
THE SUBJECT OF DANCE: DANCE BETWEEN BODY AND SOUL

Abstract: *Despite the fact that dance is inconceivable without a body dancing, the soul was traditionally understood as the subject of dance. Given the fact that the art of dance underwent its first aesthetical analysis during the modern era, as one of the fine arts, it was philosophically understood against the background of dualism, of soul and body being separated and mutually exclusive entities. In such context, the body was seen as a mere material object, deprived of any features required for the subject of any art. On the other hand, the soul was seen as active, productive, creative, as the origin of meaning and as using body to convey meanings to other minds. Therefore, for the first dance aesthetics the soul was interpreted as the subject of dance, and the body as its instrument. However, the modern idea of dance became the basis for its theoretical inquiry, to be questioned only in the second half of the 20th century. Relying on phenomenology, contemporary dance aestheticians inverted such idea, proclaiming body as the true subject of dance, and ascribing to the body all creative and artistic features that were traditionally ascribed to the soul. In this essay I will examine such inversion, by comparing the most important consequences of the traditional idea with new, contemporary and alternative solutions, based on the idea of body as a kinaesthetic phenomenon. The analysis will show the problems of such inversion, as well as possible further consequences of the idea that body, a kinaesthetic phenomenon, is the true subject of dance.*

Key words: *dance, dance aesthetics, body, dualism, kinaesthesia, movement*

Aesthetics of dance is not a prominent field of aesthetics. During the 18th century this fact became obvious, raising more than a

few questions concerning the origins and the conditions of this problem. Namely, if the art of dance is accepted as one of arts, and it is, why are there so few philosophical reflections which address it? In Francis Sparshott's words: „On the one hand, it has traditionally been held that dance was the first and in some ways the most fundamental manifestation of whatever it is that all fine arts manifest. On the other hand, the way general works in aesthetics are written seldom reflects this estimate: dance aesthetics is not assigned a key role in aesthetics, examples used to illustrate general points are seldom drawn from dance, dance is not assigned a central place in systems of fine arts.”¹

The question is, obviously, not to be bogged down by inspecting the art of dance as such, which was, as we have already pointed out, recognized and accepted as one of fine arts. More or less equal with others, but as a fine art nonetheless. In my opinion, the origins of this problem are to be sought in philosophy, that is in aesthetics – in the way it was conceived and organized, so that it excluded prominent position of dance, while at the same time including prominent positions of other arts, such as music, literature or painting. I do not want to say that the immanent constitution of aesthetics is such that it cannot give rise to a theoretical consideration of dance, as if it would be impossible to develop an aesthetics of dance. On the contrary, I would like to suggest that there is no difference between dance and other arts in this respect, arts which did get their prominent position in the domain of aesthetics; the fact that dance is rarely analyzed is, therefore, even more striking. In other words, there is no special quality intrinsic to dance which makes it more difficult for theoretical analysis and its verbal articulation than the other arts. Although philosophy will struggle with any of the arts, them being bound to non conceptual media of expression, this problem was never seen as an obstacle for aesthetical research – at least not as one that would cancel such research in advance and for good.

If that is so, how are we to understand that it was due to aesthetics that we are today left only with a few examples of dance being philosophically investigated and interpreted? Among various possible strategies of approach to this problem, I would like to propose the following one. Namely, I believe that there are specific presuppositions in philosophy which entered the domain of aesthetics and ruled over its questions, answers and concepts, making aesthetics blind for the phenomenon of dance. In other words, in almost all traditional aesthetical theories there

1 Sparshott, F. (1982) On the Question: Why do Philosophers Neglect the Aesthetics of Dance?, *Dance Research Journal*, Vol. 15, No. 1, Congress of Research in Dance, p. 5.

are governing ideas which do not belong to aesthetic research as such, but are imported from other, wider philosophical positions – sometimes even those of the same author. Given that they are not of aesthetic origin in strict terms, such ideas can distort aesthetic thought, since they shape its domain of investigation in advance, not relying on the aesthetic phenomenon. Hence, they are governing ideas – regulative ones, in Kantian terms: they are accepted in advance, and so they influence the domain of aesthetic research in advance. If those ideas would be excluded from the aesthetic research, it would, perhaps, become more open to the possibility of drawing its questions, concepts, arguments and positions exclusively from the aesthetic experience, from the aesthetic phenomenon.

