The “Body in Motion” as the Substance of Dance Improvisation? Based on Motifs from Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s *Phenomenology of Perception*

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Abstract

In the beginning of my academic career, it was my personal experience of dance practice that provided a direct impulse for studying the phenomenon of dance as art from a philosophical perspective. It was that same experience that drew my attention to the concept of aesthetic engagement proposed by Arnold Berleant. His theory, in my view, captures the fundamental aspects of dance in a unique way. That early study led me to develop and promote the aesthetics of sensitivity, which in turn created a basis for the appreciation of dance as a practice that is inseparable from life. Many problems explored by Berleant – such as the inseparability of perception from action, appreciation of the living and sensing body, and understanding of the space as relational and dependent on the body’s motion – can also be found in the thought of Maurice Merleau-Ponty. His arguments, in my opinion, help explain factors in modern dance such as somatic engagement in the process of its perception or the performative character of an event that is inseparable from its broadly construed context or the environment in which it occurs.

In the course of his academic career, Arnold Berleant has frequently referred to Merleau-Ponty’s thought and, inspired by the latter’s works, employed, in his own reflection, notions such as those of chiasm, of the flesh of the world, or of the body as a field of forces – which he also used in reference to dance. He has been most acutely sensitive, however, to the remnants of dualistic thinking present in terminology like that
of "the interior" and "the exterior," which he found even in Merleau-Ponty's work.[4]

This article is a proposal for one of many possible ways of re-interpreting Berleant's concept of dance as a practice in which elements of an existential nature are tightly connected with aesthetic, cognitive, or environmental ones. In this text, space in dance is not construed as something external to the body but as something emanating from its movement, merging with broadly understood surroundings, and becoming an embodiment of our being in the world.

Key Words
Berleant; body; consciousness; dance; Merleau-Ponty; motion; movement; space

1. Introduction
Phenomenologist Jan Patočka reduces the original sensation of the animated subject to a kinesthetic sensation, the concrete apprehension of the intentional movement of one's own body. In his concept, the movement of a part of the body is tantamount to determining oneself as a subject.[5] We come across a similar way of thinking in Merleau-Ponty.[6] He stresses that we originally perceive our body not from the outside, "objectifying it" through our sight, but by experiencing its movement. The consciousness of being a subject emerges through bodily acts. The scholarly approach of Patočka and Merleau-Ponty indicates the existence of a mutual relationship between subjectivity and movement. It is not only movement that gives us consciousness of being a subject; how the subject is conceived affects our understanding of the movements they make. A similar relationship emerges in dance, particularly in its more recent forms. How important the philosophical treatment of the dancing subject is for the understanding of its movement will be presented using a concept by Merleau-Ponty. He has inspired us to look at the history of changes in forms of movement in dance in the context of more general transformations in how we understand the subject or the body (and even corporeality).[7]

2. The Process of Perceiving Through Movement
The subject of our study is "the body in movement," which derives from Maurice Merleau-Ponty's notion in Phenomenology of Perception. Let us assume that the author's view of the world through the lens of the body is particularly suited to contemporary issues in dance. Let us assume that concepts like one's body, the subjective space of experiencing the world, and movement as "directed toward" the world can be tools for philosophical exploration of dance in terms of the transformations of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. At the heart of our study is a question: Will...
putting the body in “subjective” and not “objective” categories will give us a fuller sense of the role of the dancer in the latest forms of improvisation?

When, in *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty addresses the immediate experience of the world through the body, he examines the use of bodily sensations not yet grasped by the intellect. It would seem the case of the dancer might help illuminate how this process occurs. When dancers move in time to music, they listen to their body, which directs them to make one movement and no other. This occurs on a pre-reflective level, without consciousness in a Husserlian sense. Yet the body’s memory comes into play, honed through years of dance practice. We must recall that there are various concepts of dance, and above all, various training techniques. [8] Training the body to learn a sequence of movements, to mechanically replicate a pre-prepared dance arrangement is quite different from letting oneself be guided by physical sensations in an improvisation. In traditional dance techniques, the body is treated as an object moving about in space (and time), marked by geometrical points of reference, [9] and thus it is apprehended dualistically. Merleau-Ponty, on the other hand, sees it in non-dualistic categories, which is why he alters his mode of understanding its sensations, abandoning the associative model widely used by dance theorists and practitioners.[10] His aim is to consider the role of the body in perception, to explore existence and how we perceive the world, which he does in critiquing the philosophical concepts of Husserl and Heidegger. He apprehends the subject’s moving body as a source of communication with the world. This means his concepts of movement and motility are not tailored to artistic movement. Moreover, Merleau-Ponty bases his concept on a critique of the foundations of physiology, character psychology, and behaviorism, already addressed in *The Structure of Behavior*, [11] and uses terminology drawn from descriptive psychology. His thoughts can be difficult to follow, as he often uses a metaphorical language, not giving the interpreter conceptual precision, encouraging the reader to “slide” across the surface of connotations and conceptual associations, like Husserl before him.

