Dance as a metaphor of a body-mind integrated education.
Nietzsche, Jung and Nijinsky

La danza come metafora di una formazione integrata mente-corpo.
Nietzsche, Jung e Nijinsky

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Abstract
Expression and recognition have a basis and a centre on which they can develop: the moving body. It would be enough to take the body as a measure for all things to instantly find our bearings again. What direction would the body suggest we consider with critical attention, based on the centre – hence on our hierarchy of actions, institutions and values – and on the limit – hence on the use of our vital force and of the planet’s? It would offer a value system and an evaluation method to choose the appropriate action. An elementary system, because elementary needs are the ones that should be satisfied to be able to pursue greater goals: nourishment, housing, physical and psychic care, safety, upbringing, education. Bodily matters reveal that their formative and cognitive importance is based on their being a potential measure for a new arrangement of our whole civilisation.

Key words: dance; body-mind unity; philosophical life; education; Nietzsche; Jung; Nijinsky

Riassunto
L’espressione e il riconoscimento si sviluppano a partire da una base e da un centro: il corpo in movimento. Sarebbe sufficiente prendere il corpo come misura di tutte le cose per trovare di nuovo all’istante il nostro orientamento. Quale direzione ci suggerisce di considerare, il corpo, basandoci, con attenzione critica, sul centro - quindi sulla nostra gerarchia di azioni, istituzioni e valori - e sul limite - quindi sull’utilizzo della nostra forza vitale e di quella del pianeta? Si tratterebbe di un sistema di valori e di un metodo di valutazione per scegliere l’azione appropriata. Un sistema elementare, perché elementari sono i bisogni che dovrebbero essere soddisfatti per poi essere in grado di perseguire obiettivi più alti: il nutrimento, l’alloggio, la cura fisica e psichica, la sicurezza, l’educazione, l’istruzione. Ciò che riguarda il corpo rivela un’importanza formativa e cognitiva in quanto criterio potenziale di un nuovo ordinamento per la nostra civiltà.

Parole chiave: danza; unità mente-corpo; vita filosofica; formazione; Nietzsche; Jung; Nijinsky

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At the beginning of the *Liber Secundus* of Jung’s *Red Book* (Jung, 2009), there is a peculiar dialogue between the “I” and “the Red One”, supposedly the Devil. An odd devil, indeed, more similar to an ancient, chivalrous horseman. After a dialectic skirmish, which unveils the stiff defences and suspects of the I, bond to a Christian pre-understanding of the devil, the role of the devil becomes apparent: he is the one who creates chances for others to experience joy in life through dance.

«The Red One: ‘You argue your case well. But your solemnity?! You could make matter much easier for yourself. If you are no saint, I really don’t see why you have to be so solemn. You wholly spoil the fun. What the devil is troubling you? Only Christianity with its mournful escape from the world can make people so ponderous and sullen.’
I: ‘I think there are still other things that bespeak seriousness.’
T. R.: ‘Oh, I know, you mean life. I know this phrase. I too live and don’t let my hair turn white over it. Life doesn’t require any seriousness. On the contrary, it’s better to dance through life.
I: ‘I know how to dance. Yes, would we could do it by dancing! Dancing go with the mating season. I know that there are those who are always in heat, and those who also want to dance for their Gods. Some are ridiculous and other enact Antiquity, instead of honestly admitting their utter incapacity for such expression.’
T. R.: ‘Here, my dear fellow I doff my mask. Now I grow somewhat more serious, since this concerns my own province. It’s conceivable that there is some third thing for which dancing would be the symbol’». (Jung, 2009, p. 260)

Here the devil gets his point: dance is seen as the symbol of much more than a worn out stereotype.

At the end of the dialogue, the devil’s red fades into a tender, flesh-like colour and Jung’s green garments comes to life. This is when the I understands that this devil is his devil, that this is the inner opposite that he needs, in order to compensate for his excessive seriousness with a feeling they both call “joy”. As Shamdasani writes in his note, this inevitably reminds of Nietzsche’s *Zarathustra* and its numerous calls for dance and lightness of spirit, as opposed to the Spirit of Gravity, with which the Higher Men are often burdened. However, this opposition is excessively synthetic and might be misleading. Jung’s vast comment on *Zarathustra*, from his 1934-1938 Seminar (Jung, 1988), is a useful tool to avoid oversimplification. Only some passages will be analysed here, since those about dance take up alone dozens of pages.