If we apply this line of thought to the problem of there being no or almost no aesthetic theory of dance, the consequence would be the idea that dance was not seen as a prominent art because of some of those governing and regulative non aesthetic ideas. In other words, the consequence is that aesthetics of dance could be truly possible only if aesthetics could be freed from such wider philosophical presuppositions and directed towards the phenomenon of dance, that is the phenomenon of dance as is lived and experienced both in the production and in the reception of this fine art.

Such an idea is, surely, to be proved by more concrete analysis. However, for such an analysis to be complete, it would require questioning of various and numerous concepts, ideas and positions usually considered to be adequate for both description and analysis of dance, both in lay and in academic context. In this essay I will focus on only one such example, namely on the question of the subject of dance: who is it that actually dances? In my opinion, this question is of some importance for the study of dance, since the idea that it is the mind, the soul – and not the body – that represents the proper subject of dance was one of the most influential of governing and regulating ideas that defined positions of traditional aesthetics in its relationship to dance.

Mind-body gap: is dance only in our heads?

The art of dance became recognized as one of the fine arts during the 17th and 18th century: its full presence in the cultural life of western Europe has, however, taken place during the 19th century.² The 20th century witnessed the liberation of the art of dance from its traditional constraints and fixed forms, both in terms of the phenomenon of modern dance and the phenomenon

2 Thomas, H. (2003) *The Body, Dance, and Cultural Theory*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 94-95.

of mixing various dance poetics into unique and specific dance pieces, not to be easily classified within any systematization of dance forms or styles. I am talking of dance in the context of fine arts, where it firstly became recognized in the form of ballet, later to be developed in more flexible manners. The reason for such focus of this research is to be found in the development of the traditional philosophy, as it was dominantly orientated on fine arts – and not, for example, on folk art or on other cultures with their specific understanding of the meaning, function and essence of specific arts.³

Thus, I am focusing on the art of dance in terms of dance being one of the fine arts only because the question here is how did traditional philosophy and aesthetics approach this art, and why in such manner.⁴ Since traditional philosophy was almost exclusively orientated on fine arts, I will follow the same focus: the art of dance was, in the same context, also seen only as one of the fine arts, while folk dances, for example, were not subjected to philosophical analysis. Other approaches to the art of dance are, of course, also possible, but they will not be a part of the present analysis.

However, the development of dance as one of the fine arts is to be instructive for our purposes in another respect. Namely, since traditional philosophy was orientated solely on the fine arts, it only considered dance as one of its subjects – however rarely and with no wider expansion – when dance itself became recognized as one of the fine arts. That is to say that aesthetics of dance in proper sense, although not much developed, can be found only in philosophies of the modern era, especially of the 18th century. For example, authors like Charles Batteux and d'Alembert Jean le Rond considered dance to be one of the fine arts and offered mutually contradictive ideas regarding its place in the classical system of arts – Batteux considering it to be one of the five cardinal arts, and d'Alembert excluding it from such system and replacing it with architecture.⁵

Still, such character of early philosophical considerations of dance defines the horizon of wider philosophical ideas governing more concrete aesthetical inquiries. The most prominent of them

3 There are, of course, few exceptions – comparisons of European and non European approach to arts, but they are rare and not defining the positions of main traditional aestheticians.

4 Sparshott, F. (1995) *A Measured Pace. Toward a Philosophical Understanding of the Arts of Dance*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, pp. 3-4.

5 Kristeller, P. O. (1951) The Modern System of the Arts: A Study in the History of Aesthetics Part I, *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol. 4, p. 497; Batteux, Ch. (2015) *The Fine Arts Reduced to a Single Principle*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 3.

is Descartes's metaphysical position, namely the one stating the existence of two – and only two – created and finite substances, *res cogitans* and *res extensa*. As a founder of rationalistic philosophy, Descartes influenced not only philosophies of Leibniz, Spinoza, and other rationalists, but also – via critique of his positions – the empiristic philosophy and even the scientific thought of 17th century. His dualistic metaphysics was, despite the fact that not all of modern philosophers were Cartesianists, widely influential since it provided the first metaphysical background for the modern idea of mind-body gap.

