

**THE
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OF
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Wojciech
Klimczyk

Volume I

Courtly
Steps

**Dance and the Shaping
of Modernity 1455–1795**

Jagiellonian
University
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Translated by Søren Gauger

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To my teachers

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Acknowledgments

The narrative in the present work is in the plural form. This is not merely a stylistic trope.

The deeper I go into cultural studies the more I understand that – as in every attempt to probe reality – it only makes sense as a collective enterprise. This does not mean that we cannot speak of personal responsibility for the claims herein. On the contrary, I alone bear responsibility for all the shortcomings in the materials and arguments in the following pages. Yet without having been inspired by many generations of scholars, without their persistent, systematic work, the outcome of individual efforts would surely be the poorer; this is why I would like to thank all those whose names appear in the body of the text, footnotes, and bibliography of the present study, and those whose work did not enter the orbit of my interests this time around, but who have shaped me as an author and a person.

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W. K., Cracow, June 2015

Introduction

We have grown accustomed to the thought that we are moderns. We are so used to it that, in the closing decades of the twentieth century, we could hold a debate on postmodernity, in which voices were heard declaring the end of *modernitas*.¹ These swiftly turned out to be premature. Thinkers like Jürgen Habermas,² Anthony Giddens,³ Ulrich Beck,⁴ and even Zygmunt Bauman,⁵ who initially supported the use of “postmodernity,” have shown that the concept of “modernity” remains afloat. Even if we can speak of postmodernity as a new quality in culture,⁶ it is still being shaped in the orbit of what might be called modern culture and modern society. It is more a diagnosis of their crises than a definitive end.

The non-definitive nature of the end of modernity can be understood in various ways. Among the possibilities is a partial diagnosis. Modernity remains unfinished, because it is not fully comprehensible to itself, not all its dimensions have been covered. True, many volumes have been written about it, enough to fill several rooms in a library.⁷ Yet blank spots remain clearly visible. We would like to address one of them in this book.

Being a modern is not only a matter of having a modern consciousness, it is also sometimes being conscious of your modernity. If we see modernity as a holistic

¹ I myself have defended this view in *Erotyzm ponowoczesny* (Postmodern Eroticism), Cracow 2008.

² Jürgen Habermas, “Modernity – An Unfinished Project,” in: Craig Calhoun (ed.), *Contemporary Sociological Theory*, West Sussex 2012, pp. 25–46.

³ Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age*, Stanford 1991.

⁴ Ulrich Beck, *Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity*, trans. Mark Ritter, London 2009.

⁵ Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Modernity*, Cambridge 2000.

⁶ I remain prone to thinking that a crisis as serious as World War Two and the Holocaust must, in a natural fashion, mark a caesura in a culture.

⁷ Proof of this in a Polish context is the *Horyzonty Nowoczesności* (Horizons of Modernity) series released by Universitas Publishers since 1997, presently counting 116 volumes!

way of life, that is, as a culture, and we base our investigations on this, we need to supplement the theory of modernity as a specific way of thinking, widely covered in the literature, with research into the embodied nature of modernity. Since the 1980s, we have been observing the constant development of studies on the body in sociology, cultural studies, the humanities (in their broadest definition), and yet much remains to be done. Human existence as an embodied existence, whose embodiment takes place within a cultural context, is highly complicated. In thinking about it, it is easy to fall into a kind of reductionism. One danger is to treat it in a static fashion. This we seek to avoid in the present work by remembering to include research on the modern body.

The living human body is never fully at rest. Even when it is resting, dynamic processes are happening inside it. Vital fluids are flowing from place to place, the organs are moving. We speak of this to stress that movement is a basic quality of the body, requiring serious study. Of course, it is not physiology that interests us here, but the attempt to broach the relationship that every society forms between the movement of the human body and culture. Thus we will be interested in movement observable from the outside, in the traveling (or stopping) of the body in space, always occurring in a non-material, cultural field of forces. We will not be capable of exploring the whole spectrum of movement in this definition. In this research we cover a wide variety of activities – work, rituals, and ceremonies, leisure (including sports), intimacy, aggression... Work in this field is constantly underway, partly in the sociology of the body.⁸ Yet the humanities still only partially conduct serious, comprehensive research into the movement known as dance from a historical perspective.⁹ We would like to make a step toward filling this gap.

In describing dance, the anthropology of dance uses the concept of embodied knowledge.¹⁰ This is meant to emphasize that the dances we do are grounded in culturally shaped convictions about the world, the place of people within it, and interhuman relations. Various dances fit within a dance culture that corresponds to a time and a place.¹¹ Dance culture, in turn, is tied to culture conceived as a lifestyle or an experience of the world. These dependencies can be shown through a simple example. Let us take the waltz. This is not an ahistorical form of dance, it is a style that emerged through a folk culture, then gained wide popularity among

⁸ We might have a look, for example, at the articles published in *Body & Society*, which has been released since 1995. An overview of the achievements of the rapidly developing discipline is provided by Chris Schilling, *The Body and Social Theory*, London 2012.

⁹ In our view, the fundamental weakness of dance history studies is the small number of works that situate dance against a broader socio-political backdrop, showing it as part of the development of civilization. There have been brilliant studies on particular historical periods, to which we shall be referring, but there are no sweeping syntheses using tools developed by the history of ideas.

¹⁰ Anya Peterson Royce, *The Anthropology of Dance*, Bloomington 1977.

¹¹ Joann Kealiinohomoku has defined dance culture as: “the implicit as well as explicit aspects of the dance and its reasons for being” (quoted in: *ibid.*, p. 13).

the bourgeoisie and aristocracy in a particular cultural context, Romantic culture, and was only truly vital in this context. While it is true that it is still danced by couples in ballroom dance shows, and you can learn the waltz in dance schools, waltz culture has long been dead. Today, if we can speak of a living dance culture, we ought to use concepts like hip-hop or, more broadly, street dance. The waltz is only an antiquated form, in the best case, a deep-seated yearning for a bygone elegance, which when the waltz emerged in the bourgeois salon, was not at all perceived as especially elegant. This leads us to conclude that embodied knowledge changes, that our sensitivity toward dance is dynamic. Let us take another example – at social gatherings we no longer dance the minuet. Why? We might say because it is old-fashioned, artificial, or overcomplicated, but ultimately no one will waste much time pondering the issue. The minuet is simply no longer danced. It has been excluded from culturally-rooted embodied knowledge, though only three hundred years ago it was a natural thing to dance, like the waltz in the nineteenth century.

The above examples indicate the level on which we would like to conduct our analysis. Our thoughts will mainly focus on the crossroads between body and culture, that is, on dance culture. We will be interested in individuals in the stream of culture, their dancing choices and the preferences into which they are born. We shall try to gain access to kinetic sensitivities. This research might be of interest for readers with no dance theory background. It is our view that, if we take a close look at dance, we can show the basic dimensions of the relationship between the body in motion and culture, and thus, say something of value about culture as such. Culture is of key significance in shaping the forms of dance that appear at certain points in a society's development, and thus, by knowing the main attributes of a culture, we can explain its characteristic forms of dance. By the same token, dance reveals to us spheres of culture that remain unverballed, helping us to reconstruct it in full. This means we are not only seeking to show how culture shapes dance, but also to study dance as a cultural space for the articulation of bodies. We will be seeking to reconstruct the process by which modern dance culture is shaped, to take a rare perspective¹² on the emergence of modernity as such.¹³ We believe that

¹² In dance studies, we are beginning to see works on the ties between dance and modernity, yet they chiefly understand “modern dance” as modernist, pertaining to the work of American artists of the 1930s to 1950s, when modernist culture was in full bloom. Excellent examples of this kind of study are: Mark Franko, *Dancing Modernism/Performing Politics*, Bloomington–Indianapolis 1995; Julia L. Foulkes, *Modern Bodies: Dance and American Modernism from Martha Graham to Alvin Ailey*, Chapel Hill–London 2002; Ramsay Burt, *Alien Bodies: Representations of Modernity, ‘Race’ and Nation in Early Modern Dance*, London–New York 1998, and a book that should be regarded as a cornerstone of the sociology of dance: Helen Thomas, *Dance, Modernity and Culture: Explorations in the Sociology of Dance*, London–New York 1995.

