

THE SPIRITUALITY AND CULTURE INTERCROSSING IN THE HUMAN BODY THROUGH THE ART OF DANCE

Wiesna Mond-Kozłowska

www.wiesnamond.pl

Polish Society of Anthropology of Dance

Email: antropologia.tanca@gmail.com

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Motto:

*He has set foundation,
foundation on the holy mountain.*

.....
*As they make music they will sing
“All my fountains are in You”, Psalm 87*

Summary. *In my paper I am going to discuss the issue of the priority of arts in human culture propounding at the same time the scientific approach of some dance anthropologists and dance aestheticians who claim that dance was the first art the human being created, much earlier before writing and speaking emerged. This view is endorsed by another view that the rise of writing and speaking has been of evolutionary character and was obtained by humans relatively late. Therefore dance being virtually and directly a bodily expression can be categorised as an non-verbal expression, separate from the writing and speaking skill. Firstly, I present a main stream of anthropologists advocating my point of view and provide stark evidence for that. Secondly, I will examine an example of sacred dance which can be an epitome of spirituality/religion and culture interaction taking place in psycho-physical reality of the human body, in other words, in a Person. My point of view is going to be substantiated by a wide range of phenomena from cave painting to Dervish dance. The conclusive argument I am going to propose concerns the relationship between religion and art, the human body and sacredness.*

Key words: *aesthetic experience and aesthetic of sacredness, the origins of dance, writing and speaking, the human body, sacred dance.*

The most prominent and recent advocates in favour of dance who claimed its primacy among human arts were American philosopher of art, late Francis Sparshott and Israeli dance anthropologist Yosef Garfinkel. The former who called dance art of arts in his book “Off the Ground”¹ provided reasons which are scrupulously evidenced in the latter’s book “Dancing at the Dawn of Agriculture”².

The arguments given by both scholars are undoubtedly convincing; the medium of dance expression is the human body, so the symbolic expression is immediate and direct. Hence it is not surprising that Sparshot calls dance the first human art in the history of mankind where the human body functions both as creator and material of art being created.

If we mention “the body”, however, it is vital to define it appropriately for the purpose of this discourse. Now the concept of the body which becomes a piece of art through an act of dance, under no circumstances is perceived from dualistic perspective typical of post-Cartesian philosophy. It is quite the opposite, rather than an integrated being, to put it differently, the lived body of unified flesh and soul which become a person while all human faculties synergically interact in man’s total experience of the world.

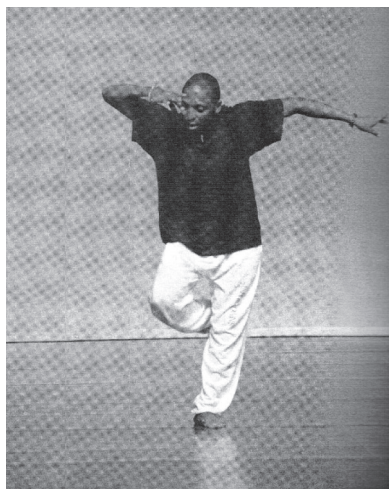


Illustration 1. *Vincent Mantsoe in his authorial choreography “Bird”*

Long time before Plato had formulated his dualistic ontology which made the human body a prison for the soul, or the soul trapped in the body, man could have enjoyed more seraphic condition of being in tune with nature, where physic and

- 1 Sparshott, F.E. *Off the Ground: First Steps to a Philosophical Consideration of the Dance* by Sparshott Francis. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988.
- 2 Garfinkel, Y. *Dance at the Dawn of Agriculture*. Texas University Press, 2003.

metaphysic completed each other. Edward Zwolski³, the Polish classical studies scholar, analysed the origins of sacred dance in Archaic Greece, where people were confronted with a play of elements and challenged by their overwhelming and sweeping power, be it lightning, flood or gale-force winds on a stormy sea, they had been able to answer such totality of sense experience with adequate self-expression, to unburden their terror or break their petrification and finally acknowledge Unknowable Super Being for their survival.

The Ancient called such a response choreia, meaning unity of dance, music and singing in a ritualistic experience of Nature.