Regarding the aesthetics of dance, Descartes is important mostly in two respects. Firstly, his dualistic metaphysics implies that soul and body are two separate entities, miraculously interconnected in the human being. The term 'miraculously' is here used as, for Descartes, there was no possibility for the human mind to explain this connection in any scientific, that is in any philosophical manner; it could only see that mind and body are interconnected, while at the same time knowing that they are modi of two different substances without any possible link between them.⁶ Secondly, Descartes's positions regarding the possibility of proper knowledge are such that the realm of *res extensa*, to which body is confined, is less knowable than the realm of soul, the realm of *res cogitans*. If there is to be proper knowledge of the body, that is of *res extensa*, it is to be found in mathematical and purely rational ideas describing extension as its main attribute. Ideas originating from senses, therefore, can never be clear or distinct – they can never offer us proper knowledge; therefore, they are to be considered as knowledge of lesser degree.⁷

Before we analyze the relationship of these ideas of Descartes with the problem of the aesthetics of dance, or the lack of it, first it should be shown that a reference to Descartes's metaphysics is not a matter of interpretation, but the matter of the factual dance experience and its understanding. Namely, the problem of the absence of the aesthetics of dance gained its visibility during the second half of the 20th century. Authors who reflected upon this problem often criticized traditional philosophy as being too rigid and too much rationally orientated to elucidate the phenomenon of dance. Among many issues then considered to be origins of the neglect of dance, the question of body is especially accentuated: as dance is unimaginable without the body dancing, such focus is not very surprising. However, the ironical twist here is that it actually should be surprising, for the argument of

6 Wilson, M. D. (2005) *Descartes*, London: Routledge, pp. 155-157.

7 Gombay, A. (2007) *Descartes*, Malden: Blackwell Publishing, pp. 41-43.

dance aestheticians was that it was exactly the body as such that was neglected in traditional philosophy, and, consequently, in traditional aesthetics.⁸ In other words, the problem of the absence of dance is, actually, only the consequence of the corresponding absence of body: traditional philosophy being orientated on mind and its features, be it rational or sense cognition, it had no sense for body as such, and could not allow for it to emerge as a philosophical problem even in the mode of dance.⁹

Here we have a striking example of previously presented thesis that traditional aesthetics in its approach to dance was under the influence of non aesthetic, wider philosophical ideas. However, the problem to which dance aestheticians reacted was not merely the problem of traditional philosophy being blind to the phenomenon of body and dance, but more the problematic fact that it has transferred those ideas into the very practice of dance – that is, into the way dancers and coreographers themselves understand their art, even if they did not have any contact with the history of philosophy. As Sondra Horton Fraleigh shows, not just dance theory, but the dance practice as such was infused with ideas that mind (or soul) and body are two separate entities, in terms of body being mindless, i.e. body being only an instrument for the workings of the mind.¹⁰ As such, mind-body gap reveals itself as far more sinister: it arranges in advance the very production of dance, both in terms of coreography and dance performance.

Fraleigh analyzes the problem into its elements: the mind-body gap is inscribed in the art of dance while it is present even in the educational process of becoming a dancer. In order to become a dancer, one has to ‘rule over’ one’s body – to be able to control it, to discipline it, so the body would do whatever soul and mind demand of it to do.¹¹ The fact is undeniable – as all of us know, it takes years of exhausting exercise to be able to do *arabesque* or *manege*. However, facts are not in question here – the problem lies in their interpretation: we should ‘control’ and ‘discipline’

8 Fraleigh, S. H. (2004) *Dancing Indentity. Metaphysics in Motion*, Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, pp. 8-10.

9 In words of Erick Hawkins: ‘But how we have forgotten human eyes *that move*; or live fingers with *three* wonderful joints; our exquisite knees; our spines that wriggle and grow with meaning; the magic aliveness where our legs nestle into the body; and even the head, not thinking life into a standstill, but feeling life into existence. I would like to help us remember.’ Hawkins, E. (1992) *Theatre Structure for a New Dance Poetry*, in: *The Body is a Clear Place and Other Statements on Dance*, Princeton: A Dance Horizon Books, p. 8.

10 Fraleigh, S. H. (1996) *Dance and the Lived Body. A Descriptive Aesthetics*, Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, p. 9.