Since the “Prologue” of the philosophical poem, Zarathustra’s return is greeted as a “rebirth” by the old anchorite – withdrawn into the woods, away from people, in whom he has lost his faith; Nietzsche believes that the ancient message about the contrast between good and evil had to be corrected by its first announcer to humanity. Thus the reborn walks “like a dancer”: Nietzsche sees dance as the remedy to the metaphysical and ethical dualism which shaped European civilisation since Socratic and Platonic Greece until its own “vulgarisation” into Christianity for History’s crowds of “everyone”.

Before entering the busy dialogue between Jung and Nietzsche, it is essential to see why this meeting, apart from the mere historical quotation, is an essential sign of the turning of epochs. Nietzsche is an epoch-making case, showing that humanity cannot banish a god if it does not create a new one: the risk is that of substituting ourselves for God, of giving up God because our risible egos pose themselves as new gods: this is what analytical psychology calls inflation. The I inflates, pretending to own all those things that pass through it and possess it. Collectively some ‘ism’ unites these individual tensions and puts itself for-
ward as a new god on all respects, under a cloak made of ideals and idols.

«Nietzsche was no atheist, but his God was dead. The result of this demise was a split in himself, and he felt compelled to call the other self ‘Zarathustra’ or, at times, ‘Dionysus’\(^7\). In his fatal illness, he signed his letters ‘Zagreus’, the dismembered god of the Thracians. The tragedy of Zarathustra is that, because his God died, Nietzsche himself became a god […] such a man [who asserts] that “God is dead” […] instantly becomes the victim of inflation». (Jung, 1938-1940, pp. 85-86)

This is, very briefly, Jung’s “diagnosis” about Nietzsche, the medical report of his pathography, and it can be traced in a number of different passages. According to Jung, Nietzsche’s madness was rooted in this fundamental attitude – grieved by his epoch’s affliction – way before its eventual bursting into an actual delusion of self-identification as Dionysus, caused perhaps by syphilis.

Right after his 1913-14 inner tsunami, in the same years of his work on the Liber Novus, Jung publishes two essays which represent, in nuce, his ideas and the consequences he suggests, after the end of his collaboration with Freud: The Structure of the Unconscious (1916) and Psychology of the Unconscious Processes (1917), later republished as Psychology of the Unconscious (final edition 1943). Because of its closeeness to The Red Book, I quote from 1917’s first edition a statement that clarifies, rather brutally, which is not unusual in Jung, his vital (and hence intellectual) objections to the author of Zarathustra and Ecce Homo:

«We must look very critically at the life of the one who taught such a yeasaying, in order to examine the effects of his teaching on the teacher’s own life. When we scrutinize his life with this aim in view we are bond to admit that Nietzsche lived beyond instinct, in the lofty heights of heroic sublimity – heights that he could maintain only with the help of the most meticulous diet, a carefully selected climate, and many aids to sleep – until the tension shattered his brain. He talked of yeasaying and lived the nay. His loathing for man, for the human animal that lived by instinct, was too great. Despite everything, he could not swallow the toad he so often dreamed of and which he feared had to be swallowed. The roaring of the Zarathustrian lion drove back into the cavern of the unconscious all the ‘higher’ men who were clamouring to live. Hence his life does not convince us of his teaching. For the ‘higher man’ wants to be able to sleep without chloral, to live in Naumburg and Basel despite the ‘fogs and shadows’. He desires wife and offspring, standing and esteem among the herd, innumerable commonplace realities, and not least those of the Philistine. Nietzsche failed to live this instinct, the animal urge to life to which 1943 edition adds: “For all his greatness and importance, Nietzsche’s was a pathological personality”». (Jung, 1966, par. 37)

This can be considered an essay version of the things already experimented in his Red Book’s active imaginations – and especially of those in “The Way of the Cross”, the chapter written on 27\(^{th}\) January 1914. Here, the comparison between the revisitation (and changing) of the Christian myth of God’s