The difference between everyday movement and movement codified for ritual purpose has been always significant, yet we cannot overlook the fact that its source and material is identical. What makes a difference it is the way it is used and arranged. The steps and movements of sacred dance, shaped according to physical laws and motion of celestial bodies, not only represent man as a part of nature but also aim at transforming the dancer's body into performing instruments, hence it unfolds to be is of transformative, instructive and healing character.

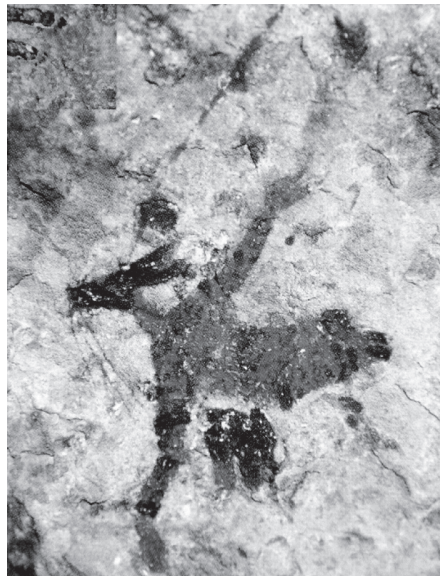


Illustration 2. *Cave painting, South Africa, a masked shamanistic dance⁴*

On the other hand, Yosef Garfinkel, providing a cognitive analysis of the dancing scenes, which he researched in palaeolithic and neolithic art of the Near East, cave

³ Zwolski, E. *Choreia. Muza i bóstwo w religii greckiej*. Warszawa, Instytut Wydawniczy PAX, 1978.

⁴ Lewis-Williams, D., Challis, S. *Deciphering Ancient Minds: The Mystery of San Bushmen Rock Art*. London, Hudson andThames, 2011, p.16.

painting included, suggests that the way dancing figures were presented contributed critically to the rise of writing, which in turn it is considered to be secondary to performative bodily expression. Garfinkel was influenced by previous research carried out by Renfrew and Bahn. According to them, cave painting representing symbolically human figures offers “the possibility of showing relationships between symbols, between objects in the cognitive map”⁵ – arguably the overall phenomenon paved the way to the rise of writing.

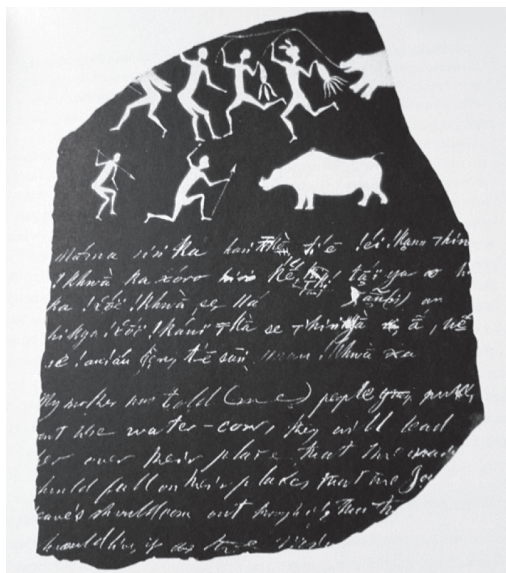


Illustration 3. San people cave painting, South Africa, juxtaposed with a modern language⁶

As we see from various research outcomes it has been a well-known fact that history of writing yields evidence of some organic and consistent evolution from pictures through pictograms to abstract graphemes.

Most likely we will never know what was first, writing or speaking but we might be sure that both of them emerged from bodily expression, which over time took on a form of dance. The Oxford Linguist School, with their eminent exponent Roy Harris, claims that human speaking organs are secondary in evolution trail to their original breathing functions. This finding in turn posits another question what was first, writing or speaking.⁷ There’s seemingly a chicken and egg situation.

5 *Supra* note 2, p.10.

6 *Supra* note 4, p.6

7 Harris, R. *The Origin of Writing*. Gerald Duckworth & Co Ltd, 1986.

The persistently spiritual cultures of Africa, Asia and South America have been constantly cultivating the sacred dance tradition as their dancing activity is closely associated with individual and public ceremonies and festivals dedicated to Deity.



