into the concept of effortlessness. However, rather than forging on myself, let me, at least for now, pass the task of understanding effortless movement to someone for whom thinking about these questions will be, if not in actuality, then at least in appearance, at least a bit more effortless.
NOTES


2. The importance of effortlessness in politics is especially apparent in the recent presidential campaign where ease seemed to win approval. In the September 2012 issue of the *Atlantic Monthly*, for example, the journalist James Fallows, in his article “Slugfest,” critically describes Mitt Romney’s ongoing campaign against Barack Obama as often displaying “what appear to be laboriously studied moves rather than anything that comes naturally.” Romney’s successful primary campaign, though, Fallows describes as exuding an impressive ease, with Romney “standing with a slight smile on his face and his hands resting easily in his pockets, looking on with calm amusement.” In recollecting the presidential race during which Reagan overturned Carter, he says, “Reagan’s sunny demeanor—loose and expansive, while Carter was tight and tense—apparently reassured voters.” Castiglione’s precepts, apparently, endure.


5. H. Bergson, *Time and Free Will: An Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness*, trans. F. L. Pogson (New York: Dover, 2001[1889]). I am not sure that the connection between gracefulness and effortlessness is as tight as Bergson sees it since, as I shall explain later, I understand our attributions of effortlessness to depend in part on our knowledge of the difficulty of the movement; it is not clear that our attributions of gracefulness depend on this, or at least depend on this to the same degree. There is much more to say about the relationship between effortlessness and grace, yet I shall, for the most part, pass over this, as there is already too much to say about effortlessness and its relation to other perhaps less difficult concepts.

6. Ibid., 12.

7. Ibid., 12.

8. As does the Swiss Butoh dancer Imre Thormann, in his 2006 performance at Hiyoshi Taisha Shrine in Japan. See www.youtube.com/watch?v=9ms7MGs2Nh8 for a youtube excerpt of this remarkable event.


11. Of course, you could say that in dance the aim is not just to move your body in a certain way, but to, say, create an effect of joy. And with partnering, of course, sometimes your aim is to support, throw, or catch your partner. In this sense, bodily movements can be part of the process of creating the effect or the toss.

12. One might also value effortlessness in the process of the musical composition, or in dance, in the choreography. My sense, though I am less sure of this, is that this effortlessness can also be seen as either mental or bodily.

13. There are also interesting causal connections between mental and bodily effortlessness. Just as it is difficult, as some say, to feel sad when you have a smile on your face, it is difficult to be mentally tense (which is perhaps an extreme, and typically useless type of effort) when you relax your body. For a very different analysis of the blur between the mental and the physical, see Montero, B. (1999), “The Body Problem,” *Noûs* (2):183–200.

14. This is not as obvious in the effortlessness we perceive in an artistic representation. A painting, for example, may represent a figure simply pouring a pitcher of water. However, it may still be that
the way in which the representing figure is pictured as moving is still beyond the ken of the ordinary individual.

15. We may understand some examples of everyday movements in dance as representing ordinary movements, such as those of a stage sweeper, while others comprise an abstract dance, such as when ordinary walking and running are some of the dance movements in a Cunningham piece. In either case, however, when such movements are valued as effortless, it seems that they can’t be done, in the way they are done, by just anyone.

16. Although it seems that effortlessness in such sports is less common today than it was in times gone by.

17. L. Louden, “Sprezzatura in Raphael and Castiglione,” *Art Journal* 28, no. 1 (1968): 43–49. The effortlessness in these works is in the representation: the figures represented, such as Raphael’s portrait of Castiglione himself, often showed a certain effortless.


19. I discuss the relevance of proprioception to our aesthetics judgments in “Proprioception as an Aesthetic Sense,” *Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 64, no. 2 (2006): 231–42.


22. Is every attribution of effortlessness normative? Is effortlessness necessarily an aesthetic attribute? Or might there be cases in which we attribute it but do not intend to make an evaluative judgment? I am not sure how to answer these questions. The term effortlessness seems to usually be used normatively. Moreover, it is usually used with a positive connotation, however, as it is not the case that all dance should look effortless, one can find if not the term, then perhaps at least the notion of effortlessness being used with a negative connotation, such as when the *New York Times* dance critic Alastair Macaulay laments the lack of energy in a recent New York City Ballet performance: “the kinds of dancing that Mr. Martin and Mr. Millepied preset are facile, polished and untroubling; the worlds they put onstage are exclusively heterosexual and uniformly polite”; and in commenting on the performance of Balanchine’s symphony in C, he says, “in Balanchine’s lifetime, in the finale when the corps de ballet women, in lines on three sides of the stage, used to point their feet (battement tendu, the step most fundamental to Balanchine’s conception of ballet technique), they were seldom in perfect unison, but the step had a white-hot galvanizing force; today it is all on the beat and all tame . . . [and] in the arduous first movement Megan Fairchild is prosaically skillful. The ballet used to be a life enhancing festival of brio and rhythm; right now it feels neat and safe.” What is needed, it would seem, is a bit more visible effort.