

## DANCE

EDMUND HUSSERL, JEAN-PAUL SARTRE,

and MAURICE MERLEAU-PONTY mention dance only in passing. For example, in *Ideen zu einer reinen Phänomenologie und phänomenologischen Philosophie II* [1912–15], Husserl refers to the dancing body in a discussion of the way the apprehension of a human being is not the apprehension of a mind fastened to a body, but of a whole person, animated through and through so that every movement is “full of soul.” In his discussion of desire in *L'être et le néant* (1943), Sartre alludes to the dancing body as a BODY that cannot be appropriated as sheer contingency, facticity, or flesh, for even if nude, the dancer is still a situated, acting, moving body. And in *Phénoménologie de la perception* (1945), Merleau-Ponty uses a dance as an example of an acquired motor habit, pointing out that learning a dance is not a matter of analyzing it into its component parts, but of “catching on to” the movement in a thoroughly bodily way.

Though MARTIN HEIDEGGER turns more explicitly to dance in several texts — for example, in his 1950 lecture “Das Ding” and in his 1959 lecture “Holderlins Erde und Himmel” — the dance he is concerned with is the “round dance” of the “fourfold” (earth, sky, mortals, divinities) in their mutually mirroring play; as a reciprocal joining, gathering, or belonging-together in which the world “worlds.” This ontologically accented dance is only loosely connected with the ritual dance forms in ancient Greece to which Heidegger alludes. ROMAN INGARDEN’s *Untersuchungen zur Ontologie der Kunst* (Investigations in the ontology of art, initially drafted in 1928 but not published until 1962) engages actual works of art more directly, but he focuses on MUSIC, painting, ARCHITECTURE, and FILM. Thus here too there is only passing reference to dance, amounting to a recommendation that “artistic dance” be clearly distinguished from such “extra-artistic phenomena” as ritual dances. However, Sibyl S. Cohen’s “Ingarden’s Aesthetics and Dance” (1984) draws upon his *Das lit-*

*erarische Kunstwerk* (The literary work of art, 1931), applying his notion of the stratified, schematic nature of the literary work of art to the case of dance — which, for example, has a lived-body stratum rather than a phonetic stratum for its foundational element.

Dance is mentioned more frequently in MIKEL DUFRENNE’s *Phénoménologie de l’expérience esthétique* (1953), though it is given no special treatment of its own. Dufrenne — who, like Ingarden, is concerned only with dance as an art form meant to be viewed by spectators rather than with dance forms in which people participate, and who draws nearly all of his examples from ballet — stresses that although there is no dance without the dancer, the dancer must submit to the dance in such a way that the dance “possesses” the dancer and movement that has in fact been very precisely determined in advance is nevertheless brought to life with spontaneity as well as grace at the moment of performance. But although the body is the “organ of performance” and provides the “sensuous material” for the dance, the particular dancing body is transcended in favor of the work itself. And the aesthetic object that the dancer thus incarnates is comprised of “pure movements” with their own sensuous, bodily logic; even moments of repose are never mere static poses, but the “apotheosis” of movement just completed and the “promise” of movement about to unfold.

Dufrenne’s work is, of course, meant as a contribution to phenomenological AESTHETICS in general, not as a phenomenological description of any particular art form. He nevertheless notes in passing that when the dancer “dedicates” his or her body to the dance, his or her movements “proceed from the trunk” — a descriptive detail already emphasized by ERWIN W. STRAUS in “Die Formen des Räumlichen” (1930). But whereas Dufrenne remarks on the highlighted role of the trunk or torso from the spectator’s point of view, Straus suggests that the dancer’s own lived experience of dancing involves a sense of “I” or “self” as being centered in the trunk (rather than, say, somewhere in the head, behind the eyes). For Straus, this shift to vital movement emanating from the body’s center is linked with the dancer’s shift from the “optical” space of theoretical knowledge, practical action, and purposive, goal-directed movement to an “acoustic” space sustaining a pre-reflective dissolution of the I-world, subject-object dichotomy — a realm of “symbolic spatial qualities”

rather than measurable distances. Here, however, dance is only important to Straus's phenomenological *PSYCHOLOGY* insofar as the contrast between everyday bodily movement and pure dance movement sheds light on the differences between the distinctive spatialities proper to the visual and to the audial modes of experiencing.