Illustration 4. *Healing dance of Son People, South Africa*⁸

Conclusion

There is some evidence that it is the human body where Gods encounter humanity through aesthetically elaborated movement. Moreover in the Hindu culture, God Shiva creates and annihilates the Universe alternately while dancing. One of the greatest gifts he gave to the mankind is yoga, a static dance prayer.

We Europeans have evidently some dormant knowledge with respect to the imposing Hindu tradition which sacralizes dance. Now, the Ancient Greek cosmological concept of the human body, called microcosms, is meant to mirror all constituents and functions of the Universe, named the Microcosm. This belief has is still been followed, even if in its relic form which is the European classical ballet incorporating as well the ancient wisdom of circles,as Rudolf Laban would put it.

Sadly, Christian culture seems to have betrayed the main teaching on the sacredness of the human body Jesus Christ epitomized. The New Testament's teaching points to the sick and haunted or obsessed bodies of the afflicted and defiled, but The Holy Gospel had is nevertheless been grounded on the concept of divinity of the human body that is conceived as integrated spirituality and physicality. Moreover, immortality is inherent to the resurrected body of Son of God who set an example to be followed by all true and well determined followers of Christ.

Again, Christian culture has still been struggling to solve this puzzle, scrambling in ignorance on the path of self-knowledge that results from self-denial and misogynistic biases of its Founding Fathers, followed by Cartesian dualism, contemporary objectification and quite recent marketing of the human body.

⁸ *Supra* note 4, p.18.

Hopefully, the following extract from an Apocrypha Gospel might serve as the trace of the ancient truth, the majority of contemporary people have lost access to, namely *That suffering also which I showed to thee and the rest in dance I will that it be called a mystery (Hymn of Jesus, Acts of St John).*

With the view to that time-honoured and highly respectable statement one is prone to think that a powerful religion and an imposing culture they overlap to guide man on the path of ongoing transformation of one's individual existential darkness and clumsiness into lightness of thought and motion. Illustration 5. Dancing Christ, a wooden crucifix, c.18th century, Vilnius Cathedral, Lithuania

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DVASIŠKOJO IR KULTŪRINIO PRADŲ JUNGTIES IŠRAIŠKA ŽMOGAUS KŪNO ŠOKIO MENE

Wiesna Mond-Kozłowska

Lenkijos Šokio antropologijos draugija, Lenkija

Santrauka. Šiame darbe ketinama atkreipti dėmesį į meno prioritetą žmonijos kultūroje. Todėl norima išryškinti kai kurių šokio antropologų ir šokio estetikos tyrėjų požiūrį, teigiantį, jog šokis buvo pirmasis menas, atsiradęs daug anksčiau nei raštija ar kalbos menas. Šį požiūrį patvirtina ir mokslininkų teiginiai, jog raštas ir žodis evoliuciniu būdu žmonijos istorijoje radosi gana vėlai.

Todėl šokis ir, tiesiog, kūno išraiška gali būti priskiriami neverbalinei saviraškai, atskirtai nuo rašymo ir kalbėjimo gebėjimų. Pirma, pateikiami garsių antropologų pasisakymai, kurie sutvirtina dėstomą poziciją ir pateikia akivaizdžių įrodymų. Toliau nagrinėjamas šventojo šokio pavyzdys, kuris gali būti dvasingumo, religijos ir kultūros sąveikos, besirandančios žmogaus kūno psichofizinėje realybėje, kitaip tariant, asmenyje, pavyzdys. Ši pozicija grindžiama įvairiais įrodymais, pradedant urvine tapyba ir išsiplėčiant iki Dervišo šokio apžvalgos. Išvados siejamos su išvalgomis į religijos ir meno santykį bei į žmogaus kūno ir sakralumo sąsajas.

Reikšminiai žodžiai: estetiinė patirtis ir šventumo estetika; šokio, rašymo ir kalbėjimo kilmė; žmogaus kūnas; sakralinis šokis.

Wiesna Mond-Kozłowska, Lenkijos Šokio antropologijos draugijos Prezidentė, Dr., laisvai samdoma lyginamosios estetikos specialistė. Mokslinių interesų kryptys: šokio estetika, lyginamoji estetika

Wiesna Mond-Kozłowska, President of Polish Society of Anthropology of Dance, Dr., freelance comparative aesthetician. Research interests: dance aesthetics, comparative aesthetics.