¹³ We should stress that we are interested in European modernity, which is a significant narrowing of the field of research. Shmuel Eisenstadt has introduced the term “multiple modernities” to call attention to the fact that we also need to speak of modernity in the context of America or Asia (Shmuel

in this way the picture of the modern person, and therefore, ourselves, will be fuller and more evocative.

The Language of the Study

If our study is to succeed, we need to create a suitable language to portray dance as a social and political phenomenon, and not merely aesthetic. Here we follow the example of the anthropology of dance, as it was understood by the pioneers of the discipline: Gertrude Prokosch Kurath¹⁴ and Anya Peterson Royce.¹⁵ Like them, we would like to approach dance as a lens that can be used to perceive a broader phenomenon. As Alan P. Merriam phrased it, we will try to “take the phenomenon to pieces in the hope of finding out what makes it tick.”¹⁶ This “taking to pieces” involves in-depth inquiry. It does not stop at describing steps, rhythms, shapes sketched in space, but also seeks what generates them.

Culture is a field of forces that push (in the metaphorical sense of the word) the body in a certain direction, which means that other directions remain unused. Culture is a kind of mechanism that selects and activates all at once. We might call it a space of articulation that is always a space of physical movement. The close-knit balance between the dynamic human body and culture is our point of departure. The body in motion is less shaped by culture than it is culture, in the full sense of the word. In our view, it is incorrect to call the body an object shaped by culture, meaning that culture is disembodied. Culture is always physical, we can only speak of it sensibly when we situate it in a body, and one that is in motion. This is also why we may argue that, essentially, the body and culture do not exist in isolation from each other, there is only cultural embodiment. This does not mean we must discard a distinction that is useful for analytical purposes, only that we postulate thinking in terms of the coexistence of body and culture, which can only be separated in retrospect.

Embodiment understood as a cultural process is a social experience, that is one that occurs in the context of Others. There is no such thing as a purely private embodiment, just as there is no private language. Culture, at any rate, is not private

N. Eisenstadt, *Utopia i nowoczesność. Porównawcza analiza cywilizacji*, trans. Adam Ostolski, Warsaw 2009, Vol. III: *Nowoczesności wielokrotnie*, pp. 359–587). At this stage, however, it would be quite difficult to make a comparative analysis in a single volume. Our hope is that this study will prompt discussion on dance modernities, enhanced by a reconstruction of the emergence of modern dance in Europe.

¹⁴ Gertrude Prokosch Kurath, “Panorama of Dance Ethnology,” *Current Anthropology* 1960, No. 1 (3), pp. 233–254.

¹⁵ Royce, *The Anthropology of Dance*...

¹⁶ Quoted in: *ibid.*, p. 39.

because it is a social embodiment.¹⁷ Human culture is the human body, the human body is human culture, “human” means “social,” associated, being always in company, with (or perhaps even in) other bodies. A relation to Others is a body, and a body is a relationship. As such, we are always geared toward. This work will speak of mobilization. Human existence is always mobilization toward, setting in motion.

This mobilization extends deeper than movement in physical space. Movement is, after all, much more than traveling from Point A to Point B. We will be interested in movement in its broadest understanding: social, axiological, and world views. Yet physical movement, from one place to another, might be seen as a model for movement in a broader sense. Human existence is moving from place to place, change, it is essentially dynamic. Even contemplation gliding through aesthetic, religious, and emotional spaces cannot evade this perspective – it is always geared toward, mobile in its staticity.

The kinetic nature of being might be called the “mobile.” We are consciously forming an analogy with “sensible” here, as used by Jacques Rancière.¹⁸ The mobile might be seen as a certain structure in the sphere of movement. If being is mobilization, the mobile is the structuralization of the process of setting something in motion. As we have said, this structuralization is social in nature. We experience movement not in a vacuum, but among Others. This is also why human movement is always symbolic. Movement is a matter of an individual kinetic imagination shaped through the experience of life with Others, and thus, against a socio-cultural backdrop. This does not mean the mobile is purely conceptual, a disembodied discourse preceding movement. The mobile is embodied imagination, the experience of a certain movement embedded in the world. The word “certain” is used pointedly here, to stress the determination being undefined and the fact of its universality. There is no movement outside of culture, but cultures differ in terms of the mobile, one manifestation of which is dance.

Like the sensible in Rancière, the mobile is always enmeshed in operations of distribution. This means that we distribute ways of experiencing movement, but also that the potential collection of mobile experiences is always apprehended selectively in a given culture or collective – movements are divided into correct and incorrect. Roughly speaking, we might say that some kinds of movement are passed by, pushed to the margins, or even condemned, while others are canonized.¹⁹

¹⁷ Cf. George Lakoff, Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live by*, Chicago 2003.

¹⁸ Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics*, trans. Gabriel Rockhill, London–New York 2013.

¹⁹ Rancière writes: “I call the distribution of the sensible the system of self-evident facts of sense perception that simultaneously discloses the existence of something in common and the delimitations that define the respective parts and positions within it. A distribution of the sensible therefore establishes at one and the same time something common that is shared and exclusive parts. This apportionment of parts and positions is based on a distribution of spaces, times, and forms of activity that determines the very manner in which something in common lends itself to participation and in what way various

Culture bears a certain “definition” of movement, it develops a vision of a space of movement that lies at the heart of individuals’ kinetic articulation. As sensory experiences, we might call these articulations aesthetic and political at the same time. They are governed by kinetic ideals, for the understanding of which it is of the utmost importance to learn the framework of the kinetic sensitivity at that time and place. Every society is a living kinetic process, with constant interplay between ideas and movements. This, in turn, means it is possible to write the kinetic history of society. When we speak of a kinetic history, or perhaps it is better to say the history of kineticity, we will use the term *kinesis*. It will be used to name a kinetic sensitivity at a given place and time. It is a form that culture superimposes on human potential for movement, a way in which humans contemporize and experience their own mobility. Kinesis is the framework for the mobility of our bodies, which is historical. It takes part in shaping our everyday movements, but also has a fundamental impact on aestheticized movement. Kinesis might be juxtaposed with the Foucauldian understanding of *episteme*,²⁰ defined as the “conditions for the possibility” of mobilizing a body. For a person always contains untapped potential that is contemporized in a given time and place to conform to certain very general, deeply rooted laws. Culture is the collective unconscious. Foucault was interested in how this mechanism operates in knowledge, and scientific knowledge in particular. For our purposes, movement is vital, and therefore, the historical fluctuation of *hexis*.²¹ We are interested in why people move the way they do, and not otherwise. Why are certain kinds of mobility deemed positive, why are they striven for, while others are marginalized, condemned, or ignored? How is the kinetic ideal of an epoch created? What are the tensions that create an image of “beautiful movement”? What kind of movement strikes people as attractive, what gives them special pleasure – a double pleasure, perhaps, as it is sensory and imagined at once? All these questions are inquiries into kinesis.

While working on this book we stumbled across Andrew Hewitt’s remarkable *Social Choreography: Ideology as Performance in Dance and Everyday Movement*.²² Our interests proved compatible on many points. Hewitt raises the category of “social choreography,” which has much in common with our kinesis, though it is slightly narrower. Social choreography belongs to the sphere of aesthetics, a “space

individuals have a part in this distribution” (Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics...*, p. 7). The distribution of the mobile is thus part of the distribution of the perceptible, its kinetic dimension.

²⁰ Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*, trans. Alan Sheridan, New York 1994, p. xxii.

²¹ Pierre Bourdieu wrote: “Bodily hexis is political mythology realized, *em-bodied*, turned into a permanent disposition, a durable way of standing, speaking, walking, and thereby of feeling and thinking” (Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, trans. Richard Nice, Stanford 1990, pp. 69–70). Here we have adopted this term to describe what has become habitual in the body, second nature, “evident.”