\(^7\) According to Jung, Nietzsche’s Dionysus was a metamorphosis of Wotan «because he was a classical 1870-1880 philosopher, he called him Dionysus» (Jung, 1991, p.28). As for the parallel between Jung and Nietzsche on fundamental doctrines see also Mädera. in Carotenuto (Ed.), 1992. To Nietzsche’s four central theories correspond four central theories by Jung: death of God and Self; superman and individuality; will to power and totipotent psychic energy; eternal return and archetypes. The issue of borrowings, influences, re-elaborations and contrasts is infinitely complex. However, schematizing helps to underline what is systematic in Jung’s thought (Jung himself kept it on the background and implicitly used it for its ordering and heuristic function).
death on the one hand and the awareness of the illusory nature of Nietzsche’s Dionysian on the other is represented as in a new edition of the “divine drama”. Therefore, according to Jung, Nietzsche’s intention of producing an epoch-making correction of the unbalance that he felt was denying the earth, bodies and instincts, proved to be flawed by Nietzsche’s own inability to combine earth and sky, high and low, ideal and everyday nature of things; this inability is both biographical and theoretical, because of its deeply psychic nature. Hence, the topic of dance directly embodies and makes explicit the point of the general transition of meaning in life, which is what the announce of the death of God implies. With the First World War and because of the meaning of modernity, this transition becomes a collective historical tragedy and enigma. This is the background in which Jung’s Red Book is conceived and, during the long incubation period, the same background that echoes in Nietzsche’s Zarathustra.

«You see, it is not inapt that we are only now attempting an analysis of Zarathustra; we need all the preparation of our psychology in order to understand what it really means […] and we need the experience of the war and the post-war social and political phenomena to get an insight into the meaning of Zarathustra». (Jung, 1934-1939, p. 60)

This is to say that this text bears in itself the symptoms of both a spiritual and a socio-political conflagration, and that the only possible answer to the death of God is the creation of mutually destructive idols; those idols bear different names but are not so different from the old wars concealed behind religious issues. Moreover, after two world wars, a Cold War – which was ‘cold’ only for the countries of the strongest Bloc – and the globalisation of Islamic fundamentalist terrorism, history itself confirms that, as is typical of our times, the idols created by ‘isms’ are following one another at an ever-increasing pace. No pacified arrangement can be found, and Chaos is the real manipulator of events. The opposites seem to be irreconcilable, and destruction is unable to give birth to its creative side. Nietzsche had appealed to Chaos, which could give birth to a dancing star. Chaos is there, while the dancing star remains closed in a black hole. Fear makes its shudder felt, if only one looks at the dates of the seminar on Zarathustra (1934-1939): once again the history and geography of dance announce closeness to the brink of the abyss.

In his Seminar on Nietzsche’s Zarathustra, Jung bases his discourse on dance on the topic of the opposites, waving between destruction and creation, with historical-anthropological parallels ranging from Shivaism to Hopi, from Africa to Switzerland.

«[…] Dancing is always connected with creation. Shiva dances the origin and the destruction of the world. The birth of the dancing star out of chaos is a symbol of creation […]. You can dance not only to produce the union with yourself, or to manifest yourself, but in order to produce rain, or the fertility of women, or of the fields, or to defeat your enemy. The idea of an effect, or something produced, is always connected with the idea of dancing. Therefore, it was originally a magic ritual by which something was produced, it was the original idea of work even. When primitives dance they really work, they dance until they are completely exhausted. For instance, in the stag dances of the Mexican Indians one of the participants puts on the skin of a stag and wears a stag’s horns, and is then pursued by the hunters who shoot at him with dulled arrows […]. That is a rite d’entrée before the stag hunting season, and is very clearly done in order to gather up all their energies and to put them into the frame of mind, the attitude, of stag hunting, or to produce plenty of meat supply, or to attract hunting animals. They dance the
animals in order to attract them, as the oyster fishers in Scotland sing the oysters. And in Switzerland they sing the cows, the so-called ranz des vaches, or the Kuhreihen, in order that they may give a lot of milk and produce calves. There are plenty of such primitive rites to produce fertility or for the cure of diseases. They dance a disease, they represent the demons of sickness and dance them in order to combat them. So the first ideas of efficiency or effect were due to their peculiar psychological experiences through rhythmic movement: the efficiency mood was developed through the rhythmical repetition that slowly catches the whole system. The native drum, for instance, the tom-tom, has an exceedingly suggestive effect: after a while the whole system quivers rhythmically, and by means of the rhythm they get into the attitude, a sort of ekstasis, in which the effect takes place, a state in which they may have visions that help them to get up their courage or to concentrate».