I believe Merleau-Ponty’s remarks take on special significance in the context of the new directions in dance, and improvised dance in particular, though they are conceived in different ways.[12] Improvisation in dance is a prime example of a situation Merleau-Ponty explored, wherein the subject (the dancer) submits to physical sensations, performing particular movements (in a new place and in a situation unlike that arranged before). Well-known contemporary choreographer Ivonne Rainer explains the essence of dance as follows: “I believe the impulse comes to me first. Then I keep assessing the situation, I see things and make decisions. Or I can choose
not to surrender to my impulses. I won't draw any conclusions from this. (...) I choose to do this, I choose to perform a play in this way. You might get lucky and it fits your instincts. You can risk acting, though there is no other choice. Burdened by hopes, by the sphere of action, what more could you ask for?”[13] Rainer's words could serve as a motto for dance activities in the latter half of the twentieth century, when there was a surge in situational dance experiments focused on the “here and now,” the happening, the event. [14] The mechanism of such improvised dance is outlined by phenomenologist Maxine Sheets-Johnstone, whose Primacy of Movement describes them in terms of “thinking in movement,” of kinetic intelligence. [15] As she explains, the improv dancer has no time to ponder movement, whether symbolically or conceptually, nor do they apply movement associations. When they engage in a movement, it occurs “here and now.” This is an impulse moment, of sudden new way of being in a certain spot, in a concrete situation, barring the conceptual intervention of movement, the primacy of thought before movement. This is why Sheets-Johnstone calls improvisation “exploring the world in movement,” regardless of how dance improvisation is understood, [16] showing that, in dance, the process of moving and perception are inextricably intertwined. We see this motif of Maxine Sheets-Johnstone's in Merleau-Ponty's concept, the ties between movement and perception, because “to move one's body is to aim at things through it. It is to allow oneself to respond to their call, which is made upon it independently of any representation.”[17] He writes: “Movement is not thought about movement, and bodily space is not space thought of or represented.”[18] In Merleau-Ponty's concept, perception is a basic link with the world, it is the body's actions vis-à-vis the outside world, the world of objects, a way of being a body-object “geared toward” the world. But he sees perception unlike how it is seen by philosophical tradition, because of his concept of the perceiver as an “impersonal” body and its effect on the subjective grasp of the body. In Merelau-Ponty's view, perception "is not, therefore, a personal act," but, as Migasinski states, it is a "relationship to being," preceding theoretical thought, which is why we ought not to speak of the perceiving subject in terms of consciousness, but rather as "existence."[19] As Piotr Mróz emphasizes, existence is "the possibility of moving toward the world,"[20] a specific movement by which we endow with meaning, as we open up to the world in its multitude of aspects and horizons. "For, seen from the inside, perception owes nothing to what we know in other ways about the world, about stimuli as physics describes them and about the sense organs as described by biology. It does not present itself in the first place as an event in the world to which the category of causality, for example, can be applied, but as a re-creation or re-constitution of the world at every moment. As far as we believe (...) in the physical
world, in ‘stimuli’ (...) it is first of all because we have present at this moment to us a perceptual field (...).[21] This concept of perception cannot be explained in terms of receiving stimuli or gathering impressions, as it is from an empirical standpoint, implying a certain conceptualization, the structuring of stimuli by the consciousness or the intellect, negating the body's original impressions. This permits acting in the “here and now,” in a particular moment and place, as in this explanation of Yvonne Rainer's work in dance described by Barbara Sier-Janik: “She sought to accomplish her goal by demonstrating the ideal harmony between sensation and movement, between the concentration of the mind and the work of the muscles, with no narrative foundation, no psychological motivation or excessive personalization.”[22]