²² Andrew Hewitt, *Social Choreography: Ideology as Performance in Dance and Everyday Movement*, Durham–London 2005.

in which social possibilities are both rehearsed and performed.”²³ Hewitt understands the aesthetic as a sensory motor to act deeply rooted in individuals. He opposes the perception of aesthetics as divorced from life, as a transcendental space of ahistorical beauty to which reality must aspire. Yet nor does he wish to adopt a vitalist perspective, which sees movement as the base substance upon which the aesthetic corset is externally applied. Hewitt sees the “aesthetic” as the performative combination of both these elements. This explains the “ideology as performance” in his book’s subtitle. He joins Louis Althusser and Fredric Jameson in thinking that ideology is not, essentially, an issue of false consciousness, but a real experience of the world. Ideology is a way of immersing the senses in reality, as reflected in the term “social choreography.” This creates an intimate link between the aesthetic and the political. Hewitt writes:

What I am calling “choreography” is not just a way of thinking about social order [social choreography is not an externally imposed physical discipline]; it has also been a way of thinking about the relationship of aesthetics to politics. In other words, as a performative choreography cannot simply be identified with “the aesthetic” and set in opposition to the category of “the political” that it either tropes or determines.²⁴

The realms of the senses and social structure understood in ideological categories (epistemic, based on *hexis*), and not institutional ones, are quite close-knit. “Social choreography exists not parallel to operation of social norms and strictures, nor is it entirely subject to these strictures. It serves [...] to bring them into being,”²⁵ Hewitt writes. Social choreography should thus be understood “neither as aesthetics nor as politics but rather as articulation – not as one term in a relation but as a discourse, and performance, of that relation.”²⁶

Much the same goes for kinesis. It is also more in the realm of practice than the purely rational theory from which it must be distilled. Kinesis is a socially determined way of experiencing a body in movement, a suit in which culture garbs individuals’ kinetic imagination, and a kinetic field of forces in which individuals conceptualize movement and move. Studying dance requires us to reconstruct this field of forces. This leads us to consider the political nature of kinesis.

Kinesis is a space of struggle for the possibilities of physical expression.²⁷ There is constant rivalry over movement in society, as there is in culture (we repeat: there

²³ Ibid., p. 4.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 11. Unless otherwise indicated, notes in square brackets are made by the author.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 15.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ This term is discussed in Aristotle’s *Physics*, III, 1–2, where we find analytical discussions of the nature of change. Aristotle works out a definition of kinesis as updating the potentiality of movement (cf. James Kostman, “Aristotle’s Definition of Change,” *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 1987, Vol. 4,

is basically no difference between them). Power relations are expressed in a space of physical excitement, shaping a kinetic sensibility. We might say that movement is immersed in the political, by Carl Schmitt's understanding of the word.²⁸ Kinesis is an antagonistic sphere shaped by the friend/foe relationship. Factions build around kinetic visions, ideals of movement. Fierce debates are waged over the limits of kinetic expression. In dancing, a person experiences his or her self within a specific kinetic paradigm, and this paradigm is grounded in ideology. This means dance is not axiologically neutral, it is a political activity establishing a space for experiencing existence. In the full sense of the phrase, dance is a distribution of the mobile. Moving in a certain way, individuals and societies build a concrete kinetic identity, making a political selection of specific values, while these always enter into an antagonistic relationship, though not necessarily openly hostile, with other values and identities. In producing a kinetic identity, dance is, therefore, a tool in the battle for worldviews. Here is a vivid example: in the late nineteenth century the Spirit Dance performed by the Lakota Sioux helped them strengthen tribal bonds, but white men took it as an anti-European demonstration.²⁹ Chief Sitting Bull was arrested for not stopping his brothers from dancing. Soon thereafter came the massacre at Wounded Knee. In this case, dance was clearly a bone of contention because it mobilized a worldview that the white men reconstructed as hostile. The Sioux kinetic rituals built their autonomy, they took part in the social work of the imagination, creating a sense of community that was seen as threatening to the imperialist drive of the colonizers, who did everything to keep the dance from happening.

In the case of the war over the Spirit Dance we might speak of dance as an open show of hostility, but an antagonistic element is basically a part of every form of dance, making it a tool for emancipation or distinction. Yet there is more. The political nature of kinesis means that it is also a space for articulating what has not yet been articulated. Rancière notes: "The essence of politics is *dissensus*. Dissensus is not the confrontation between interests or opinions. It is the manifestation of a distance of the sensible from itself. Politics makes visible that which had no reason to be seen,"³⁰ or perhaps we move in a way that there had not been cause to before. In kinesis we observe not only a disagreement at work, but also the search for alternatives, making way for something previously rendered immobile.

No. 1, pp. 3–16). He is thus referring to activity, the emergence of the possible. This analytical definition of kinesis is our point of departure, of course, though we seek to historicize and politicize it. This is also why we take Aristotle as a springboard to create our own notion of kinesis, bound up with the philosophical issue in a social battle for the meaning.

²⁸ Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology*, trans. George Schwab, Chicago 2005.

²⁹ Cf. James Mooney, *The Ghost-Dance Religion and Wounded Knee*, New York 2011 (1st pub. 1896); Michael Hittman, *Wovoka and the Ghost Dance*, Lincoln 1997; Alice Beck Kahoe, *The Ghost Dance: Ethnohistory & Revitalization*, Long Grove 2006.

³⁰ Jacques Rancière, "Ten Theses on Politics," *Theory & Event* 5:3, <http://www.after1968.org/app/webroot/uploads/RanciereTHESESONPOLITICS.pdf>.

The struggle for the means of distributing the mobile calls to life an infinite series of embodiments, and these are translated into forms of dance, which either establish or contest them. In speaking of dance, we are taking a concrete approach to the individual and his or her existence among others. There is a systematization of a kinetic worldview, in opposition to competing kinetic programs. Our imagination, and with it our body, enters the kinetic dispute like a dance. This is accompanied by the outline of a community, and as such, political work. Let us provide an example. Here is a fragment from Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who will be covered more in-depth in the final chapter:

the harmony of five or six hundred men in uniform, holding one another by the hand and forming a long ribbon which wound around, serpent-like, in cadence and without confusion, with countless turns and returns, countless sorts of figured evolutions, the excellence of the tunes which animated them, the sound of the drums, the glare of the torches, a certain military pomp in the midst of pleasure, all this created a very lively sensation that could not be experienced coldly.³¹

This image of dancing military men who cannot fail to move the spectator is not merely a spontaneous observation. It contains the ideal of community in movement. It condenses themes present throughout Rousseau's work. It shows his kinetic sensitivity, and thus casts light on mobile ideals, on the kinesis of the Enlightenment as such. In the present work, we will be referring to images of this sort – situated between the individual kinetic imagination and the kinesis of the overall culture – by the term “kinetic politics.” Kinetic politics need not involve dance at all. A community in motion can also be designed through images of another kind. It would be instructive to see, for example, Eugène Delacroix's famous *Liberty Leading the People* or Pieter Bruegel's *Children's Games* from this perspective, to take two examples in painting. Kinetic politics does not immediately presuppose dance. It is merely an established and leading vision of the body in motion, a vision with a touch of social utopia. We discover it in the pages of literature and philosophy, carved in stone or immortalized in paint, and even – if this thesis does not go too far – in the sound of music.³² Why, then, would we like to investigate dance, and stage dance, above all?

³¹ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Letter to M. D'Alembert on the Theatre*, trans. Allan David Bloom, Ithaca 1968, p. 135f.

³² We can understand music as political in two ways. First of all, we have works that are open calls to battle or to take up other kinds of public action, as in some marches and songs. Secondly, music can be seen as political in a deeper sense, when it tries to undermine a prevailing sensitivity, inspiring people to seek experiences that, from the perspective of the ruling powers, are suspect. Avant-garde music often takes this approach, and is sometimes quite brutally opposed by the authorities; this was the case with the Nazis' fight against the “degenerate” atonal music of composers like Arnold Schoenberg.

The concept of reflexivity is key here. The kinetic worldview of a society can be reconstructed from various kinds of sources – and this is what we shall do. Among these sources one is especially important, in that movement is its main issue. Here I have in mind a theory of dance tied to the gradual sublimation of dance and the development of artistic dance, the variety that is the most self-reflexive. Let us turn once more to Hewitt, who writes:

discourses around dance [...] have tended to recognize choreography as a form that not only exemplifies a certain ideological relation of aesthetics to politics but also reflects on and/or performs that relation. Dance's overt choreographing and conventionalizing of the body has allowed it to serve as a performative reflection on social choreography in the broader sense.³³

Thus, artistic dance can be called the self-consciousness or self-reflexivity of kinesis. It momentarily retains the forces that shape human movement even where dance is not present; these forces are what this book seeks to describe.