Yet despite the relatively sparse treatment of dance in the classic texts and authors mentioned, there is a small but growing body of literature in which phenomenologists have focused on dance in its own right (rather than as exemplifying some other theme or phenomenon). Moreover, persons initially trained in dance have turned to phenomenology in order to elucidate the essential structures and aesthetic aims of Western theatrical dancing. In so doing, they are carrying forward two trends already emerging from the dance world itself: a concern for a compelling, non-reductive way of giving voice to the subjective experiencing of dancing, and a concern for the precise, evocative verbal description of seemingly ephemeral and ineffable dance works as they are experienced from the audience's point of view. Thus a phenomenological turn to lived experience and to the "how" of the appearing phenomena already resonates with autobiographical and historical writing by dance "insiders" (dancers and choreographers) on the one hand and 20th century dance criticism on the other.

*The Phenomenology of Dance* (1966), by MAXINE SHEETS (later Sheets-Johnstone), was the first book-length study to apply phenomenological terms and concepts to the experience of choreographing, performing, and perceiving theater dance works. Drawing upon *EXISTENTIAL PHENOMENOLOGY* — especially its portrayal of ecstatic time, along with its emphasis on the pre-reflective ways in which "consciousness 'exists' its body" and thereby constitutes lived space — as well as upon the notion of dance as "virtual force" worked out by Susanne K. Langer (1895–1985) in *Feeling and Form* (1953), Sheets characterizes dance movement as pure dynamic "form-in-the-making," as a "sheer dynamic flow of force" such that the dancer's body is a center of force in a textured, "diasporatic" space. Like Dufrenne, she emphasizes the oneness of dancer and dance and appeals to a certain "logic" governing the development of a choreographed movement sequence: to compose a dance is to discover the bodily logic of its

distinctive "dynamic line." But as she also points out, the emerging organic continuity of this dynamic line can be clarified for choreographer and dancer alike by vocalizing it, since the dynamic line itself is essentially a "dynamic interplay" of qualities or energies that can be "mirrored" audially (whether "actually vocalized" or "inwardly heard") as well as executed bodily and perceived visually. This concern for artistic creativity is also pursued in her "Thinking in Movement" (1981), an essay on dance improvisation that emphasizes the pre-rational "kinetic intelligence" of a situated, "mindful" body.

DAVID MICHAEL LEVIN focuses on dance in a series of publications in the 1970s and 1980s. In "Balanchine's Formalism" (1973) he suggests that although ballet has historically been a representational form with plot, setting, characters, etc., some of Balanchine's works demonstrate that the classical ballet idiom itself reveals essential bodily possibilities of lightness, poise, and grace as the dancer visibly transcends the constraints of the body's own weight and makes weightlessness appear in its place. In "The Embodiment of Performance" (1975–76) he examines the avant-garde performance genre as a medium in which the sensuous body is shown to be the primitive source of significance as well as the bearer of already sedimented historical-cultural meaning. In "Philosophers and the Dance" (1977–78) he links the lack of serious consideration of dance in much of the Western philosophical tradition to a general hostility toward the bodily, and the feminine principle, on the part of a patriarchal civilization whose emphasis on mastery and control has suppressed — but not destroyed — a primordial connectivity embodied in sacred dance. And in "On Heidegger: The Gathering Dance of Mortals" (1980) he pursues and deepens Heidegger's ontological appropriation of dance.