3. Experiencing One's Own Body Through Dance

Looking at dance (old or new) through Merleau-Ponty’s concept opens new horizons for understanding movement and associated concepts of space and time. We should forget about apprehending the body in external, objectified categories, as Irena Turska is wont to do.[23] Merleau-Ponty is after an experiential element, a perception of the world where the impulse to perform a movement comes from submitting to the sensations of one's own body, where one discards the division between senses and reason, or body and mind, and binary oppositions slip into the background. In this way we can better understand the improvisational practices which strive for instinctual, impulsive action coming from a feeling, sensitive, thinking body, driven by its own intelligence. Let us therefore take a closer look at the concepts of body and movement in Merleau-Ponty, to trace the dilemmas involved in their adoption in dance.

If we accept the tentative thesis that Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological theories can help us to explain the shifts in approach to dance in the late twentieth century, we should recall how revolutionary his approach was to understanding the body, and limit our investigations to fairly loose analogies. Most of the conceptual categories Merleau-Ponty used to describe movement come from his concept of the body. Yet we lack a basis to assert that this concept also emerges in the dance concepts we are analyzing. There are merely certain similarities in approach to movement – for example, in terms of the present shift in attention toward the sensations and motility of the body. According to Merleau-Ponty, it is not the body as a physical mass, but the active, living body that is created by responding to the world. It is a subject geared toward particular aims and tasks. The body “lends itself without reserve to action,” which cannot be rendered by biological and physical processes, and cannot be described in these categories.[24] Its aim is to situate itself toward objects so that, in a given cognitive situation, they show themselves in
the best possible light. Yet what is this situating itself toward objects, and what has this to do with the movement of the subject in space, especially when the space is a situation and not objective, and every perspective upon the moving body is a perspective through bodily sensations? We can illustrate this situation fairly easily in terms of dance, when the dancer moves on stage among certain props, nearer or further away, circling around them (exhibiting them), or leaving them out of reach of the body. In terms of classical ballet practice, Elizabeth Selden even speaks of the body designing the space, considering that the dancer's movements define the space in which they perform, presenting it to the viewers by coming nearer and retreating, setting central and marginal fields, dividing it into parts or uniting it to make a whole.[25] This is a symbolic presentation of the environment/world through movement.[26] Let us take a moment to ponder what interpretation this dance presentation of the space of the world gains through Merleau-Ponty's concept of movement.

We begin with an issue key to Merleau-Ponty, the determination of the role of bodily sensations in movement which situates one in the space of the world. To his way of thinking, this is a kind of inner sensation, and the first stage of human activity, which is conceptualized only later, but which orients us in the world. “(...) experience of one's own body runs counter to the reflective procedure which detaches subject and object from each other and which gives us only the thought about the body, or the body as an idea, and not the experience of the body or the body in reality.”[27] At the stage of the first sensation one perceives the impersonal “self,” but without the consciousness of the subject or a division into body and soul. Merleau-Ponty's notion that the body-subject's cognitive practice begins with the physical sensation of movement thus alters our understanding of the subject's consciousness ruling the body.[28] He opposes his views on consciousness to concepts both ancient and modern, represented by Descartes, and picked up by Hume, Locke, and Kant. He sees consciousness not as the “rule of concepts,” not as “free creation in acts of bestowing meaning,” nor as “pure thought,” the “I think.” This is consciousness through “ruling the body.” It is not tied to a subjective act of introspection, it is only found on a corporeal level, and there is neither clarity nor transparency, as in Descartes. Nor is this a thematized consciousness that constitutes or fulfills acts, as in Husserl. Merleau-Ponty critiques what he calls “philosophy of a constituting consciousness,” exemplified by Kant’s concept. [29] And all this is because the body is intentional, it teaches itself and orients itself in the world, and in this sense, it is conscious.[30] Key to understanding consciousness on a corporeal level is thus the concept of intentionality. This is what allows the body to occupy an initial, unconceptualized position toward the world and this is why motility, according
to Merleau Ponty, ought to be understood as “motor intentionality.”[31] As Maciejczak writes, “the body develops intentionality through movement—an assimilation and prelinguistic understanding of the world.”[32] In changing the radically temporary, post-Cartesian way of speaking of the body-consciousness relationship, Merleau-Ponty does not explain the concept of intentionality in a satisfactory manner. We know it occurs on a corporeal level, which is equivalent to saying that movement is not a result of consciousness affecting the body. Yet if, by his concept, intentionality is an essential property of one’s own body, if every movement of the body is intentional and if movement is seen in terms of its external objective space, what belongs to this movement?