At this point we would like to stress a thesis that lies at the heart of this work. Dance – and particularly that of the self-reflexive sort – as an embodiment of kinesis is always a kind of worldview and a kind of anthropology. This means that it presupposes a particular vision of being in the world, from which it derives. This is what it contemporizes; to be precise, it mobilizes a certain way of being in the world. Here we might bring in a reading of Jean-Marie Pradier's ethnoscenology, according to which,

plays on stage and the discourse that accompanies them are like fleeting manifestations of how culture apprehends the body/mind [i.e., the person], how it presents to itself its inner organization, its value and its power, its capacity to evoke, recognize, and give pleasure or pain.³⁴

This is the kind of ethnoscenology we would like to do, as it pertains to dance.

Here we must turn our attention to something quite important. Because of its demonstrative nature, stage dance is always, to some degree, propaganda. Yet this thesis less diagnoses the consciously designed indoctrination of dance than indicates that a dance performance always propagates a certain vision of dance, and thus, a kinetic ideology, less in terms of its narrative content than its structure. As such, abstract dance is no less political than a Spirit Dance, as both mobilize their values at the expense of others. Both contain a vision of the human being

³³ Hewitt, *Social Choreography...*, p. 17.

³⁴ Jean-Marie Pradier, *Ciało widowiskowe. Etnoscenologia sztuk widowiskowych*, trans. Kinga Bierwiazzonek, Warsaw 2012, p. 14.

and the community. This means the nature of the physical being on stage becomes significant, as does the relationship performed between movement and stillness.

Stage dance is a special kind of dance, as it is often a laboratory for new forms of bodily expression. Stage dance is political not because it takes part in power struggles as a tool of propaganda (though this, of course, does happen), but chiefly because it redefines (or at least has the potential to redefine) the mobile. Hewitt writes of this in the context of bourgeois culture, in which an autonomous aesthetic sphere emerged. He goes back to the eighteenth century, seeking the origins of apprehending choreography in terms of “rehearsing,” as something that provides an opportunity for “the working out and working through of utopian, yet nevertheless ‘real,’ social relations.”³⁵ This observation could be applied to the entirety of the early modern epoch. New principles of distributing mobility are worked out in dance. It is not strictly and exclusively a social preservative. Self-reflexive, or “artistic” dance does the work of critiquing kinesis. It is a laboratory of possibilities, a game of absence and excess.³⁶

The Method

We would like to write a history of dance, understood as a trace of kinesis. This will not be a history of works, though they will appear. Nor will it be a history of techniques and styles, though we will also be devoting space to these, of course. We want to have a look at the history of communal ideas hidden in the steps and forms of particular dances, the history of kinetic societal models that make the foundation for dance thinking, the history of early-modern Europe’s sensitivity to movement, found in the history of dance culture on our continent. We do this not only by examining dance materials. It bears repeating that we are not merely interested in movement through space, but in the movement of the entire human being. Their vitality, drive, desire for change, and growing faith in their own autonomy.

We will be exploring texts that tackle the issue of the body in motion. We will be particularly interested in dance treatises as sources of information about how people of past epochs perceived dance, how they imagined it, what hopes they tied to it, what kinds of ideals they sought to express through it. As such, we should give fair warning that our history will not be of use to those seeking to reconstruct historical dances.³⁷ Naturally, we will not avoid reflecting upon how people danced in the period when modernity was taking shape, yet this will interest us

³⁵ Hewitt, *Social Choreography...*, p. 17.

³⁶ Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 28–29.

³⁷ Our work does contain indirect hints, however. It suffices to consult the bibliography, which contains many works describing dance history in detail.

comparatively little compared to how those people themselves apprehended and experienced dance. We are not writing a history of dance as such, but a history of kinetic ideas, which is why we will be mainly occupied with the theoretical side of dance. It cannot be separated from the practice. That would be quite artificial. Yet some things we must choose to stress.

We cannot content ourselves with writing that concerns only dance if we seek to investigate the kinetic imagination. As we now see, dance is the embodiment of ideas. It does not develop in an aesthetic vacuum or magical ether of corporeal beauty, as its less critical adherents would prefer to believe. Its history is one of social ideals: without its ideological context we are incapable of understanding it, and dance is, essentially, one of the major manifestations of this context. This means that documents of dance theory are documents of social consciousness. The history of dance assists us in writing the history of ideas. This, in turn, leads us toward philosophy.

No one spoke of the cultural role of philosophy more brilliantly than Hegel:

Thus the Mind of a people in its richness is an organization, and, like a Cathedral, is divided into numerous vaults, passages, pillars, and vestibules, all of which have proceeded out of one whole and are directed to one end. Philosophy is one form of these many aspects. And which is it? It is the fullest blossom, the Notion of Mind in its entire form, the consciousness and spiritual essence of all things, the spirit of the time as spirit present in itself. The multifarious whole is reflected in it as the single focus, in the Notion which knows itself.³⁸

If we replace “Mind of a people” with “culture,” Hegel’s thoughts might serve as a guideline for our study.

We might disagree with Hegel, objecting to his glorification of philosophy, claiming that it is only one sort of intellectual activity, and far from the most important. This is the picture we increasingly have today, when philosophy now seems no more than one profession among many, a specialist discourse. Yet it is our view that, even today, philosophy remains a key to understanding the epoch, and this is because of its speciality. As Hegel writes further:

political history, forms of government, art and religion are not related to Philosophy as its causes, nor, on the other hand, is Philosophy the ground of their existence – one and all have the same common root, the spirit of time. [...] It is a condition which hangs together in all its parts, and the various parts of which contain nothing which is really inconsistent, however diverse and accidental they may appear to be, and however much they may seem to contradict one another.³⁹

³⁸ Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, trans. E. S. Haldane, Vol. I, Lincoln–London 1994, pp. 53–54.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 54.

Our work will be seeking the kinetic dimension of this “ground,” and with it, the incarnation of the “spirit of the times” in dance.

Following up on Hegel, we might say that philosophy is the consciousness of an epoch captured in concepts. Dance, in turn, is that consciousness captured in movement. Both these fields, as manifestations of a common ground we have called culture, from which kinesis flows, hold a constant dialogue, though we may not always be aware of it – they comment upon and illuminate one another.⁴⁰ We will be reconstructing how they interweave in detail. We thus use a tactic akin to the Pradier’s in *The Body of the Spectacle*. While in his work, theater discourse (texts on the art and the accompanying theoretical reflection) mainly crosses paths with medicine, for us the relationship between philosophy and dance discourse will be key. This will be our focus, trying to grasp the evolution of the spirit of the times, and thus to describe how modernity was shaped.

This does not mean that we will be drawing only from philosophy and dance theory. The spirit of the times is also found on canvases, in the verses of poets, and in the pages of scientific works and theater treatises. Thus, our work will concern not only dance and philosophy, but also dance and the fine arts, the fine arts and philosophy, science and dance, dance and theater... Obviously, not everything can be recorded and observed. As Pradier says about his own study:

what we are calling the body – and others might call a person, both material and non-material – is created by mere scraps of knowledge, hypotheses and intuitions, joined into a whole only through symbolic actions and depictions [...]. It is impossible to reconstruct such a system; we would have to cover the whole of Western medicine and the history of spectacles, and add to that cultural, social, and political contexts.⁴¹

We are grappling with a similar difficulty, except that, for us, if we would like to be fully conscientious, the challenge would be to cover the whole of Western philosophy. Meeting this challenge is basically as impossible as it would have been for Pradier to cover all of medicine. Yet the dream remains, and we must, at least to some degree, do it justice. As such, we will be putting forward what we hope to be the most interesting and unconventional assortment, while trying to make the investigation as methodical as possible.