Levin continues his *HERMENEUTICAL PHENOMENOLOGY* of dance in *The Body's Recollection of Being: Phenomenological Psychology and the Deconstruction of Nihilism* (1985), whose aim is to retrieve a "body of understanding" kept in concealment by the dominant tradition. He accordingly turns not only to Heidegger, Nietzsche, and Merleau-Ponty, but also to aboriginal teachings and traditions concerning the body. The resulting *FUNDAMENTAL ONTOLOGY* not only focuses on gesture and motility, but culminates in a presentation of

dance as a “bearing of thought in which we are granted an experience of Being”; he suggests that “when dance is thoughtful, it is a fundamental form of poetizing (*Dichtung*)” and that as ontological movement, dance arises from and discloses our deep and originary attunement to the Being, ground, or origin that it celebrates in its ecstatic and earth-affirming leaps and circles.

SONDRA HORTON FRALEIGH’s *Dance and the Lived Body: A Descriptive Aesthetics* (1987) is similarly concerned with the mythopoetic and ontological significance of dance, which she explores by way of the notion of polar tension (be it the archetypal tension of the masculine and the feminine, the strife of world and earth in Heidegger’s portrayal of the bringing-forth of truth in the work of art, or the tension between the individuality of the dancer and the “universalizing” impulse of the dance). Yet her project as a whole is to make the inherent qualities and aesthetic properties of dance intelligible in a way that does justice to insiders’ experiences of dance as the existential art *par excellence*. She emphasizes that although dance celebrates and affirms the vital, pre-verbal movement sensibility of the lived body-subject, dance movement is not ordinary, habitual, or automatic, but is consciously structured for an aesthetic purpose; grace in dance consists in a “fit” between such movement and the energy or effort needed to incarnate it. Her descriptions—which focus for the most part on modern dance rather than ballet—include analyses of specific dances and choreographic styles as well as references to more general experiential structures such as moving with another (or others) in unison and moving against another (or others) in counterbalancing, mutually facilitating, contrasting, and oppositional ways.

Fraleigh’s interviews with modern dancers indicate that connections between modern dance and EXISTENTIALISM are not limited to endeavors such as her own attempt to work out a phenomenological aesthetics of dance: rather, dancers themselves also report being directly influenced by the writings of Nietzsche, Kierkegaard, Camus, and Merleau-Ponty. Heidegger’s “thinking of Being” is similarly the inspiration for Gelassenheit Arts Presenters, a nonprofit organization recently founded in San Francisco under the leadership of dancer and choreographer Philip Jones. This organization is devoted to sponsoring dance/theater/music events where what is at work in the work of art can

come to unconcealment — i.e., to fostering occasions for releasement (*Gelassenheit*), *alēthēia*, and letting-be. In other words, the organization deliberately sets out to bring together performing artists who work ontologically, conveying the being of human being by making present the truth of Being in a movement of “showing” that gathers us into a revelatory event of “seeing.”

In Australia, PHILIPA ROTHFIELD also works toward building bridges between phenomenological philosophy and contemporary dance, not only by using phenomenology to help articulate movement and dance practice, but also by allowing movement and dance experience to inform phenomenological writing. Her essays on dance deal with such issues as the transgression of individual bodily boundaries in the dance form known as Contact Improvisation, which she discusses in terms of Merleau-Ponty’s notions of “flesh” and “reversibility,” and the “corporeal connectivity” arising between dancer and audience such that the sensuous pleasure of moving can spread by a kind of contagion from the performer’s body to the bodies of audience members. Yet in addition to the general kinaesthetic resonance of the dancer’s movement in the spectator’s body — a theme mentioned by many writers on dance — Rothfield acknowledges the possibility of a specifically erotic dimension to the intercorporeal performance situation. She also recognizes the social and cultural inscription of bodies, linking this with issues in FEMINISM. But she contends that dance practice can itself shift and renegotiate historically produced codes and modes of representation. Her work thus supplements POSTMODERN accounts such as Susan Leigh Foster’s *Reading Dancing: Bodies and Subjects in Contemporary American Dance* (1986) and “Dancing Bodies” (1992), which follow MICHEL FOUCAULT in describing the disciplinary procedures creating the trained bodies (and correlative “selves”) appropriate to various dance styles and techniques.