Let us return once more to the sensation of movement and consider its mechanisms. We can gather our remarks in three points:

First, when the body moves, it feels it “here and now,” and this is a sensation with no clear and evident conceptual definition, no thematization, and is linked to the “horizon” of seeing through the body with the necessity of considering the possible horizons of objects, the “figures” of the world.[33] In this sense, the sensation of arm or leg movements confirms the existence of this type of perception on a pre-reflective level.

Secondly, because the body moves, it feels it can (“I can”), in other words, that something is within its reach, its power, depends on it, it sets out prospects for action.[34] As Maciejczak puts it, “I can” indicates the core intentionality of the body in opposition to the Husserlian concept of consciousness, which is the ultimate point of reference for every perspective.[35] In light of Merleau-Ponty's thoughts, we might interpret “I can” as the subject that “can” focus on certain tasks and aims, as it has the capacity to use habitual structures it possesses, and those it will develop in the future.

Third, the fact that the subject sees from the perspective of “here” and “now” (where the perspective is rooted) indicates a situatedness of the gaze of their body and the perspectival nature of its situatedness, which, in turn, is tied to the concepts of time and space.[36] This is due to the fact that the body moves and acquires a certain understanding of time and space, except that both are experienced from within, and thus, they are not objective points of reference. “And finally, far from my body’s being for me no more than a fragment of space, there would be no space at all for me if I had no body.”[37] We can understand this to mean that when we move, we become accustomed to a certain spatial situation, which is one of many temporary perspectives on the world. Going further, we might say that, as a result of my experiences, I see the world in spatio-temporal categories, which means space and time to some extent become a priori categories (as in Kant), constant attributes of movement, except that these are not forms of the transcendental subject, as they come from body sensations and emerge in ever-changing constellations.
4. A Motion that Generates Space

As we have said, in characterizing movement in terms of its sensations, Merleau-Ponty proves the existence of the phase of contact with the world that occurs on a corporeal level. In this way, he defends the subjective nature of one's own body, stressing its orientation, its focus "on" the world, to which intentionality responds. He defines movement in situational and momentary terms, with reference to the background against which we see change in the situation of an object. His concept of one's own body thus instigates a change in the whole "equipage" of the body, the understanding of the movements it makes, and the concepts of time and space. Merleau-Ponty's statements are particularly "saturated" with concepts tied to space, which, owing to its non-dualistic approach to the body, has a different source of meaning than its Cartesian equivalents. Because exploring alternative performance spaces is often foregrounded in contemporary dance,[38] we shall try to delve into these modern developments from Merleau-Ponty's perspective. The situational works of contemporary dancers require new terms for understanding the movement of bodies in space.

Let us start by considering if Merleau-Ponty considers movement as a change of position in terms of objectively existing space, since in the theoretical works on classical dance, movement in dance is determined according to geometrically marked points. By dance theorists' reckoning, the movement of the dancer's body observed by a viewer presumes situating the body's external materiality against other objects, or the place it occupies. Since in Merleau-Ponty's concept the body is an intentional subject, not a material object that shifts according to an external referential structure, what categories may we use to define movement?

In *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty sees the problem of the body's existence as an object among objects and the existence of an external objective space, writing "There must be, as Kant conceded, a 'motion which generates space,' which is our intentional motion, distinct from 'motion in space,' which is that of things and of our passive body (corps passif)."[39] He does not ignore the existence of a passive body, but he is not interested in seeing the body as an object situated among other objects. (He thus neglects to reflect upon the impact of the limitations of the body's materiality on the acting body.) Merleau-Ponty thus takes into account the existence of movement conceived in objective space, which does not mean that this is his primary interest. He is after the living, experiencing, feeling (*la chair*) body, not the institutionalized or objectified body. As such, we see that he is not interested in the classical understanding of the dance movement, as it reduces the body to merely a shifting piece of an objectively circumscribed space. On several occasions,
Merleau-Ponty stresses an enigmatic turn of phrase: we should “understand motility as basic intentionality.”[40] He often uses the concepts of motility, action, and movement in various constellations in Phenomenology of Perception, with reference to man's existential predicament, and not movement on stage. Here is another quote from Merleau-Ponty: “Our bodily experience of movement is not a particular case of knowledge. It provides us with a way of access to the world and the object, with a 'praktognosia,' which has to be recognized as original and perhaps as primary.”[41] Yet in Merleau-Ponty's analysis we also find concepts that are important in grasping improvised movement. This is because he approaches movement in terms of bodily sensations. By his concept, movement is confirmed with reference to the background against which the body functions, the horizon from which it emerges to activate itself to move.[42] A space is situational, which has its own consequences, as it is instrumental in forging differences with regard to the world of objects.[43] The body differs from other objects in that it has no set position, which is what makes the body a subject, which corresponds to intentionality. By the same token, the spatiality of the body is experiential. The body is a background of sorts, a horizon from which we gaze, which is not an absolute point of reference. It circumscribes “the notion of objective space,” with regards to which we say something is “on,” “under,” “beyond” etc.[44] Does Merleau-Ponty's concept of space as a subjective perspective of the body have implications for contemporary dance practice? We shall try to single out at least three ways Merleau-Ponty's understanding of space is reflected in improvised dance:

1. **The space of the body.** Merleau-Ponty writes, “Bodily spatiality is the deployment of one's bodily being, the way in which the body comes into being as a body,”[45] having in mind the way a subject exists, his physical existence that involves constant movement geared toward the world. Movement, in turn, must be circumscribed by the body's motility, the scope in which the body can move. Thus, the space of the body is a space of movement, of actions the body makes, established through certain set habits which are always being tested by new experiences. “If bodily space and external space form a practical system, the first being the background against which the object, as the goal of our action may stand out, or the void in front of which it may come to light, it is clearly in action that the spatiality of our body is brought into being, and an analysis of one's own movement should enable us to arrive at a better understanding of it.”[46]

2. **The situational space.** Looking through the body “in/onto” the world signifies the situation, background, or horizon from which we depart as we apprehend the world. This is a situational orientation point of sorts that is not established in set spatial relations. This links up with point one, except that here the stress falls on “here” and the “horizon,” on
establishing temporary perspectives on the world, in which the body is the constant. It circumscribes the space from which we see the world and relations in its scope.

3. **The double horizon of space.** On the one hand, the body is a mass situated in an external, objective arrangement of references; on the other, a space is experienced by the body. These spaces ground one another, though the space of the subject seems to eventually prevail, as it circumscribes an objective space (to become the space of the subject's possible actions).[47]

We can find a metaphorical exemplification of these spatial formulations in the approaches adopted by dance artists in the latter half of the twentieth century. On the one hand, dancers in search of new forms of movement explore the movement capabilities of the body/subject, i.e., the space of the body; on the other hand, in sketching the space of the stage through movement, they present it in a situational field, ultimately making the dancing body the constant of the stage, and indicating the mutually grounding double horizon of the situational space and the dancer's body. In the first case, as in Merce Cunningham's choreography for *Torso*, the artist explores the body's motility. In this performance, it involves investigating the possible placements of feet, head, and legs on many planes and at many tempos to determine the limits and conditions of the movements. An example of the enactment of the second and third concept of space could be the unsynchronized linear dance presentations in which several people dance at once, each of their bodies annexing a fragment of the stage, presenting it to the audience. The gaze is unable to take in the whole presentation at once, it hops from one fragment of the performance to another. In *Torso* this unsynchronized set of various dancers' movements arose from the fact that Cunningham only decided at what point they would enter the stage while the play was underway, subjecting themselves to “objective chance” in moving from one end of the stage to the other.[48] The mutually grounding orders of the subjective space of the body and the objective visible space are also seen in contact improvisation, in work based on tactile contact with another person.[49] This technique incorporates a conviction that the body must be heard to find an individual movement-based response to another body in an objective space.

If we see improvised dance movement from Merleau-Ponty's perspective, it strikes us that grasping the dancer's body in terms of classical dance theory—as an object or spatial mass situated outside of an objective space—does not give us an exhaustive description. Merleau-Ponty teaches us to take a situational view of the dancer's movements, as the body designs the space as a way of inhabiting or assimilating it, as a point of reference for the concepts of "near," "under," or "above."[50] In this way, he makes dance (a laboratory to
investigate movement) a metaphor for the human existential cognitive predicament, which grows to become essential, intentional human behavior. Contemporary improvised dance seems to agree with this concept, especially when, as Sheets-Johnstone confirms, it calls attention to the perceptual potential of movement, arising from listening to one's own sensations.

