

Philosophy of the Dance: When the Dance is More than Art

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Abstract: The study presents a philosophical analysis of the phenomenon of dance, the possibility to consider the ontology of dance as it is defined by its epistemological significance. The anthropological components of dance become the ontological attributes of its being. Exploring the spatio-temporal aspect of dance it is possible to conditionally define its specific attributes that identify the immanent and the transcendent beginning of the dance. The study examines the gnoseological meaning of dancing through the category "prolepsis" which is associated in ancient philosophy with acquiring "premised knowledge". The comparison of play and dance in the context of ontology indicates that dance creates a certain mood and approaches the state of its cognizer. The ontology of dance has deep anthropological base and relates to the problem of representation of a person in space.

Key words: Dance, movement, posture, philosophy, ontology, anthropology, knowledge, play, prolepsis, body

INTRODUCTION

The African philosopher and poet Leopold Sedar Senghor, playing with the famous phrase of Descartes, suggests a formula: "I dance therefore I am". Of course, this worldview characterizes not so much the dance but the mentality of the African ethnic community in general. Obviously, there is a contrast between the rationalism of the European civilization and the concept of "negritude" based on the feeling of nature. Without going into the problem of the ethnic cultures typology we note in this context only that the history of Western civilization streamlines virtually all spheres of human life and the art among other things.

Following the history of Western art to comprehend the essence of the dance, perhaps will bring us least closely to the truth. There is an anthropologically essential difference, traced in dance genesis and manifested in how the dance is performed whether "for dancer himself" or "for the stage." When the dance becomes the means of creation and expression of artistic image, it is transformed into art. In the professional art, the essence of the dance obeys only the idea of the artistic image, the interpretation of the producer's conception to the public. The field of art formalizes and streamlines the genesis of the dance, turning it into anthropologically derived event.

Where artistic image is displayed by dance, the dance ceases to be what it is by human nature and then the dance turns into a regular art mummery. Neat professional

bodily movement language gives the possibility to shape any sentiment in space but this will be the image of the sentiment, mask but not the beingness. Such artificial (in all senses of the word) existence of the dance cannot lead to the birth of "tragedy" to the experience of passions by Nietzsche (2006) (representative of the West, though irrational philosophy) to the understanding of true human existence which spoke Zarathustra: "now I am light, now I fly, now I see myself beneath me, now a god dances through me".

The phenomenon of the dance goes far beyond the arts; moreover, metaphysics of the dance begins exactly outside of aesthetics and artistic creativity. The dance is one of the rare forms of behavior which least of all represents everyday life and completely lacks the chemistry of the art or devine worship. Anthropologically, dance is above the art, much as the poetry is above literature and mathematics (as intellectual activity or "agon") is above a pragmatic natural science. The comparison of the dance with the phenomenon of play also contributes to the discovery of ontological foundations of the dance and the possibility to bring it beyond art. In the research of Gadamer, Huizinga, Schiller, play is elevated to an independent ontological category. According to Friedrich Schiller, man is man only when he acts, i.e., play, like dancing (outside the sphere of art) makes people free from coercion, duties, conventions, allowing them to break through into the space of free and creative existence. Gadamer (1988) wrote that: "motion which is play itself is devoid of any ultimate objective; it

is updated in endless repetitions". From the ontological point of view, play is focused not on the result but on the process that is manifested in man's spiritual ability to create another being. If we talk about a choreographic work of art it is obvious that it has a structure, purpose, means but the ontological value of the dance is revealed in its psychological perception. In his "Homo Ludens", Huizinga says that play is older than culture and therefore, play is peculiar to nature's phenomena and is a normal state for human nature. Dance is play itself; moreover it is one of "the purest and most perfect forms of play that exists" (Ludens, 1949). Following the arguments of Huizinga, the dance is as much a natural state for a human being as play: the dance is always free to play in space as poetry and music and thus be visible and tangible. Play is something to help a human both to hide and disclose himself. The play of the body with space is spectacularly appears as the dance. In this context of an ontological comparison of the dance and play it is appropriate to mention the concept of performance by Richard Schechner. Talking about the convergence of art and life, Schechner positions theater not as an aesthetic phenomenon but as a social one like such performative practices as ceremonies, rituals, sports, games. The aesthetics of performance, including dance is not related to the realm of art but to the life of man his feelings, experiences, opportunities.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The dance has its own anthropological ontology which is based not on art or a skilled craft but on experience of the senses brought to passion, experiencing joy or using the Greek lexicon, charisma. Charisma (χάρισμα grace, a gift, deriving from χαρά joy, charm) always gives rise to grace (lat. gratia from Grace Goddess whose name in the Greek language is Χαρία which in turn is derived from χαριτα fullness of joy) peculiar to dance. Genuine dance cannot be but charismatic.