11 Fraleigh, S. H. (1996) *Dance and the Lived Body*, p. 9.

the body, make it a proper ‘instrument’ of the mind and/or soul. Therefore, if we are to control, discipline, and rule over the body, making it subject to our intentions, then the body is not the subject of dance – it is an instrument of dance.

Such understanding of dance involves several other consequences: namely, if the body is merely an instrument of dance, and it is an instrument to be used by the mind and the soul, then the true subject of dance is the mind (or the soul). Hence, it is the soul that truly dances, since the very essence of dance is produced by it – and not by the body, which is merely used for such essence to be manifested in material realm, in *res extensa*, or in the public domain. Therefore, dance is essentially not a bodily event, but the event of the expression of states of mind, may they be of cognitive or of emotional character. So, we’ve reached the origin of previously mentioned inversion: although dance is unimaginable without some body dancing, it is nevertheless often understood as non-bodily in its character. Such paradox, once revealed as a paradox, is seemingly easy solved – the body should be returned to dance, and dance to the body. However, as I will show further on, aesthetics of dance will find this solution rather problematic.

Another consequence of the same dualistic approach to the art of dance is the primacy of the coreography, i.e. of the coreographer.¹² Namely, once the body is expelled from dance, and proclaimed to be its instrument only, there is no need for the subject of dance to be literally the person dancing, that is now their soul. The subject of dance could now be the author of dance, the creator of its idea which is to be embodied via the body as the instrument – and that body does not have to be the body of the one and the same person. Therefore, if the dance is essentially not in the body, but in the soul, there is no need for it to be in the soul of the dancer: now coreographer can step forward as the true subject of dance, since it is he who conceives it, who truly creates the dance.¹³ In those terms, dancers are reduced to little more than their bodies: their souls should receive the idea of dance from coreographer and apply it to their bodies, so dancers are merely interpreters – not proper artists.

If we are to involve the audience in this little sketch, it would represent the final ‘magnetic ring’ of this rather platonistic hierarchy: namely, according to such understanding of dance, the audience is to enjoy the original idea of the coreographer,

12 Sparshott, F. (1995) *A Measured Pace. Toward a Philosophical Understanding of the Arts of Dance*, pp. 373-374, 376.

13 Pouillaude, F. (2017) *Unworking Coreography. The Notion of the Work in Dance*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 216-217.

and not the bodily movements of dancers *per se*. Given that those movements merely embody the original idea made in the soul of the choreographer, it is just that idea that should be recognized in the reception of dance, although it is translated into another realm, the realm of *res extensa*.¹⁴ Disproportion of the senses primarily used in the performance of dance and in its reception also endorses such interpretation: the dancer is not differentiated from the dance he is performing, so he cannot see himself in the manner in which a pianist can hear himself playing. On the other side, spectators are detached from the dance, they do not move: it is the epiphany of the contemplative attitude that is to allow for cancellation of the body so the original idea of the soul embodied through it could finally be reached. The audience is, in one way or the other, to unpack the bodily movement and to retrieve the original mental idea translated into the body by the dancer.

If we take a step back and consider modern philosophical ideas which are the background of such interpretation of dance, ideas of Descartes, we can show that aesthetics of dance indeed was clearly infused with ideas of non aesthetic origin. The influence of Descartes's dualistic metaphysics is obvious in the detachment of body and soul, in the mind-body gap. However, such dualistic metaphysics not only differentiates between the mind and the body, but it also reserves any kind of meaning exclusively for the realm of the mind. Therefore, the body cannot be the origin of the art of dance since it cannot be the origin of any meaning, and arts do convey meaning – even if it is non verbal.

Moreover, in Descartes philosophy – and in much of the scientific worldview of modern ages – the body is not only the instrument of the mind, but also, understood in its own essence, a complicated machine. That is, the body is understood in terms of the new mechanistic physics, which equates bodies among each other in terms of them all being one single material substance, Descartes's *res extensa* we might say. Such view of the body is highly problematic for aesthetics of dance, since it does not differentiate between the human body, which can be the subject of dance, and other bodies, which could never dance. The human body, even the dancing one, is here seen not as a possible subject, but necessary as an object, one among the other material objects in the world. Therefore, such body may be seen in aesthetic terms only in two cases: first of all, as a pure material to be formed, similar to colors, marble, tones, clay and so on in case of other arts. If it is understood as a material of aesthetic

14 Pouillaude, F. (2017) *Unworking Coreography. The Notion of the Work in Dance*, pp. 163-164.

production, then it is to be formed and shaped by the soul, as we have seen earlier.