Merleau-Ponty's approach to movement is an attempt to overcome the Cartesian dualism, the body/subject split into object and subject, soul and body, subjective and objective. This dualism is collapsed by the transcendental structure of one's own body situated somewhere in-between an existence as object or subject, whose intentional action is always geared toward the world. This takes place in the movement of existence, in the rhythm of a dialectics of grounding and collapsing ground, in a dialectic that moves between various orders, such as physical and intelligible. This approach to the movement of existence lets us see dance, not in terms of a predetermined structure of thinking or a choreographic intention, but as open choreography. Contemporary dancers have changed their understanding of stage movement in practice in improvisation, for instance, and demand a new approach to the dancer's work, as following the impulses of the body and marking out a specific space through the body. They have signaled the necessity of foregoing dual definitions of the body, which ceases to be a mere object or tool that requires tuning, so as to work the best possible, becoming a motor for creative and cognitive actions. Dancers' improvised actions stand for a more general tendency in culture, which Richard Shusterman has called the somaesthetic turn,[51] in which a new sense of understanding the body emerges to overturn the traditional dualistic conceptual categories designating what have been the "constant" place of the body and mind, the senses and reason in the human cognitive situation. More detailed consideration of this topic will have to be left for another time, but we ought to consider new perspectives for grasping the history of transformations in dance movement that have appeared across the world along with the growing interest in the cognitive capabilities of the moving body/subject.

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Endnotes

[1] His concept inspired me to write the book Prze-myśleć taniec. Reinterpretacje estetyki środowiskowej Arnolda Berleanta [Re-Thinking Dance: Re-interpretations of Arnold Berleant’s Environmental Aesthetics], which I am currently finalizing. In my work, I develop selected ideas of Berleant’s aesthetics that help analyze dance in its contemporary forms from the perspective of changes described in the (broadly construed) humanities as “the somatic turn” and “the performative turn.”

[2] My research inspired by Berleant’s thought was shared in several oral presentations, e.g., Estetyka wobec tańca [Aesthetics and Dance], presented at the opening of the Somaesthetics Section of the John Dewey Research Center in Cracow in 2012; Estetyka tańca w kulturze globalnej [Aesthetics of Dance in the Global Culture], presented at the conference Taniec w kulturze globalnej. Zyski i straty [Dance in the Global Culture. Benefits and Losses] in Warsaw in 2014; Dance as Performance w ujęciu Arnolda Berleanta [Dance as Performance According to Arnold Berleant], presented at the Institute of Philosophy in Cracow in 2016; and Dance as Performance – wokół koncepcji Arnolda Berleanta [Dance as Performance – Reflections on Arnold Berleant’s Theory], presented at the Third Polish Congress of Aesthetics in Szczecin in 2017. The first two presentations were entirely dedicated to the aesthetic theory explored in Berleant’s Art and Engagement. I have also explored Berleant’s thought in numerous articles, the latest of which include „Medium tańca
w ujęciu Arnolda Berleanta” [“The Medium of Dance in the Theory of Arnold Berleant”], in Sztuka i Filozofia 55 (2019), in which I analyze the ephemeral nature of dance and consider the possibility of applying the notion of medium in the context of the author’s processual theory; and „Piękno w formie tańca czy piękno formy tańca? O potrzebie filozoficznej estetyki” [“Beauty in the Form of Dance, or Beauty of the Form of Dance? On the Need for Philosophical Aesthetics”], in Ethos 32 (2019) nr 3 (127), in which, building on Berleant’s aesthetics, I introduce the idea of somatic “aestheticity,” which I in turn apply to certain forms of contemporary dance. I also translated Berleant’s article published under the Polish title „Estetyka zaangażowania,” in Biuletyn Polskiego Towarzystwa Estetycznego 3 (1) 2003, p. 1.


[6] A detailed analysis of changes in the apprehension of dance movement throughout the centuries is found in the article: „Ciało tancerza: od wzrokocentryzmu do pluralizmu” (“The Dancer's Body: from Visuocentrism to Pluralism,”) in Kultura Współczesna (Contemporary Culture), 2011, nr 3 (69), pp. 45-57.