(Jung, 1934-1939, p. 46)

We already mentioned how creation and destruction belong to two different phases of the same movement:

«[…] ritual dancing under primitive circumstances is symbolic; it is always the representation of the creative powers in our unconscious. Therefore it often means the sexual act, or the fertilization of the earth, or it is for the production of a certain effect, whether constructive or destructive. And, as a representation of the creative act, dancing necessarily symbolizes both destruction and construction. It is impossible to create without destroying: a certain previous condition must be destroyed in order to produce a new one».

(Jung, 1934-1939, p. 56)

In Jung this symbolic power, capable of holding the opposites together without cancelling them or making them overlap, is the myth; Jung knows he cannot be at ease in Christian myth anymore, but he constantly pursues its possible evolution, its realisation in a new form: his figures are mysterium coniunctionis and complexio oppositorum, from the subterranean ways of alchemy and as a compensation for the distance of the Christian spirit from the earth and instincts, from the feminine and the integration of what is evil and forbidden. In short, quaternity over trinity. From The Red Book, through his studies on alchemy and the Seminar on Nietzsche’s Zarathustra, and up to the new World War with his writings Psychology and Religion (1938-1940), A Psychological Approach to the Doctrine of the Trinity (1942-1948) and Transformation Symbolism in the Mass (1942-1954), Jung reunites Christian symbolism with its dark side, through psychic and cultural history, and through himself. This process will reach its conclusion with Aion (1951), Answer to Job (1952) and Mysterium Coniunctionis (1955-1956). In some key passages of his essay on the Mass, Jung extensively quotes one of the new testament apocrypha – the Acts of John – thus creating an interstice of connection among Christian tradition (especially in its variants rejected from the Major Church), the principle of individuation, the image of the Self and the circle, and the symbolism of dance.

«Self-reflection or – what comes to the same thing – the urge to individuation gathers together what is scattered and multifarious, and exalts it to the original form of the One, the Primordial Man. In this way our existence as separate beings, our former ego nature, is abolished, the circle of consciousness is widened, and because the paradoxes have been made conscious the sources of conflict are dried up […]». Looked at from the psychological standpoint, Christ, as the Original Man (Son of Man, second Adam, τέλειος ἄνθρωπος), represents a totality which surpasses and includes the ordinary man, and which corresponds to the to-
tal personality that transcends consciousness. We have called this personality the “self” [...] In this sense, therefore, we can speak of the Mass as the rite of the individuation process.

Reflections of this kind can be found very early on in the old Christian writings, as for instance in the Acts of John [...] That part of the text with which we are concerned here begins with a description of a mystical ‘round dance’ which Christ instituted before his crucifixion. He told his disciples to hold hands and form a ring, while he himself stood in the centre. As they moved round in a circle, Christ sang a song of praise, from which I would single out the following characteristic verses:

I will be saved and I will save, Amen.
I will be loosed and I will loose, Amen.
I will be wounded and I will wound, Amen.
I will be begotten and I will beget, Amen.
I will eat and I will be eaten, Amen.
[ … ]
I will be thought, being wholly spirit, Amen.
I will be washed and I will wash, Amen.
Grace paces the round. I will blow the pipe. Dance the round all, Amen.
[ … ]
The Eight [ogdoad] sing praises with us, Amen.
The Twelve paces the round aloft, Amen.
To each and all it is given to dance, Amen.
Who joins not the dance mistakes the event, Amen.
[ … ]
I will be united and I will unite, Amen.
[ … ]
A lamp am I to you that perceive me, Amen.
A mirror am I to you that know me, Amen.

Jung underlines how in the Acts of John the dancing ritual takes the place occupied by the Last Supper in the synoptic gospels, and by the washing of feet and the vine and the branches discourse in John’s gospel: it takes the place of the institution of the Eucharist. The centre is the Lord, Jesus the Christ, and he cannot be separated from the circle, the disciples: through dance they become one. This is the symbol of the incarnatio continua, of the advent of the Spirit as a completion of Christ’s message.

The Incarnation concerns the multitude, hence a Chrification and divinization of the multitude, of the human and the cosmos. An apokatastasis, a reintegration of the evil into the divine, as in the theological teaching of the father of the church Origen, later rejected as heretic.