⁴⁰ If, in the following quotation we substitute the words “spectacle” and “science” with the words “dance” and “philosophy,” we receive a beautiful description of the relationship that interests us: “We shall be far from capturing the ties between the spectacle and science in terms of the inferiority of one toward the other, and further still from determinism; for we must bear in mind that these ties abound in analogies, loans, conflicts, rivalries, misunderstandings, and intermingling mutual influences, most of them concealed” (Pradier, *Ciało widowiskowe...*, p. 18).

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

Modernity – The Modern Era – The Middle Ages

Our story is not merely the history of dance. This is mainly a pretext to speak of something else – a process that there have already been attempts to analyze in many ways, but which still awaits a narrative, departing from the concepts of movement and dance. The process we speak of is, in the most general terms, the development of modernity. Some great books have been devoted to the topic.⁴² We do not seek to write another dissertation to define modernity. We are rather casting ourselves into the whirlpool of modernity studies, trying to use its energy to understand what the dance experience is in a social context. As we shall see, as the Modern Era developed, it made dance increasingly problematic, which is just what makes it an interesting field of study. Thus the conviction that the kinetic side of the Modern Era requires investigation.

We should note our assumption that the Modern Era is not identical to modernity. The Modern Era includes modernity, but the reverse is not true. The Modern Era is a descriptive term outlining a historical period. In the simplest terms, it signifies an epoch that comes after antiquity and the Middle Ages. Its first stage is the Italian Renaissance. This understanding of the Modern Era carries the seeds of modernity from the outset, as we shall see; yet if modernity is to bloom, a fairly large period of maturation is required, in which we cannot yet speak of a fully modern culture. Full modernity explodes alongside the French Revolution, when the old social order is swept from the face of the earth. This modernity is the full realization of the Modern Era's potential, a leap into the deep waters of total activism. This is an existential state in the full sense of the word, a physical experience with which we are profoundly marked at present, and which was shaped over many centuries.

To give an initial idea of how radical the change in human consciousness was on the road to the Modern Era, let us pause a moment in the previous epoch. All strict historical caesurae are, of course, arbitrary. They are interventions made *ex post*, a dissection of the living fabric of reality for antiquarian purposes. This is why we are less and less inclined to draw a thick line between the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. People of the Renaissance did not suddenly become entirely different from their predecessors in the Middle Ages. The change was gradual. Yet in terms of worldview there is a clear difference between the epoch of knights,

⁴² Most inspiring to us were works by Michel Foucault, above all *The Order of Things* and *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan, New York 1995, and the classic study by Norbert Elias, *The Civilizing Process: Sociogenetic and Psychogenetic Investigations*, trans. Edmund Jephcott, Oxford 2000. We should also mention the monumental work by Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity*, Cambridge 2012, which we admire from a methodological perspective, though not always for its judgments.

monks, and plowmen and the time when cities ruled. This transformation can be seen in many ways. For us, the gradual building of faith in man's creative abilities is crucial. The weight shifted from the past to the future. People took their fates, and the fate of the world, into their own hands.

In the fifth century CE the monk Vincent of Lérins taught: "Move not from their place the stones your father placed there [...] for it is better to avoid novelties, ancient things must be preserved; if the new is impure, the old learning is holy."⁴³ In this quote we clearly see the characteristic medieval tendency to look to the past. There is a lack of dynamism, of any progressive thought. "The medieval consciousness is static. The idea of development [...] is foreign to it, the world neither changes nor develops: it is God's primordial and perfect creation and remains in this unchanging state. It is characterised by a graduated hierarchy, not by a dynamic process of development."⁴⁴ This does not mean, of course, that medieval man lived purely in the present, never reflecting on the future or times past. Historians were at work, genealogies were created, and the temporal horizon was marked by the biblical Final Judgment, the coming of which was anticipated. Christianity had rejected the notion of circular time, which was characteristic of antiquity, in favor of a linear perception. History had a beginning and an end, toward which it gradually moved. Yet humans were incapable of guiding its vector, they could only perform the tasks allotted to them, following the flow of time. This was how things were, at least according to the official ideology.⁴⁵

The operation of the state society was utterly dependent on the third state's internalization of the conviction that political change was not only impossible, but also undesirable. This explains the widespread belief in the natural hierarchy of beings, which also translated into a social hierarchy that was natural for the epoch. In this context, change could only be for the worse. If there was some dynamism in the official ideology, it was merely the dynamism of choosing between good and evil, dynamism of free will in a moral, not a political sense. Temporal

⁴³ Quoted in: Aron Gurevich, *Categories of Medieval Culture*, trans. George I. Campbell, London 1985, p. 170.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 170.

⁴⁵ Undoubtedly, the Middle Ages were not as static as theological treatises and religious literature would like to show. While official culture was relatively hieratic, the folk element buzzed alongside of it, full of life, energy, and vitality. This element preserved the dance energy stoked in the late Middle Ages by courtly culture. Through folk culture, condemned by much of the church hierarchy, dance did not vanish entirely, and was reborn in the Renaissance. The vitality of medieval folk culture is described by Gurevich in *Medieval Popular Culture*, trans. Janos M. Bak and Paul A. Hollingsworth, Cambridge 1990. We should also recall a classic study by Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Helene Iswolsky, Indiana 1984. By the same token, in our day, we should not speak of a uniform folk culture, but its local varieties, and thus, of pluralism, which might be labeled "folk cultures," or the distinction of specific subcultures in folk cultures (such as craft and peasant culture, the folk culture of the medieval cities and the medieval countryside, to provide the most general distinctions). Cf. Peter Burke, *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe*, New York 2009.

reality, to generalize somewhat, was a bad dream, from which the individual longed to awake in heaven. Medieval man was therefore “free,” though he could only shape his inner life. As such, the Christianity of the day was not entirely passive. Nonetheless, medieval Christianity was convinced of an irreparable flaw in human nature tied to original sin. Humans were incapable of bringing about their own salvation, they could not carve out their own heaven, they could only be admitted to it. They required mercy, as compellingly shown by St. Augustine. They were capable of wanting good, they could be converted, but this did not suffice. Human will was never pure will, it was a will that wanted and did not want all at once, because, though humans may have wished for salvation, they were immersed in the corporeal muck of animal instincts; they remained torn apart, until God’s intervention came, removing the rift through the power of His grace. In this way, the individual became truly free when they chose total submission to God. In every other case we were strictly dealing with willfulness, succumbing to the impulses of a headstrong nature.

Thus, the situation of the medieval Christian was a kind of paradox. On the one hand, Christianity brought a conviction that the individual, to some extent, forged their own fate:

A free God corresponds to man, endowed by his Creator with free will: he is free to take the path of righteousness or depart from it and take the path of sin and evil. That freedom which is God’s prerogative becomes a virtue of man.⁴⁶

This was perceived by Augustine, who tied man to the concept of *initium*, or beginning. It is this capacity that separates him from other creatures. As Hannah Arendt writes: “With man, created in God’s own image, a being came into the world that, because it was a beginning running toward an end, could be endowed with the capacity of willing and nilling.”⁴⁷ Here we have the seed of a modern dynamism, as we shall now discuss.

On the other hand, the capacity to begin is only really needed in order to break with the torments of temporal life. The freedom to choose is a freedom to submit to the Creator. This means it is not really about humans starting something new for humans, but that humans, unlike the rest of creation, participate in divine freedom as a “beginning.” This, however, does not mean political activity, creating new social structures, or care for one’s own body, or those of other members of society, but striving for limitless peace, which alone can tear us from the material here and now. Interestingly, this does not mean absolute motionlessness, it is not pure passivity, nor can we speak of autonomy.

⁴⁶ Gurevich, *Categories...*, p. 195.

⁴⁷ Hannah Arendt, *The Life of the Mind: Willing*, San Diego–New York–London, p. 109.