[8] Though we might accept the thesis that the dancer uses body habits because, in hearing a certain piece of music (to which they have often rehearsed certain mechanisms of movement), they perform one movement and not another,
this does not yet determine the existence of non-reflective movement sensations. We might suppose that the study of dance technique is based on body habits, but these are consciously developed. This makes these habits the result of years of body-training, and are not based on internal, non-reflective sensations of the body; on the contrary, they come through regularly training it and observing it from the outside for the desired effect. This generally happens through a trainer demonstrating and controlling certain movements, which are repeated in front of a mirror to be remembered.

[9] This is how dance movement is conceived in many works on the subject. Rudolf Laban, for one, has suggested that the movements of the dancer's body be conceived following the Platonic shape of the icosahedron. See: Irena Turska, 
*Spotkanie ze sztuką tańca (An Encounter with the Art of Dance)* (Kraków: Polskie Wydawnictwo Muzyczne, 2000), p. 82.

[10] Behind this concept of dance is the traditional mode of explaining the process of perceiving one's own body in associative categories. It is assumed that we perceive the body from the inside as a coherent, compact, integral whole, based on experiences gathered in childhood, collating input from touch, hearing, sight etc., collected in moving our body. Moving means using ready and pre-developed patterns of movement.


[14] American artists lead the field in experimental works, especially those tied with Judson Dance Theatre, Grand Union, but also others, such as Merce Cunningham. Everyday movements are the substance of most dance pieces, foregoing stylized movements in favor of aleatorism; they experiment with performance venues, annexing informal spaces like basketball courts or the roofs of Manhattan.


[16] Sheets-Johnstone thus defines every dance improvisation. The thesis is rather controversial, as there are basic differences in approach to improvised movement. For instance, Trisha Brown places improvisation under structural
control, while Anna Halprin conceives of improvisation as listening to one's body in tune with nature. Op. cit., p. 488.


[26] A symbolic presentation of the space in dance occurs through various forms of movement, e.g. through the soloist marking out central fields of the stage, or when groups of dancers, through shared movement, present the space on stage, such as by accepting certain lines around a central dancer or decentralizing a space of the stage, when there is no such lead figure.


[28] According to Merleau-Ponty, bodies cannot be defined through a distinction between subject and object inherited from Descartes, not to mention the biological and the psychological. Merleau-Ponty opposes a vision of the body as an object which outside stimuli affect; it is a subject analogously creating impressions in perception, corresponding to an empirical concept. Nor is he satisfied by a purely neurophysiological approach, in which external stimuli are transferred to the nerves, consciousness is reduced to brain processes, and the body moves in a feedback response.


2.06.2021


[34] How do body sensations work? As bodies, we are ready to be focused on things, as it were, and this is why they stimulate us “without the intermediary of representation in the consciousness.” We might understand this as follows: the subject has vague sensations, knows neither the aim nor the task, but the sensation exists, keeping the subject at the ready.


[36] We lack the space to fully explain our understanding of the terms “here” and “now.” Merleau-Ponty was not after a point-based understanding of time and space. In terms of such concepts as “background” or “horizon,” he breaks down a perspective of apprehending movement in objectivist or physical terms. On the concept of time in Merleau-Ponty, see: Wokół fenomenologii francuskiej, możliwości, pokrewieństwa, konfrontacje (On French Phenomenology: Possibilities, Kinships, Confrontations) ed. Iwona Lorenc, Jacek Migasiński (Warsaw: PAN, 2007), pp. 50-75. On the concept of space, see Maciejczak, Świat według ciała, pp. 99-116.


[38] From the 1960s onward, the experimental practices of dancers aim to investigate and explore new conditions for exhibiting art, and these investigations necessarily take place through the dancer’s body movements. We can understand this as follows: the dancer moves through a new space, e.g. the roofs of Manhattan or mattresses, as we find in the work of Trisha Brown, and must adapt their movement to the place of presentation, or else they might slip or fall into the water. In this sense, they explore new, unexplored artistic ground, based on impulses urging them to take only some of the possible movements in the situation at hand.


[48] We know the example of Merce Cunningham, who wrote out various movements and then had the dancers draw cards; he often also sent dancers on stage without them knowing what music they would be dancing to.


[50] This problem is explored by Berleant in a similar manner: “Dance, in fact, literally embodies the basic powers of the human situation. It exhibits the primal conditions of the human realm in which space and time are generated out of movement’. “The body becomes the point from which space is measured (...”). Berleant, *Art and Engagement*, op. cit., p. 160, 161.