The religious value of dance is widely recognised: about Jewish and then Christian tradition, it will suffice to note the wild and powerful dance of David around the Ark of the Covenant; Catholic and Orthodox liturgies still retain vestiges of some kind of dance around the altar; up to the early modern period, and beyond, religious festivals have had their stages of choice on parvises or even inside churches. In Hasidic tradition, from the eighteenth century onwards, dance is a central element of Jewish prayer. Sufi brotherhoods are evidence of the essential
role played by dance in creating a communion with the divine. As a result of the Second Vatican Council, dance has regained its original role in the pursuit of a deeper spiritual understanding even for the Catholic Church, after centuries of outright ostracism: it will suffice to mention Mireille Nègre e Liliana Cosi. However, this is not my point. Jung introduces a more eccentric idea: in his comparison with Nietzsche, he explores the obscure underground currents beneath Christian official tradition and so rebuilds the connection between high and low, earth and sky, body and spirit, lawful and forbidden, good and evil — using new, less contrastive terms. What is more, Jung sees a subterranean tendency which flows from the many gnososes to medieval heretic sects, is conserved and transformed by alchemy and finally gushes out in his times. This tendency can be a balancer and an epoch-making model for the pursuit of meaning in a time full of explosive divisions — as shown by the wars, hot and cold, of the twentieth century —, a time which has proven unable to hold matter and spirit, realism and ideals, freedom and limit together. In the light of this connection, Nijinsky’s life and his personal tragedy can be seen as the terrible synthesis of an unsolved problem. His madness cannot be interpreted as some kind of prophetic sign, neither can it be an excuse to dismiss the issue with which the great dancer confronted the arts and every form of expression which tries to capture our time: the pursuit of beauty and the ethical duty to take upon ourselves the contradictions we live in, both as individuals and as a community. On the verge of his illness, in his last ballet, Nijinsky still managed to communicate with his art what he would no longer be able to communicate about the suffering he had to endure, but which belonged to everyone. It was a cruel coincidence that this last performance took place in a ballroom in Saint Moritz, only a step away from Sils Maria, a place with which the dancer was familiar, the place where Nietzsche had stayed few years before and where he had had the “revelation” of the eternal return. Nijinsky’s biography seems to focus around the fundamental theme of division, of the ethical dualism marking our history. The young dancer was renowned, and he had already caused scandal because of his choreographies, negligent of stereotypes and of those artistic and moral pruderies dear to the “polite society”, while full of an extraordinary, openly sexual, vital force. The final scenes of Debussy’s Après-midi d’un faune (1912) brought the instinctive and primordial force of sexuality into the world of great music and classical ballet, and it did so in Paris, one of the most important audiences in the world. In 1913 The Rite of Spring, with Stravinskij’s avant-garde music, staged an ancient pagan rite, a sacrifice for the renewal of life cycle, partially drawn from Russian folklore. I recall these major choreographies by Nijinsky only to underline the pressing, telluric powerfulness of his art. We now know that his wife, Romola, censored Vaslav’s diary (Nijinsky, 1934) in an attempt to make him seem closer to the tragic hero celebrated in art and collective imagination than to his actual life experience and illness; at the time, he had been diagnosed by Bleuler (Jung’s doctoral teacher of psychiatry) with schizophrenia, today his diagnosis would be of «schizoaffective disorder in a narcissistic personality» (Ansbacher, 1993, p. 669). However, this doesn’t diminish the strength and dramatic power of Romola’s pages, particularly of those trying to recall Nijinsky’s last dance. A dance which is important not only because it was performed by a prodigious dancer, or because it enters the terrible mystery that sometimes covers in madness the fate of a genius, but also because — simi-

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8 On this topic see also the works of Clara Sinibaldi.