Another possibility is related to the reception of dance, not to its production: if the body is to be experienced aesthetically, it has to be infused with some phenomenality different from its plain sense-perceptive features, which it shares with other material objects. That is, it has to be artistically formed and shaped; but then, aesthetic experience it conveys has nothing to do with its mechanistic bodily essence, but with the transformation it has endured. In other words, aesthetic experience is not and could not be about the body - it is about the mind which manifested itself through the body. And, therefore, we learn that the body as such cannot have any aesthetic meaning whatsoever; it could only be seen as such as it is the soul of the audience that experience it as an aesthetic phenomenon - it is the soul that recognizes artistic meaning. Thus, as we have seen, if there is to be any proper knowledge of the body, it should not be sought for in aesthetic experience: aesthetic experience will not reveal the true nature of the body, since it consists of unclear ideas which could not become distinct, conceptually differentiated. The true nature of the body is to be known only via science, that is through the insight of reason; hence, if the body is to reveal itself in its own domain, that would not be the domain of art, of dance. Finally, if that is so, then the body cannot be the proper subject of dance. However, it is just that.

Dancing body and dance aesthetics

Traditional philosophical ideas I previously sketched with regard to the problem of the subject of dance, the primacy of soul over the body, do not belong to the phenomenon of dance as such. As we have seen, those ideas originate from the general metaphysical and epistemological domains of philosophy, and they organize aesthetical approach to the phenomenon of dance in advance. Such aesthetical analysis of dance, however, is to be understood as its specific interpretation, problematic in some of its core concepts and ideas, which can be questioned and changed. In this respect, aesthetics of dance merely follows the same line of development which was taken by aesthetics as such: namely, in the period of modern ages aesthetics was slowly, but constantly releasing itself from the metaphysical and epistemological influences, to which it was subjected during centuries of philosophical questioning of aesthetical problems, since Plato and Aristotle onwards.

The idea that dance should be freed from such constraints of modern metaphysics and epistemology was first actualized through abandoning of the mind-body gap I've previously

analyzed. Namely, the idea that the soul is the subject of dance and that the body is merely its instrument, perhaps even its object, is now replaced by the idea that it is the body that dances, i.e. that the body is the true subject of dance. Such reversal is plain enough: since the art of dance cannot be conceived without the body, here we apply Occam's razor – we will not accept complicated explanations if there could be offered more simple ones. In other words, we are to start with minimal conditions of dance, and not progress to accept other, more complicated ones if that is not necessary. Therefore, we start with the body: it is the body that dances.

However, as it was the case with previously described interpretation of dance being actualized by the soul, the idea that the body is its true subject also implies certain consequences. Firstly, the idea goes against the understanding of body as an instrument; secondly, it goes against the primacy of the choreographer; and thirdly, it implies that the content and meaning of dance should be derived from the body – that they no longer have purely mental character. Now, if the body is no longer to be considered as an instrument of the soul, then the origin of dance cannot be the choreographer anymore, since he does not dance, does not work with his own body. The primacy of dance production is, thus, returned to the dancer. However, such primacy is now orientated on the dancer's body, not on his soul: therefore, the body has to be understood as active and artistically creative – not as passive anymore. If the body is interpreted as the true origin of dance, it also has to be understood as 'intelligent' - not as mere matter, deprived of mind.

Nevertheless, such consequences and ideas are problematic in few respects. Firstly, if the body is now accepted as the true subject of dance, where does that leave us with respect to the soul? Does this mean that the soul, the mind, and mental events in general have nothing to do with dance? This problem is, once again, to be resolved in more general and not strictly aesthetic terms. Namely, in question here is not only the idea that mental events are the true origin of dance, but the very differentiation of mind and body. Therefore, by stating that the body is the true subject of dance aestheticians do not just claim that the mind or the soul have nothing to do with dance. On the contrary, they are challenging the very division, the very separation of mind and body that was the paradigm upon which traditional dance aesthetics relied. Hence, such questioning would also have some anthropological consequences, if not even metaphysical ones.