The hallmark of this creature [the human being], obviously closer to God than any other, is by no means creativity. [...] Rather, God's creature is distinguished by the mental capacity to affirm or negate freely, uncoerced by either desire or reasoning.⁴⁸

In Arendt's words we find a diagnosis of limited activism, a dynamic specific to medieval thought. The rift and struggle of the will can only be placated by active love. The will must turn into love for humanity to come to fruition. Arendt demonstrates this beautifully using Duns Scotus, who made the distinction between *activum* and *factivum*.⁴⁹ In this we have an opposition between pure activity, an aim in itself, and producing something that is external and passing. The *activum*, which is tied to thinking and wanting, has a higher perfection. The production of objects (*factivum*), and thus, the transforming of empirical reality, is a vain effort. We ought only to nurture the *activum*, and this happens to the fullest when wanting becomes affection, through which eternal movement becomes eternal peace. This is a remarkably interesting view: "love's abiding power is felt not as the arrest of motion – as the end of the fury of war is felt as the quiet of peace – but as the serenity of a self-contained, self-fulfilling, everlasting movement."⁵⁰ Duns Scotus phrases it thus: "the act of loving, which naturally precedes delight, brings quiet in such a way that the acting faculty does not come to rest in the object except through the perfect operation by which it attains the object."⁵¹

In medieval times, then, to simplify things greatly, the point was to transcend earthly time toward eternity. Taking care of the present was not a virtue. Humans were not to blame time, their task was not to mind it, enliven it, or use it: "they treated time as merely a moment of eternity. [...] Time belonged to God and could only be lived out. To grasp it, measure, or turn it to account or advantage was a sin."⁵² This picture is confirmed by the highly popular motif of the wheel of fortune, which, according to Jacques Le Goff, is basically conservative, utterly discouraging political action.⁵³ The initial dynamism of Christianity, tied to the concept of linear time, clearly lost its impetus here. Moreover, movement toward the future is downward. The world increasingly degenerates. The late Middle Ages lived with a consciousness of a downfall – all that was good happened in the past, only catastrophe was on the horizon.⁵⁴ This explains Vincent of Lérins' fondness for ancient learning. As Aron Gurevich noted, the medieval world had no room for the concept of material progress. Only spiritual development could occur. In terms of faith, humans could ascend, salvation was ever-nearer, in medieval times human history is almost never

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 135.

⁴⁹ Cf. *ibid.*, p. 142.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 145.

⁵¹ Quoted in: *ibid.*, p. 234, note 99.

⁵² Jacques Le Goff, *Medieval Civilization*, trans. Julia Barrow, Oxford 1998, p. 165.

⁵³ Cf. *ibid.*

⁵⁴ Cf. *ibid.*; Gurevich, *Categories...*

a logical tale that ends happily, with a better society, for instance. Progress only makes sense as a spiritual category.⁵⁵

Here we need to make certain reservations, of course. The main current of medieval thought negated political change. However, there did emerge a revolutionary millenarian tendency symbolized by Joachim of Fiore, a monk who prophesied the coming of the era of the Holy Spirit. “According to Joachim and his disciples the Church was rotten and damned with the existing world. It would have to make way for a new Church, the Church of the saints, which would repudiate wealth and would make equality and purity reign.”⁵⁶ Crucially, Joachim did not speak of times after the end of the world, of eternal happiness in heaven, but of the final stage in the Earth’s history. His prophecy had enormous revolutionary potential, becoming an expression of a desire whose presence some trace to this day in the deeds of various rebels and terrorists⁵⁷ – of making way for eternal happiness now, in this vale of tears.

The Bourgeoisie – Mobilization – Agency

Even if dreams of social change were not entirely foreign to the Middle Ages, the static tendency held sway.

In the Middle Ages the world was not perceived as being in flux; it was stable and immovable at its foundations. Change affected only the surface of the system establish by God. [...] Failing to comprehend his own inner being in terms of development, man naturally failed to see or relate with the world in terms of process. Individual man and the universe are alike static, such changes as occur being only superficial and subordinate to divine providence.⁵⁸

This system, however, gradually began to shake, as Gurevich brilliantly showed: “With the development of the urban population with a new, more rationalistic way of thinking, this traditional way of apprehending nature [and with it, God and man] began to change.”⁵⁹ Somewhat further on, he makes a statement that is important to us:

The output of artisans and craftsmen had its own cyclic patterns, but these were not determined by seasonal change. The farmer was tied to the natural cycle, from which he

⁵⁵ Cf. Gurevich, *Categories...*

⁵⁶ Le Goff, *Medieval...*, p. 192.

⁵⁷ On Joachim of Fiore and other medieval “millenarian rebels,” cf. Norman Cohn, *The Pursuit of the Millennium: Revolutionary Millenarians and Mystical Anarchists of the Middle Ages*, Oxford 1970.

⁵⁸ Gurevich, *Categories...*, pp. 129, 133.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 90.

could only with difficulty escape – and even then not completely; the town-dwelling artisan was connected to nature in more intricate and contradictory ways. [...] People living in a burgeoning urban civilization were even in its early stages behaving according to patterns set by themselves rather than by nature. They were aware of the division they had created between themselves and nature; for them, nature was an external object.⁶⁰

Gurevich points to the growth in the significance of the city, whose inhabitants began to find the power to act, as a key aspect of the transition from the Middle Ages to the Modern Era. While we concur, we should stress that the shift from rural to urban life that gradually occurred in the Modern Era entailed a total change in human existence, a cultural transformation that translates into a revolution in the sphere of kinesis. The Middle Ages and Modern Era are two different ways of experiencing the body in motion, two different kinetic imaginations, different qualities of touch, closeness between people and its rhythm – in sum, they are different cultures, understood as socially constructed forms of people experiencing their mobility.⁶¹

The Middle Ages are based on two extremes, which complement each other brilliantly. On the one hand is the chaotic, dirty, and remarkably energetic abandon of the folk holiday. On the other, we have pious concentration, the deeply respectful posture, striving to suppress the corporeal side, and thus: religious stasis.⁶² These qualities were not equally positive. In a moral sense, the “Great Silence” was infinitely praised over the carnival. In the words of Jean-Claude Schmitt, we are dealing with “the ideological superiority of motionlessness.”⁶³ In modern times, things have swung to the opposite pole. Motion has taken the ideological high ground. This does not mean, however, that the Modern Era rehabilitated folk culture. It would draw from it as a reservoir of cultural energy to help break with the stasis of church culture, while sublimating the elemental folk culture. The sharp end of the Modern Era’s kinetic program, then, is aimed at a dual enemy – the hieratic nature of religious culture and the simplicity of rural culture. It is in this environment that modern kinesis was to hatch – against the Church and the Countryside. We repeat, this does not mean that there was an abrupt leap from the Middle Ages to the Modern Era. By the Middle Ages types of customs had emerged in courtly culture that, in opposition to the Church, affirmed sensuality and the present, albeit in a refined fashion, to stand apart from the simple physical pleasures of the folk. This was the germ of the modern kinesis. The new social forces that came to the fore in the Modern Era – the bourgeoisie in its broadest sense – drew inspiration from

⁶⁰ Ibid., pp. 146–147.

⁶¹ A brilliant work that sheds a great deal of light on the medieval kinetic sensitivity is Jean-Claude Schmitt’s *Gest w średniowiecznej Europie*, trans. Hanna Zaremska, Warsaw 2006.

⁶² “The Middle Ages generally more valued the attitude than the movement in gestures, as in the prayerful stillness, a sign of concentration and listening to the voice of God” (ibid., p. 27).

⁶³ Ibid.

court culture, yet endlessly transformed it. This created modern culture, and with it, bourgeois society. True, medieval or “ludic” kinetic patterns held long into modern times, especially in the lower classes. Yet the overall tendency, as this work seeks to show, is clear – the march of the bourgeoisie toward cultural hegemony.

We should note that we will be using the term “bourgeois” in a special way.⁶⁴ It will be used to describe social forces, strata that are actively attempting to transform the existing structure, believing in the human power to change. Initially, in the late medieval period and the Italian Renaissance, this understanding of the bourgeoisie could, to a large extent, be identified with the city-dwellers, as opposed to the rural population, clergy, and aristocracy in the castles. This does not mean, of course, that all the inhabitants of cities were progressive, and that all those in the Church and the aristocracy were backward. In later times this generalization is even less apt, which means we must stress that our work does not equate the bourgeoisie with urbanity. The bourgeois population was not restricted to the cities. In part, it was actively created by members of the aristocracy and some representatives of the lower levels of society. What characterizes them at present is a progressive attitude, an appreciation of the temporal, a fondness for action, and a glorification of work. The bourgeoisie thus understood – as the creator of modern culture – is the main protagonist of our book.