9 The Diary of Vaslav Nijinsky, (ed. by J. Acocella), was published by Farrar, Straus & Giroux, a New York publisher, in 1999. The first edition of the diary, edited by Nijinsky’s wife, Romola, and published in 1936, was a reshaped, censored text, especially in those parts about sexuality and homosexuality, but also in those passages about family contrasts. Another addition by Romola is the typographical distinction between the sentences in which Nijinsky identifies himself with God and those in a plain first person.
larly to the cases of Nietzsche and Jung – there are instances and biographical events which embody the power of symbols; in other words, they tell with extreme brevity the tragedy of an entire epoch. On the night of 19th January 1919 Nijinsky danced his last dance; after having told the pianist, Bertha Asseo, she would be told on the spot what to play, he announced:

«I will show how we live, how we suffer, how we artists create.’ And he picked up a chair, sat down on it facing the audience, and stared at them, as if he wanted to read the thoughts of each. Everybody waited silently as if in the church. They waited. The time passed. We must have been like this for about half an hour. The public behaved as if they were hypnotized by Vaslav. They sat completely motionless [...] Vaslav was dancing - gloriously but frighteningly. He took a few rolls of black and white velvet and made a big cross the length of the room. He stood at the head of it with open arms, a living cross himself. ‘Now I will dance you the war, with its suffering, with its destruction, with its death. The war which you did not prevent and so you are responsible for’. It was terrifying.

Vaslav’s dancing was as brilliant, as wonderful as ever, but it was different. Sometimes it vaguely reminded me of that scene in Petrouchka when the puppet tries to escape his fate. He seemed to fill the room with horror-stricken suffering humanity. It was tragic; his gestures were all monumental, and he entranced us so that we almost saw him floating over corpses. The public sat breathlessly horrified and so strangely fascinated. They seemed to be petrified. But we felt that Vaslav was like one of those overpowering creatures full of dominating strength, a tiger let out from the jungle who in any moment could destroy us. And he was dancing, dancing on. Whirling through space, taking his aud

dience away with him to war, to destruction, facing suffering and horror, struggling with all his steel-like muscles, his agility, his lightning quickness, his ethereal being, to escape the inevitable end. It was the dance for life against death». (Nijinsky, 1934, pp. 360-362)

Spectators perceived the sacred atmosphere of the event – Romola doesn’t quote it, maybe she doesn’t even know it, which makes the coincidence even more fascinating, but clearly the sensation in the room was that of the terrifying and the fascinating, according to the characteristics of the numinous in Rudolf Otto and Jung.

The subject of the ballet itself, which explicitly reverses any aestheticizing diversion, holds in an indissoluble connection self-expression and common tragedy: the artistic performance has to deepen awareness, to enlarge conscience.

Nijinsky’s life had always been threatened by conflict and pain: his brother’s insanity; his envious fellow pupils who bullied him in dance school; his feeling an outlaw because of his Polish origins and his radical introversion; his parents’ separation and his mother’s depression; his accidental involvement in the military repression of 1905 demonstration, in which a friend of his lost a sister; his troubled professional and romantic relationship with his manager, Sergei Diaghilev; his being dismissed by the Ballets Russes, which he had led to international fame; his gender identity uncertain between homosexuality and heterosexuality; his controversial marriage to Romola de Pulszky; his arrest in Hungary during the war on a charge of being a “Russian enemy”; his management problems; his brother’s death. Whatever the causes of his schizoaffective disorder, it is self-evident that his sensitivity could not stand the enormous tensions accumulated in his biography. As every mental disorder is bound to do, madness signals both the failure in keeping one’s balance and one’s attempt to find a solution. Maybe Nijinsky’s love for Tolstoj and his pacifism, the
obsession with war and with each and every person’s responsibility, his delirious identifi-
cation with God – a God as fully human as he was – are all signs of this “dream of
peace”, inner and outer.
A historical-archetypal conciliation between Christian symbol and flesh, a sort of exten-
sion and conclusion of the incarnation of God. An enterprise forced by his illness, as
well as by his biography and by history; a most miserable enterprise.
How could one deny the link among the lives and works of Nietzsche, Nijinsky and Jung?
They all are, in a way, symptoms of the quest for a new meaning after the death of God or,
we could say, for a connection between the opposites, which – disjointed and armed one
against the other – tear apart the cloth of collective life and the soul-mind of individuals.
With his reason drifting away, the last thoughts on his diary summon fragments of
disorientation and of the epoch’s struggle. Hence, in his Diaries, he says he is God be-
cause he feels his presence, God in flesh and feelings, not in intelligence, but not God, no
more than a simple man – immediately after this, he accuses the Stock Market of being
Death himself. Maybe his radical confusion had smelled the presence of another God
dominating us? And instead of war and hatred among nations he declares his love for
all peoples: by loving the whole world, he writes, I will manage to resemble God.
Nijinsky unintentionally posed a huge issue, that of the radical relationship between art
and life, aesthetics and ethics – this, too, is a crucial point for both Nietzsche and Jung,
and a well-represented one through the history of twentieth century arts and dance.
Caterina di Rienzo writes:

«There are a number of ways to express the thought of dance, but it is be-
yond question that dance is a form of thought: on bodies, on man, on the
world and on the relationship among them, on a tension towards transcen-
sion. This is a theoretical and historical fact whose inflections can be varied,
but which is now beyond justification.