To state that the body is the true subject of dance, then, implies that there is no gap between mind and body, i.e. that their differentiation is false. In this respect 20th century aesthetics of

dance reaches out for another wider philosophical background, namely for phenomenology, which offered it philosophical means for challenging the mind-body opposition. At first glance, such strategy does not seem as very innovative: if the traditional aesthetics reached out for the main metaphysical and epistemological positions of its era, 20th century aesthetics reaches out for an alternative, but again not in terms of developing aesthetical theory out of the aesthetic phenomenon as such – it relies upon already formed philosophical positions.

However, there are two main differences in the traditional and the 20th century approach. Firstly, while traditional aesthetics relied on philosophical background without questioning such strategy, 20th century aesthetics of dance reaches out for phenomenology with clear purpose of finding alternative for the traditional model, that is only in terms of criticizing traditional positions. Therefore, phenomenology is here used for clearing the area of aesthetical research so it would be able to approach to the phenomenon of dance, as it is present in aesthetic experience. Much in the spirit of the phenomenological method.

Secondly, phenomenology is here chosen as a weapon of choice by no chance. Namely, the second generation of phenomenologists turned much more to problems of body and perception; Maurice Merleau-Ponty being the most prominent of them. Merleau-Ponty offered a new perspective on the body, criticizing the very dogma of modern science – that all bodies are essentially only modes of the unique matter, mechanistically explained. In opposition to mechanistic worldview, Merleau-Ponty opted for the idea of a sensitive, lived body, for the difference clearly experienced between our own, human body and the other bodies, to which we relate via our body.¹⁵ Thus, the leveling of the human body to a mere material object is here cancelled, only to open the new possibility of the human body to be considered active, sensible, creative and even thinking. Therefore, traditional opposition between the soul and the body is now transformed into the unity of the cognitive body, of the body endowed with features previously ascribed to the soul.

The influence of Merleau-Ponty's philosophy on the aesthetics of dance is clearly shown in Fraleigh's analysis of dance.¹⁶ Moreover, Maxine Sheets-Johnstone, another important dance aesthetician, points out to the possibilities of using the phenomenological method not just in terms of departure from the traditional positions, but also for the positive and creative

15 Carbone, M. (2004) *The Thinking of the Sensible. Merleau-Ponty's A-Philosophy*, Evanston: Northwestern University Press, pp. 23-24.

16 Fraleigh, S. H. (1996) *Dance and the Lived Body*, pp. 3-4, 12.

development of aesthetical analysis of dance.¹⁷ In following lines I will try to analyze few crucial consequences of such approach.

Now, if the body is the subject of dance, what does it mean? Surely, it means that it is the body, and not the soul, which is creating the dance and understanding it completely, in a bodily manner; the question of *bodily knowledge* is here to arise. To state this is to say that in creating dance the body is not merely dancing, producing moves and possessing the space, a description is adequate for the traditional understanding of the body as an instrument. So, there has to be more: the body has to be the subject of dance, that is it has to produce dance in terms we earlier ascribed to the soul. Thus, it is not a question of the body that *knows how* to do certain moves, because it was trained to do them, but more the question of the body being able to *know what* it is doing. So, the question would now be is there some kind of bodily rationality comparable with the rational knowledge of the traditional soul?

Surely, to use terms like 'bodily rationality' or 'bodily knowledge' here sounds problematic, since rationality and knowledge were traditionally ascribed to the soul, and not to the body; it is exactly this sort of inversion that dance aestheticians want to introduce with their theories. To illustrate: 'On the pre-reflective level there is no possibility of being 'self-conscious' in the sense of apprehending the body as an object. On the pre-reflective level, consciousness can only exist its body as the contingency of its being, as the inescapable structure of its existence. As such, it is the unreflected-upon, lived experience which pinpoints the consciousness-body relationship at the primary ontological level.'¹⁸ Therefore, if we accept such an idea, it would mean that 'knowledge', 'rationality' or 'self-awareness' of the body is realized on primeval level, out of which every idea of soul being rational or self-aware is further to be deduced. The 'self-awareness' of the body is, thus, realized in a manner of sheer self-presence, which is to be understood as the fundamental phenomenon of human existence, 'one phenomenon that never leaves us'.¹⁹

However, the idea of the body being creative or knowing by itself is bound to - again phenomenologically - questioning the realm of sense perception and searching for its basic form. In the case of dance aesthetics, as it is, for example, shown with

17 Sheets-Johnstone, M. (1966) *The Phenomenology of Dance*, Madison and Milwaukee: The University of Wisconsin Press, pp. 10-12.