Beyond the nature of dance, the human body works for the "owner" (the willing person) who is focused on the modus of possession. The body that existed in work, sport, war as a tool of the willing person, begins "to live" in dance. To be able to dance and to dance is not the same thing. A man who has the knowledge and skills of professional dance is not a dancing man in an existential sense. Sometimes it comes to the fact that many dancers, constrained by professionalism are not capable of feeling another reality, they are helpless without artistic image. The "Dance of Life" is not an abstract metaphor but an ontological mode of human existence and like Dionysian

music of F. Nietzsche, giving birth to the tragedy, the dance is the metaphysical beginning of the world. In the dance for all its phenomenal nature, the body does not involve physiological functions: it is neither eating, nor drinking it is not conducive to childbearing it just "lives". Thus, there are no separated soul and body in dancing individual, though there is a completely different ontology, appearing in the triad of "spirit-body-space" which in turn splits into two oppositions with a common "middle term": "spirit-body" and "body-space". As a result, the dance is presented in the duality of the "dancing body of a human" and the "body of a dancing human." This is not a word-play these are two banks of the river called charisma (Lotman, 1994). If the dance makes one to feel "other" to open and to recreate the world to comprehend the integrity and fullness of being, this is rather, the truest way of reviving the unity of the human and the world which is on the further side of civilization and technocracy. In the above-mentioned concept of L. Senghor, "I dance" means the attitude to the world not completely rationalized and thus the dance is a form of integration of sense, intuition, feeling and a special kind of cognition.

Attempts to find the "Dance of Life" in the classification system of dance types and genres remain unsuccessful as well as the attempts to find a formal definition and characteristics of such a dance. Discussions about which dance and from what era (ancient Greek round dances, "free dance" by A. Duncan, postmodern improvisation or Oriental dances, etc.,) is natural and which one is artificial, remain in the field of art history not shedding light on the dance metaphysics. Meanwhile, in scientific literature rather important is a question about the ontological and gnoseological meaning of the dance.

Among the whole range of sub-disciplines of philosophy it is the anthropology that allows identifying the ontological foundations of dance. The dance involves a certain arrangement of space, freedom of will possesses cognitive aspects and has gnoseological meaning. The dance unites the spiritual and material origin of life and also inevitably appeals to the ontological categories such as space and time, movement and rest. If we bear in mind that according to M. Merleau-Ponty, the body is both visible and seeing, then in the dance and specifically in the dance postures and movements one can see transcendence origin through immanent embodiment. Dance offers a different perception of space; the dancer is able to compress and extend the dance space through his movements (from the plastic movements of the hands to rapid jumps upward and afar). In addition, there are differences in perception of space by dancing and not

dancing individual. In dance as nowhere else, the body is aware of its border with the world. During the movement the dancer extends himself beyond the physical body, consequently changing the surrounding space.

Since, the anthropological components of the dance become the ontological attributes of its existence, it makes sense to consider in more detail one of these attributes, namely the "posture". The perception of dance in everyday awareness is associated above all with movement; professional choreography technique is primarily aimed at mastering the movement and then the dance performance is supplemented with postures.

However, dance posture is not just the position of the performer's body in space. Posture is something that can be fixed by the glance, word, hand. It is no coincidence that Gabovich (1977) in his study expresses the idea that "dance is a sculpture, living on the stage according to the laws of musical harmony". The ontological status of the posture appears in the "picturesqueness" of the dance. J.G. Noverre affirmed that "a ballet is a picture or rather a series of pictures connected one with the other" (Pasyutinskaya, 1985).

The ontology of the dance posture is reduced neither to the anatomy of classical ballet nor to man's everyday activities the dance postures have symbolic meanings. There is a certain connection between consciousness and posture that has its own peculiarities in the Western and Eastern traditions. In the majority of Western practices, postures are derived from the mentality, etiquette at that the meaning of posture is the consequence of emotional disposition, religious or secular ethics. In the Eastern culture, the posture ontology is not questioned. Any posture is energetically loaded, it is fixed and held. In the Eastern tradition, the posture is an energy channel, the way of sympathetic and transcendental connection. In the ethnographic aspect, the semiotics of the dance posture is given by a ceremonial sense that is posture represents a ceremony "in a contracted form".

Posture as an ontological attribute of the dance is always entelechial that is according to Aristotle, it bears goal. The posture does not exist for itself it is ontological and entelechial, it reveals the feasibility and accordingly, the intellect will and feelings. Some sculptors and painters deliberately use plastic dance postures to give composition kinematics, sensuality and meaningfulness.