This assumption can be understood starting from the revolution underwent
by dance during the twentieth century, a process that frees it from the label of
escapist art and inscribes it among the most relevant turns of the twentieth
and twenty-first centuries. Studying the strengths of choreographic research
from the beginning of the nineteenth century means finding traces of the
changes in modern culture, and their interconnections.
The aesthetical creation of a radically new idea of bodies and movements is
born and evolves from the choreutic avant-garde: from Delsarte to Dalcroze,
from Duncan to Nijinsky, from Laban to Graham, from Cunningham
to Bausch, to quote only a few. Be-
cause of this, the art of dance experi-
ences a revolution in its status of servile and graceful divertissement and
reaches the centre of an interrogation of itself, of its place in history and of
its possible offer to human condition». (Di Rienzo, 2011)

Even though Jung resisted the idea that writing his inner experiences in metaphors could
be considered “art” – as suggested by a female voice whom he later came to call his
“soul” – and objected that soul is a part of “nature”, today we should be very careful
when making such a distinction (Jung, 1989).
Art changed its status so drastically that such a sharp division raises many issues. I believe
that our current cultural “canon-non-canonical” would have difficulties in finding a univocal
definition of ‘art’, and psychology is so far from distinguishing nature from culture,
when personal experiences are concerned, that it would be impossible to find a shared
concept and use it as a watershed. Moreover, Jung’s dialogues with Soul started in No-
vember 1913, after the visions that would later form The Red Book. Hence what is in
doubt between “art” and “nature” is the ex-
perience of war, inner and outer, of active imaginations, of dialogues with Soul, of
paintings, of mandalas and historiated initials, of the fight between the spirit of the depths and the spirit of this time, of sense and countersense, of nonsense and supersense. Or maybe it would be better to talk about a *continuum* of “nature”, “art” and philosophy? An unresolved issue. However, the signs of times suggested an entirely different position for *The Red Book*: Massimiliano Gioni, the renowned curator, posed it as the starting and irradiating point of 2013 Venice Biennale; this exhibition was centred on the relationship between the utopia of the Encyclopedic Palace (human knowledge’s synthesis and monument) and biographical experiences, which are often eccentric and expressed in artistic or semi-artistic attempts, and where everyday iconography is pushed beyond itself. Nevertheless, the genealogy of dance therapy is perfect to illustrate how the link between expression and validation – in my opinion the two essential passages of any psychic treatment – was at the centre of a flow from artistic pursue to the discovery of its potential for treatment. It will be enough to keep in mind Mary Wigman and Marian Chace to understand that a clear-cut separation of the fields would be artificious; otherwise, one should at least admit that it is from the twentieth century evolution of dance that the basic principles of therapy are born: the body-mind unity, the various forms of symbolic representation, improvisation, empathetic attention, mirroring – and all these features are essential in both dual and group relationships.

Dance, as a therapy, aims at revealing parts of ourselves that tend to remain hidden or unaccepted by conscience and by the desire for identification with a personality which condenses superego, ego-ideal and ideal ego. This is the principle behind every form of therapy: helping the expression of “other parts” in order to ease their recognition and their integration into a new image of the self. ‘Expression’ is a peculiar part of communication. It is something that one normally would not say or that one would say, but that is actually hard to turn into words or images. A surplus of energy is required to “press outwards” – as the word says – the scary or shameful confession, something that leads one to break with, defy or elude established conventions of conversation. A special interlocutor is needed: an intimate friend, a stranger, or an analyst: a sort of centaur in which a best friend and a stranger are combined. All in all, the unconscious depends on expression: the idea is drawn from a hypothetical inference, useful to explain something that has risen from the inside with a force of its own: where and how was this thing that is flowing forth? The refined hermeneutics that can be deployed in the analytic exchange relies on expression, which guides it with a selective function.