The Modern Era might be understood as the shaping of the bourgeois society, its gradual ripening in several stages. In each of these we observe complex social games, whose stakes are power. The bourgeoisie longed to be a decision-making factor, but this could not be achieved in a simple way. The clergy, and above all, the aristocracy, did not want to yield. This is why we observe temporary alliances, as well as attempts to build decision-making centers that crossed social divides. We will be reconstructing these struggles in detail. At this stage, however, we would only like to show a general tendency, noting Gurevich’s compact observation: “European society was gradually moving from a contemplation of the world *sub specie aeternitatis* to an active relationship with it: a relationship measured in time.”⁶⁵ This transformation means the triumph of the bourgeois mindset and how it has colored the kinetic space. For the purposes of this study, we have decided to call the process of shifting from contemplation to activity “mobilization,” in order to highlight the key role of movement in shaping modernity. Let us try to clarify what we mean by this term as well.

In an early book, *Eurotaoismus: Zur Kritik der politischen Kinetik*, whose French translation significantly reads *La Mobilisation infinie* (The Infinite Mobilization),

⁶⁴ On the problems encountered by the scholar seeking to describe the bourgeoisie, see the insightful analysis by Maria Ossowska, *Moralność mieszczańska*, Wrocław 1985, pp. 14–24.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 149.

Peter Sloterdijk suggests we see modernity as a state of being-toward-movement.⁶⁶ This permanent mobility of reality is rendered by the title of the French translation. It is indeed Sloterdijk's being-toward-movement in conjunction with dance that stands behind our concept of mobilization. Yet what is being-toward-movement? In other words, how can we capture the specific mobilization of the Modern Era?

The word "mobilization" means making mobile, capable of moving. Mobilization means making something ready to move. Yet we cannot stop there if we would like to understand its modern variant. Sloterdijk calls attention to the military associations that the word mobilization evokes today, and stresses they should be taken seriously. Thus, mobilization is setting in motion to achieve a set aim. It implies a struggle for something, a striving for victory, a state of capacity for aggressive action. As such, mobilization is a highly political concept, in Schmitt's reckoning. One mobilizes in the name of something and against something, all at once. Mobilization is rivalry. It means more than mobility, it is tinted with a certain pride, and this interests us most.

When we look at the concept of mobilization, we observe how, on a physical basis – a readiness for movement as travel or as changing the state of the body – an ideological shell is created – movement as a striving for authority. Mobilization, then, is a concept that joins various structures of reality. Sloterdijk speaks of the overlap of physics, humanities, politics, and ethics. "The seemingly most empty, the most external, the most mechanical – movement (which had been left to the physicists and sports medicine doctors to research) – penetrates the humanities and at once turns out to be the cardinal category, even of the moral and social sphere."⁶⁷

According to Sloterdijk, "the formula of modernizing processes is as follows: Progress is movement toward movement, movement toward increased movement, movement toward an increased mobility."⁶⁸ Progress is a concept very similar to mobilization. In addition, however, it has keyed us in to the most important aspect of this process. Once again, we stress – the human body's movement in space, as in dance, is embroiled in the broader processes of mobilization. It is much more than physical bodies that are in motion.⁶⁹ Here we do not have in mind mere material shifts. We have movements of bodies in geometrical space, but also social movements,

⁶⁶ Peter Sloterdijk, *Eurotaoismus: Zur Kritik der politischen Kinetik*, Frankfurt am Main 1989; idem, *La Mobilisation infinie: vers une critique de la cinétique politique*, Paris 2000.

⁶⁷ Peter Sloterdijk, "Mobilization of the Planet from the Spirit of Self-Intensification," *Theatre Drama Review* 2006, Vol. 50, No. 4, p. 36.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 37.

⁶⁹ Moreover, the "physical body" perceived in opposition to the realm of the spirit, is basically nothing more than a product of mobilization, an artificial construct arising from the growth of a specific way of being in the world brought about by modern mobilization. The fact that, in our day, we apprehend the body and movement primarily in physical terms is the result of a profound change tied to the development of the modern natural sciences, symbolized by Galileo and Newton, and not its precursor. Before mobilization, physical movement was inseparable from metaphysical movement. Today this division is normal.

we have art that moves us, we are moved in our everyday lives and through the sublimity of public rituals. The whole of reality seems fundamentally mobile, always in motion. The world is not, for us, a stable point of reference, nor are we unchanging bodies thrown into a liquid environment. Both “I” and reality are fluid.⁷⁰ Destabilization has become the norm. “Kinetics is the ethics of modernity.”⁷¹

Thus, mobilization is a key word here, describing a cultural paradigm that shaped the modern vision of man. The origins of this paradigm go back to the actions of the Italian bourgeoisie, who were inspired by political theories of antiquity and postulated an understanding of humanity as activity. In this, the bourgeoisie spent the following centuries mobilizing themselves, forever seeking ideological grounding for their activity. The (dancing) body yearned for something to legitimize its activity. Mobilization has always happened under one flag or another, in the name of something. It has appealed to a basic force operating in the world which it discovered, whose representative – and finally, quintessence – was believed to be the bourgeois body. This means that our tale must be sensitive to the notion of agency.

In this book, we use “agency” to mean a source of activating power, not necessarily individual. From this perspective, agency is a kind of magma that can congeal in various shapes. It is not equivalent to an individualistic perception of activity or action. We can speak of collective or scattered agency. It is crucial to point out that our intent is not to decide upon the objective nature of agency, but rather to show how modern culture has conceived of agency at various stages of its development, to what beings it has been attributed. In the Modern Era, complex games were played in the sphere of agency, in which the individual, or individualized subject, was only one participant, though one who steadily gained the upper hand. We will try to reconstruct these games.

One final remark on terminology. Agency is, for us, a term derived from culture, while the “subject” derives from the sphere of the individual. Power is situated between these structures, on a social level; it is understood as a capability to affect the shape of the community. Cultural mobilization individualizes human existence, but also atomizes society. The bourgeoisie is a special form of socialization, centered around creating social bonds. Power is meant not only to exercise control over the organic community – it desires to and must create this community. This can only be through the intermediary of bodies, which is why, in political terms, movement is utterly fundamental. The bourgeoisie is a society of a community endlessly mobilizing itself to commune, based on increasingly complex kinetic politics, whereas earlier societies merely spontaneously celebrated their communality. We believe this issue, of a place occupied by dance in the process of moving from an organic community to a designed community, is intriguing, to say the least.

⁷⁰ Cf. Bauman, *Liquid Modernity*...

⁷¹ Sloterdijk, *Mobilization*..., p. 37.

Motionlessness as Resistance?

Our tale of the evolution of dance forms follows the dramaturgy of the Modern Era – from the awakening to the hegemony of dreams of individual autonomy. We will be moving alongside this chronology – from the cities of the Italian Renaissance to the classicist palaces of France, the merchants' stalls of London, the Enlightenment salons and revolutionary offices of Paris. We will be looking at how the dancing body was perceived by humanists (Chapter I). We will be reconstructing debates on dance in the Baroque Era and its regulations in the court of the Sun King (Chapters II and III). We will drop in an England wracked by internal conflicts, where the bourgeois kinesis first fully emerged, and with it, a new model of dance spectacle (Chapter IV). Then we observe how this model was adapted in France (Chapter V) and how it entered a dialogue with the sentimentalism of the Revolution (Chapter VI).

Like every dance, this narrative has its rhythm. It is marked by a dialectic we have observed in the history of kinetic thought. When we speak of the mobile as a grounds for dispute, we should call attention to the fundamental tension always present within it – movement and motionlessness, starting and stopping, mobilization and demobilization. The Modern Era is marked by activist thinking. In the very concept of the subject is the idea that people shape reality. They less fit into the world than continually shape it as they will. Humans are a force and an agency, and should be proud of it. All the same, since the dawn of the Modern Era there has been a movement that opposes this worldview. We find opinions to this effect in Montaigne, Pascal, and Voltaire. The Modern Era is not only total mobilization, but its critique as well. This gives us a constant dialectic of starting and stopping. Dance is no exception here.