18 Sheets-Johnstone, M. (1966) *The Phenomenology of Dance*, pp. 35-36.

19 Henry, M. (2009) *Seeing the Invisible: On Kandinsky*, London: Continuum, p. 5.

Sheets-Johnstone, the body and its movement are proclaimed as the very basic form of making contact with other bodies, that is with the world around us.²⁰ The argument accentuates not just the body, but its movement in space and among other objects as the primary condition for us to have any sense perception in the old sense of the term – that is, as the primary manner in which the world is opened to us.²¹ The same strategy is shared by Michel Henry, who argues for kinaesthetic phenomena being not only fundamental phenomena of world comprehension, but also for them being sort of sinaesthetic medium out of which specific realms of auditory or visual experience can be differentiated.²² Thus, for Henry the specific media of perceptual experience (visuality, audibility, etc.) are never pure, but always referring back to more basic horizon where they are all interconnected.

Such strategy of the primacy of bodily movement aims for more aesthetic purposes: for example, if the body is now placed as a subject of dance, reception of dance also has to be placed into the body, but this time into the bodies of spectators. In other words, following this interpretation, it would be wrong to assume that the reception of dance is to be resolved exclusively on the level of visual perception, because visual perception is only based on this more fundamental bodily kinaesthetic level of ‘perception’.²³ Therefore, aesthetic experience of dance is also to be explained as a kinaesthetic phenomenon, grounded in the fact that spectators too have this specific kinaesthetic knowledge via their own bodies. Surely, spectators would not dance, except in some specific cases, but they can nevertheless experience dance as a kinaesthetic phenomenon since their own self-awareness is primarily based in the kinaesthetic experience of their own bodies. Nevertheless, this is not the case of projecting movement seen onto one’s own body and its self-awareness: it is much more the case of reacting kinaesthetically on the kinaesthetical phenomenon, recognized via synesthesia, that is via mutual cooperation of multiple senses.

20 Sheets-Johnstone, M. (1966) *The Phenomenology of Dance*, pp. 17-18, 20.

21 Parviainen, J. (2002) Bodily Knowledge: Epistemological Reflections on Dance, *Dance Research Journal*, Vol. 34, No. 1, Congress on Research in Dance, p. 15; Sheets-Johnstone, M. (2011) *The Primacy of Movement*, Expanded Second Edition, Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, pp. 113-114, 120; Mickunas, A. (1974) The Primacy of Movement, *Main Currents in Modern Thought*, Vol 31, No. 1, pp. 8-9.

22 Henry, M. (1975) *Philosophy and Phenomenology of the Body*, The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, pp. 82-83.

23 It is a matter of distorting the primacy of vision in dance. See: Thomas, H. (2003) *The Body, Dance, and Cultural Theory*, pp. 101-102.

As we can see, the very realm of kinaesthetic experience, being fundamental and grounding for more concrete experiences of specific senses, such as vision, is here doubled, both in the context of art production and of art reception, somewhat repeating the mind-body gap of traditional philosophy. Surely, there is no gap here, not in the full sense of the word, but there is a differentiation between two layers of the same experience – one considered to be more basic and fundamental, and the other to be more present to the body's 'eye'. For example, in the case of reception there is the surface layer of visual perception following the dance, and the more fundamental kinaesthetical layer of the body as such, which allows for the visual perception to convey much more than merely seeing the body conveys from one place in the space to the other. The kinaesthetical layer should allow us to feel the dance, and not just to see it move.

In the case of production, the body that dances is at the same time by itself, behind and in front of itself, since it is aware of its previous movement, of the movement it does at the given moment of time, and of the movement which is yet to come. The dancer has double self-awareness, since 'A pre-reflective awareness of space is thus also intrinsic to any lived experience of consciousness-body; hence, intrinsic to the dancer's lived experience of the dance'.²⁴ Therefore, to be able to dance, dancer has to be present to himself in a very special mode of self-awareness: he has to know his current bodily position and the one that is immediately to come, without having time to rationally think it through – he has to act in the moment, without pause. The same goes for awareness that the current bodily position was a consequence of the previous one.