However, the very project of elucidating how dancing bodies are shaped in institutional settings also points to the larger field of movement education and to the implicitly phenomenological elements in the work of Rudolf Laban (1879–1958), including a turn to the “how” of lived movement and a concern for invariant features of movement experience. Dialogue between phenomenology and Laban movement education was

already underway in the 1970s, as is evident in a 1974 symposium on "The Significance of Movement" bringing together members of both traditions. More recently, Vera Maletic's *Body — Space — Expression: The Development of Rudolf Laban's Movement and Dance Concepts* (1987) includes some explicit comparisons of Laban's work on body, perception, motility, spatiality, temporality, and expression with the treatment of these themes in Merleau-Ponty, Straus, and FREDERIK J. J. BUYTENDIJK. Comparisons between Laban and Merleau-Ponty have also been discussed in a paper co-authored by MAUREEN CONNOLLY and Anna Lathrop.

It is interesting to note that Heidegger's extended notion of the "round dance" is anticipated to some extent in Laban's *Die Welt des Tänzers* (The world of the dancer, 1920), where the term "*Gedankenreigen*" or "round dances of thought" refers to moving, multidimensional "interrelationships of concepts and thought" irreducible to merely logical connections, while the round dance itself is taken as the form of ultimate communion and unity. Moreover, Laban's discussions of dance in terms of inseparably intertwined elements of "time-space-force" in the same work (and other texts) provide a precedent for Sheets's presentation of dance as "forcetimespace" in her 1966 book. That Laban takes the mover's body (rather than some fixed point of the surrounding space) as the point of reference for the directional orientations used in his system of movement notation is reminiscent of Husserl's descriptions of the body as the nullpoint of orientation. And Husserl's remarks on the sphere of objects within reach — as well as ALFRED SCHUTZ's more sustained treatment of the notion of the world within my actual, potential, and restorable reach — finds a parallel in Laban's development of the notion of the reach space or "kinesphere." Such similarities need not imply actual influences between the individuals concerned. But they do indicate that the phenomenological turn to lived body, lived space, lived movement, and lived relations with others and objects is situated within a broader historical-cultural context characterized by an increasing theoretical and practical concern with these themes in other disciplines as well, including not only dance, but also PHYSICAL EDUCATION and SOMATICS.

Work yet to be done in the encounter between phenomenology and dance might include studies of the transforming and community-building aspects of

dance, including social dance, ethnic dance, ritual or sacred dance, and so on. Moreover, in addition to thematizing specific dance styles or traditions in the context of phenomenologically oriented ETHNIC STUDIES or ETHNOLOGY, there is room for further work on dance as a fundamental way of being human that is to be honored and developed in EDUCATION at all levels. Here "dance" is not the title of a specialized activity reserved for professionals and subject to the reigning aesthetic criteria of a given culture, but names a dimension of human motility per se, a primordial human possibility. Finally, there is also room for further discussion of dance as "world-generating" — a theme emerging in ALGIS MICKUNAS's "The Primacy of Movement" (1974) and in the chapter on dance in ARNOLD BERLEANT's *Art and Engagement* (1991), where the bodily engagement binding performers and spectators not only epitomizes sociality, but also has cosmological implications.

Throughout, however, we would do well to acknowledge that dance has an evolving, constantly changing character; dance experience is multifarious and plurivocal, and dance itself can never be fully contained by any single attempt to discipline, define, or describe it. Yet although seeking a univocal expression of "the" essence of dance may be a counter-productive research aim, giving voice to a "chorus eidetics" of dance—and of the impulse toward dance whose heart beats within all movement — is still a worthwhile and timely task.