The expression of the analysand learns to set itself free from the boundaries of negotiation tolerance, which, conversely, as far as the “persona” (the social mask that everyone invariably wears) is concerned, has to gain the other’s approval. However, it sometimes needs to set itself free from the internal impulse towards an externalisation oblivious of the circumstances to which the “persona” is obliged to conform.

The analysand’s expression learns to burn self-referential issues and empower the expression of the other; through this abstention he can be reflexively enlarged by his commitment to his duty. Here, the realisation of the self is nothing more than the full carrying out of one’s duty. This also results in the analyst’s self-recognition and, in those cases in which gratefulness is possible, even in recognition from the other.

The recognition of the analysand reaches its truth when it opens to the other (inner and outer) and welcomes it as a component of the individual harmonisation of its experience. Self-recognition happens through the recognition of the other, both as a shadow to be accepted, and as an ‘other’ body, external and irreducible to one’s own.

Transference and countertransference relationships can thus realise the exchange and reciprocity of these forms of expression and recognition. However, expression and recognition, especially in our times, have a basis
and a centre on which they can develop: the moving body.

With neither a centre nor a limit, we must start from a centre and a limit that no theoretical chatter can cover: the body that we are, in the historical definiteness of present civilisation. It would be enough to take the body as a measure for all things to instantly find our bearings again – the only exception being bad faith and manipulation as defensive reactions to reality. What direction would the body suggest we consider with critical attention, based on the centre – hence on our hierarchy of actions, institutions and values – and on the limit – hence on the use of our vital force and of the planet’s? It would offer a value system and an evaluation method to choose the appropriate action. An elementary system, because elementary needs are the ones that should be satisfied to be able to pursue greater goals: nourishment, housing, physical and psychic care, safety, upbringing, education.

This is the only way to transform good intentions – acknowledged, at least in theory, by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights – into actual facts for “everyone” (a key word in the Declaration).

Bodily matters reveal that their formative and cognitive importance is based on their being a potential measure for a new arrangement of our whole civilisation. It would be enough to consider the consequences of the actual ways in which real bodies are handled (the great majority of bodies, those of about 80 percent of world’s population) on our life: on its length, on health, on exclusions, on privileges, on identity; this consideration would be enough to understand how deep, dramatic and urgent is the conversion to which we are called, both individually and as a community, by the dreadful show of those debased bodies. Nijinsky, half insane and half wise, had understood it from the war: in his last dance he felt he was soaring above piles of corpses. Material and psychological raids against millions of bodies are far from remaining horrible memories of a time past.

Therefore, since bodies are the centre and limit around and through which we should reimagine a political criticism of civilisation, it should also be clear why they also stand at the core of therapy and of a new hope, a project of a transformed way of life, which we will call – drawing on an ancient tradition to renovate it – “philosophy as life path”.

Educational and instructive practices derived from these principles should rediscover the idea of limit and the need for centring, starting from the undeniable experience of the body as a centre and a limit, from its perceptions and gestures. These experiences are undeniable because of their being phylogenetically inherited; this is true for sensibility (epidermic, proprioceptive, visceral), perception (preferences, figure–ground, constancy, similarity) and action (motor coordination and orientation movements) (Eibl-Eibesfeldt, 1989).

Quest for meaning beyond natural data is based on a natural necessity to create culture, once the system encephalon–upright walking–manipulation–language has produced various possibilities of action and perception, among which to choose. The metaphor of “sense” itself is based on spatial orientation and on the ability to pre-figure movements in time. Sense rests its first sense on the body moving in space. This space – namely the structure of limits that make orientation possible – is lived and travelled by the body, and transformed by its movements, within the irreversibility of time as inscribed in its birth and in its fate of death. Because of the great disorientation we live in, we need to restart learning the sense of reality starting from what really is essential. Our body will be our master. Our relationships with the others and with nature, inner and outer, live inside it, in the experience of our senses. The body lives a dialogic life that, after having been modified by the world, returns and modifies the body which senses and acts. It is natural, at this point, to recall Hadot, for whom philosophy itself is “transformation of the percep-

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10 For the relationship between pedagogy of the body and philosophical practice, see the works of Ivano Gamelli.
tion of the world”. Already a teacher of centre and limit, the body becomes the finest ally and the safest criterion of a philosophical life-style. How could a philosophical life be unable to reach the very heart of life itself?
References