The spaciousness of the dance postures possesses ontological status the dance cannot exist regardless of space while chronologicity loses its meaning at the perception of the dance. Time does not disappear at all even one posture has its own duration but chronologicity does not affect the meaning of the dance. Using the

integrity principle of the gestalt theory, R. Arnheim disproves the view that some pieces of art are performed in time (e.g., dance) and others exist regardless of time (picture). "We perceive the dancer's action as a sequence of phases. The performance contains an arrow as the painting does not. But the performance cannot really be said to occur in time" (Arnheim, 1974).

At the borderland of the ontology and anthropology, the dance is not only an ontological reality but also has gnoseological meaning. Even in ancient times Lucian noticed the connection of the dance with the thinking process and wrote in his treatise: "performance is as much an intellectual as a physical exercise: there is meaning in his movements; every gesture has its significance" (Lucian, 1905). Thus, we can talk about the impact of the dance training on memory, thinking, coordination, attention, emotions, concentration and energy expenditure. Dance requires awareness of the body work in space, speed of its motion, height and step width as well as conscious posture and gesture.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

We can say that the dance is thoroughly penetrated by mathematical nature as it contains figures, fractions, proportions, operations of addition, subtraction, division, etc. Another fact proving the relationship between dance and mathematics is the use of common terms: lines, diagonals, columns; in the figure of the dance they can be situated in parallel or perpendicularly, symmetrically or asymmetrically. Moreover, the position of the body in the dance is fixed by various angles acute, obtuse and straight. In addition to visible geometry and algebraic forms, dancing individual always experiences a sense of balance and the center, i.e., the dancer is always within the frame of reference. Dance plastic reveals not only the creation of postures, geometric figures, image but also the precise mathematical calculation of the power of the jump, the number of turns in the tour, the length and width of the step, acceleration and deceleration of movements. It turns out that the dance manifests the mathematical mind where certain laws of algebra and geometry are used. It is no coincidence that the Greek words "dance" (ορχηδεις) and "order" (ορχηδου) are resembling. Thus, dance training requires the inevitable recourse to mathematics and logic. Though one cannot ignore that perhaps there are ways of feedback, i.e., when individual or the cognitive process are affected by the dance. The ancient term "prolepsis" (προληψις) in the context of "prior" knowledge, perfectly suits to uncover the gnoseological meaning of the dance. The Epicurean term "prolepsis" is associated with the function of anticipating, predicting the future knowledge. However, anticipating or sensing

the nature of things is possible only within the limits of existing experience. In dance, there is an involuntary “dialogue” with the transcendent reality; the person gains experience which in turn, leads to the formation of the ability to “prolepsis” as anticipation of future results. Dance can help to “talk” and “see” not only by the sensory-empirical method, for example, through the creation of an artistic image. Dance can reproduce, through the “vision” a very different type of information in an ontological dialogue. The immanent corporeity of dance contributes to opening metaphysical knowledge.

Being in a certain mood, a man is capable of cognitive thinking. In Pythagorean philosophy, the sympathetic connection with nature is an indispensable element in the process of theoretical cognition. According to Descartes, the individual becomes cognizer when in thinking he goes beyond his own body. The dance in its gnoseological meaning creates a certain tonicity of the body (a condition of prolonged excitation of nerve or muscle tissue not accompanied by the fatigue) that affects the cognition capability. In Plato’s philosophy, music, physical exercises and dances occupy a high status in the education of young people and in shaping their moral qualities. Ancient author Lucian said: “of the merits of Pantomime of the manner in which it combines profit with amusement; instructing, informing, perfecting the intelligence of the beholder” (Lucian, 1905). L. Blok-Mendeleeva writes: “In Greece danced everybody, since the dance not only was among the compulsory subjects but was willingly learnt by adults”. When describing the life of Russian nobility of the 18-19th centuries, Lotman (1994) noted that children used to start dance training since the age of five because dance class was obligatory and strict subject. Thus, if we follow the ancient tradition and interpret prolepsis as bodily and spiritual predisposition to the cognition, then the dance, creating a certain mood, approaches one to the state of the cognizer.

As known the play promotes the formation of prior context of knowledge. The same is true for the dance which in its gnoseological meaning affects the activity of the cognitive process. Certainly, it should be noted that it is not about specific scientific and empirical concepts but about the formation of “prior context” of knowledge (the state of “anticipation” prolepsis).

CONCLUSION

Surely, the consideration of the dance in philosophical perspective not only expands dance theory and history but also brings out a new vision aspect of classical philosophical problems concerning the primacy of existence, the opposition of human outward and inward, the essence and the existence. The comprehension of the dance beyond the arts allows one to differently understand human problems, i.e., we get a new key for the perception of “I” and “Other”. From the perspective of anthropological ontology a dancing man creates a special space around himself, the attributes of which are ease, grace and charisma. Not coincidentally, Nietzsche (2006) wrote: “His eyes are pure and no disgust is visible around his mouth. Does he not stride like a dancer?”.

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