#### FOR FURTHER STUDY

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*Study Project on Phenomenology of the Body*

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**DASEIN** In ordinary German, *dasein* means existence, especially human existence, but it is used by MARTIN HEIDEGGER in *Sein und Zeit* (1927) as a technical term to signify that being whose very mode of Being is to understand Being and hence to raise the question of Being. Heidegger is exploiting the root meaning of the word "there-being" (*da-sein*): it is up to Dasein "to be" (*zu sein*) the "there" (*da*) of the WORLD, i.e., to be the place or locus where the world is disclosed or becomes phenomenally manifest. The thrust of the word "there" is not to signify one place as opposed to another, there as opposed to here, but rather the essential disclosedness, manifestness, or phenomenality of things as a whole; *sein* in turn has a verbal and infinitival sense, "to be" the there. Hence the force of the term is to emphasize that Dasein must itself *be* the "there," the disclosedness of Being and world, that Dasein brings its "there" along with it.

Heidegger thus is innovating upon a fundamental theme in EDMUND HUSSERL'S CONSTITUTIVE PHENOMENOLOGY. Like Husserl, Heidegger agrees that the phenomenality of the world must be traced back (*reducere*) to the "subject" that "constitutes" the world, a subject that thus enjoys a certain "transcendental" primacy. Like Husserl, who distinguishes between the transcendental and the worldly EGO, Heidegger distinguishes between Dasein and human beings. But Heidegger argues that the very Being of this subject, when questioned more radically, is to be determined not as a transcendental subject but as Dasein, and that its work of "constitution" is a matter of Dasein's "understanding of Being." The latter, in turn, lies at the basis of the way Dasein understands itself and other beings of the same sort as itself, as well as worldly entities.

The notion of Dasein thus serves to free phenomenology from the influence of a Cartesian and pure

transcendental subject and to reconceive it in more radically ontological terms by raising the question of the being of the *sum* or *cogito*. Rather than an epistemic subject that knows (*erkennen*) the world, Dasein is conceived as a being actively engaged in various worldly projects and ultimately in the task of being a "self." It is up to Dasein "to be" (*zu sein*) this being, actively to take over the task of being itself, of being the "there" of world and self.

The "analytic" of Dasein is the explication of the defining features of such a being. Since the Being of this entity is "existence," the analytic of Dasein is said to be an "existential analytic" and its defining features are said to be "existentialia," as opposed to "categories," which are the defining features of beings other than Dasein. As the explication of the Being of Dasein, the analytic of Dasein is an ontological analysis, and can be called an existential-ontological analytic, as opposed to the ontologies of beings other than Dasein. But the existential-ontological analytic is not simply one among many ontologies; it is the first, primary, or FUNDAMENTAL ONTOLOGY of the being that bears an ontological primacy over all other beings, and this in virtue of Dasein's understanding of Being. The aim and upshot of the analytic of Dasein is to lay bare the horizon within which Being itself can be understood.

This analytic is not to be confused with other investigations of human existence; it is not a psychological, anthropological, biological, ethical, or theological investigation of human beings, but a strictly ontological study of the being that raises the question of Being. This discrimination corresponds, analogously, to Husserl's separation of a purely transcendental science of consciousness from empirical psychology. As an ontological investigation, the existential analytic is not an essay in EXISTENTIALISM, i.e., an existential PHILOSOPHICAL ANTHROPOLOGY that for Heidegger is properly to be attributed to KARL JASPERS and that belongs to the field of existential anthropology. Heidegger does not dismiss existential anthropology in *Sein und Zeit* (1927), but insists that it must take its lead from the analytic of Dasein.

The analytic of Dasein is divided into two stages: a preliminary or preparatory stage, and a more primordial stage that builds upon and radicalizes the first stage; this division corresponds to the two published divisions of *Sein und Zeit*. A third division, never pub-

Encyclopedia of Phenomenology

Embree, L. (Ed.)

1997, XIV, 765 p. 1 illus., Hardcover

ISBN: 978-0-7923-2956-5