Such self-awareness, as we can see, is the very idea of bodily (kinaesthetic) self-awareness, as presented by, for example, Sheets-Johnstone.²⁵ However, although posited as an unique flow of bodily positions and co-present awareness, such explanation still implies a doubling much similar to the one mentioned with regard to reception of dance. The question still remains – is this doubling, then, a consequence of traditional ideas still secretly present even in this reversed aesthetics of dance, proclaiming body to be its subject? Or is it an effect of two main positions from which we are considering the phenomenon of dance, production and reception? It seems that the idea of the body as the subject of dance demands blurring of the line between production and reception: they are both explained by reference to kinaesthetic basis of human experience, and they both have

24 Sheets-Johnstone, M. (1966) *The Phenomenology of Dance*, p. 28.

25 Ibid, pp. 35-37.

more productive and active, as well as more receptive and passive side. Perhaps it even demands for the final equation of those positions. Nevertheless, those and similar questions still did not find their proper answers in contemporary aesthetics of dance; on the other hand, they do reveal the direction of its future development.

Another problem for further development of dance aesthetics is the hermeneutical one. Namely, although expressed in various terms and in more than a few attempts to distort traditional concepts and to invent new ones, concepts more adequate to the aesthetics of dance and forged out of the aesthetic experience of dance, most dance aesthetics agree in one point: the art of dance is not mere mechanic movement of the material body which is endowed with some additional and unexplicable meaning. On the contrary, the very process of dance is immanently meaningful since it intrinsically involves transformation of the dancer – of the dancer’s self, we may add.²⁶ In other words, the meaningfulness of dance is produced solely by the body in its movement, but its constitution is defined by the fact that the experience of dance is, by its very character, transformative (and creative) – for the dancer as well as for the audience. However, if that is so, then the analysis of dance is confined to a hermeneutic circle: there is no solid ground upon which it could build its findings, for that ground – the phenomenon of dance – is in constant movement and change. In McNamara’s words: ‘In light of this and the other hermeneutic phenomenological principles discussed above, any investigation of a dance phenomenon is not only about understanding what the meaning of that phenomenon is, but also about the processes of the investigator’s own construction of meaning as well.’²⁷

In my opinion, in an attempt to reveal it as the phenomenon of importance for aesthetics, aesthetical theories of dance up until now focused more on finding this dance-specific realm and the background horizon for its analysis than on developing precise interpretations of the field they’ve discovered. Therefore, they are still not precise and developed enough in more than one respect. Still, it is also my opinion that future analysis of this field of aesthetics could be very fruitful not only in terms of elucidating the question of dance, but also in terms of offering new perspectives for philosophy of art in general. By investigating the realm of body in motion, of kinaesthetic phenomenon as the

26 Sparshott, F. (1995) *A Measured Pace. Toward a Philosophical Understanding of the Arts of Dance*, p. 5.

27 McNamara, J. Dance in Hermeneutic Circle, in: *Researching Dance: Evolving Modes of Inquiry*, ed. Fraleigh, S. H. Hanstein, P. (1999), Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, p. 170.

basis for all other perceptual and perhaps aesthetic phenomena, we could, perhaps, follow the indication offered by E. Hawkins: 'Biblically, in the beginning was the word; but now the tender gesture could resurrect the world.'²⁸

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СУБЈЕКТ ИГРЕ: ИГРА ИЗМЕЂУ ДУШЕ И ТЕЛА

Сажетак

Рад је посвећен поређењу традиционалног и савременог естетичког разумевања игре, пре свега питању њеног субјекта – ко заиста игра? Традиционална естетика за субјект игре проглашава душу, при чему се тело разумева као пуки инструмент којим се душа користи како би оно уметничко у игри манифестовала у домену интерсубјективности. Савремене феноменолошке естетике игре обрћу ову позицију, те за субјект игре проглашавају тело. Анализе у раду показале, поређењем неколико кључних примера, начин на који је ова инверзија спроведена, као и последице које повлачи нова идеја тела као субјекта игре. Коначно, рад резултује у критичком експозеу основних поставки феноменолошке естетике игре, као и у указивању на могући хоризонт њеног даљег развоја.

Кључне речи: *игра, естетика игре, тело, дуализам, кинестеза, покрет*