In structural terms, dance, like every organized experience of movement, is based on a dialectic of mobilization and stopping. We cannot speak of pure, uninterrupted movement and pure motionlessness if the muscles are always tensing and relaxing, air is gathered and released from the lungs, the eyelids tremble. On the one hand, motionlessness is essentially impossible. On the other hand, the constant flow of life, the vital pulse hardly means the body is in incessant motion. The still body is also often more stirred and more stirs a partner's or viewer's body than a body freely moving through space. This is why, in fact, we should not be speaking of motionlessness, but of mobilizing stillness. This mobilizing of demobilization is the flip side of total mobilization. Motionlessness does not exist in an ontological sense, but we should explore motionlessness as a political gesture.

Our investigations will show that the decision to set in motion or stop the body on stage is raveled in a choice between mobilizing and demobilizing visions of the world and man. In this sense, movement is a political tool, but so is motionlessness, stopping, artificial slowdown. To understand the political nature of dance, we

need to see how the static body operates within it – what role it is given, what place it occupies, and the source of the immobilizing impulse. Does the dancing body stop itself, or is it stopped? What is the nature of stopping? What does the operation of dancing involve – is it politically aggressive, or is movement in space a manifestation of political motionlessness? Can we speak of demobilizing mobilization? Can we only speak of motionlessness when the body does not move through space?

Mobilization develops by overcoming obstacles. This means the dialectic is a spiral. The mobilizing totality of modernity is working through and incorporating motionlessness. Modern culture is not always philosophically persuasive on this count. The challenges of demobilizing thoughts are sometimes left unsolved, merely swept under the carpet. Endless, total mobilization carries the enormous hazard of smothering a pluralism of standpoints, violence in the name of progress, a tyranny of movement. This is partly why we have opted to speak of mobilization as a virus, which gradually seeps into the fabric of Western culture. The infection initially seems to strengthen the organism, prompting a sense of euphoria, near omnipotence, but ultimately it topples the body to the ground. The finale is truly nightmarish.⁷² Thus mobilization is a virus, and not merely a process.

Here we ought to confess to one other debt we have incurred in writing this work – perhaps the greatest of them all. This book would not exist were it not for *The Human Condition*, written over half a century ago by Hannah Arendt.⁷³ We may criticize this work for being unrealistic, for idealizing Greek culture (above all, Athenian democracy), but this does not mean it can be shrugged aside. Arendt did an impressive job in breaking down our topic, that is, *vita activa*, into three kinds of activities. She discriminates between: a) work, or activities that allow us to prolong our biological existence; b) production, or creating an “artificial” world of things; and, finally, c) actions, or what is born between people without the intermediaries of things or materials – care for the community.⁷⁴ In our view, dance belongs to the sphere of actions, though when Arendt writes about it, she mainly has politics in mind. This does not mean it is not entangled in the logic of work and production, however, particularly when a culture enters a phase of mature modernity.

Arendt understands the Modern Era as the triumph of production at the expense of action, which is reflected upon people’s relation to contemplation. *The Human Condition* shows that antiquity and the Middle Ages were epochs that assigned *vita contemplativa* a place of importance. In Greece, philosophical contemplation accompanied political activity on the Agora like a shadow. In the Middle Ages it was

⁷² This is discussed in some works that have become classics: Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, New York 1976; Zygmunt Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust*, Ithaca 2000; Enzo Traverso, *The Origins of Nazi Violence*, trans. Janet Lloyd, New York 2003.

⁷³ Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, Chicago 2018.

⁷⁴ Definitions are found in: *ibid.*, p. 24.

situated in the heart of the culture, becoming the highest ideal.⁷⁵ Contemplation was not always equated with passivity, as Arendt emphasized. In antiquity, it was closely tied to active thinking and creativity. So it was in Socrates and Aristotle. In their philosophy: “It is and remains part and parcel of a fabrication process, even though it has divorced itself from all work and all doing.”⁷⁶ Things were different in Plato, and later in the idealist thinkers of the Middle Ages. For them,

the motionlessness which in the state of speechless wonder is no more than an incidental, unintended result of absorption, becomes now the condition and hence the outstanding characteristic of the *vita contemplativa*. It is no wonder that it throws man into motionlessness, but it is through the constant cessation of activity, the activity of making, that the contemplative state is reached.⁷⁷

It is against this second variant of the *vita contemplativa* that the modern spirit increasingly rebels, offhandedly, as it were, discarding the first kind. This holds severe consequences for *homo faber*, who, stripped of his ability to contemplate, and thus to grasp a higher, metaphysical truth, remains alone with himself, in a painful void and silence, trying to fill or smother it with a greater dose of himself, of human activity.

This is the pride of the subject tied to autotelic production:

Only *homo faber* conducts himself as lord and master of the whole earth. Since his productivity was seen in the image of a Creator-God, so that where God creates *ex nihilo*, man creates out of a given substance, human productivity was by definition bound to result in a Promethean revolt because it could erect a man-made world only after destroying part of God-created nature.⁷⁸

This revolt in dance and the attempts to staunch its flow are the basic subjects of this book.

⁷⁵ Arendt quotes Thomas Aquinas: “*Vita contemplativa simpliciter melior est quam vita activa* (the contemplative life is simply superior to the active life)” (ibid., p. 318).

⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 303.

⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 303.

⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 139.

CHAPTER I

Between the Dynamism of the Individual and the Tranquility of the Cosmos: Italian Dance Treatises of the *Quattrocento*

The *quattrocento* was special in many regards. For the story we aim to tell, the most important expression of its uniqueness was the blossoming of dance theory. Three dance treatises were written in Renaissance Italy, which is an impressive tally when we recall that throughout the Middle Ages there were no specialist works devoted solely to dance, or at least none that have survived to our day. Not so with antiquity. We have, for instance, a text from the second century CE, Lucian of Samosata's *On Dancing*. So too, in the Renaissance, there was dance theory. As in other fields of culture, this was not simply a return to ancient forms, it involved their creative development.

In this chapter we will take a look at the Renaissance revitalization of dance, as evidenced, in part, by the treatises. We will show that this was part of a larger effort to revitalize human existence. Let us try to plumb to the deep foundations upon which the dance reform rested, to show how it tied in with the development of modern humanism. The Renaissance treatises on dance are the product of a burgeoning humanist worldview, they show us its kinetic side. Here we can read the first modern vision of the human body in movement, in both its individual and communal incarnation. These texts by the dancing masters, who began clearly stamping their presence in the public sphere of the day, reveal the mores of the time, and with them, the dilemmas of people who, in their view, were restorers, rebuilding culture from scratch after a time of collapse. We will show that this thesis of breaking with medieval backwardness is highly exaggerated in the case of dance, as the roots of Renaissance kinesis sink deep into the Middle Ages. We

will be attempting to explain why the Italian bourgeoisie of the fifteenth century were nonetheless able to see themselves as unlike their medieval precursors. To this end, we shall compare the dance treatises with works created in other fields of culture. This joint analysis of source documents will reveal to us the Renaissance conception of society and man, which we think we know, yet which remains to be explored as it pertains to dance.

The Renaissance worldview was uncommonly dynamic. In the course of the fifteenth century it underwent a complex shaping process, in which the ideal of action entered in various relations with a yearning for peace that lurked in its shadow, and sometimes stepped into the foreground. The Renaissance was not only a longing for renewal, a forward movement, it also marked the first modern forms of contemplation. Here too, dance played a considerable role. The humanism from which it drew inspiration was, on the one hand, a worldview that called attention to this world – to political problems, to action, to secular experiences and pleasures. On the other hand, humanism betrayed a clear desire to belong to a structure beyond the temporal. The Italian Renaissance endeavored to reconcile these two tendencies, in dance and elsewhere, though this turned out to be impossible.

The tension created by two opposing urges – to act and to contemplate – was tied to the social and political tension maintained throughout the fifteenth century. The republican tendencies that traced back to the previous centuries, to the political victory of the *popolo* over the old aristocracy, were forever grappling with individual aspirations for authoritarian power, justified by the argument that it was more effective in controlling social chaos than collective political bodies. This authoritarian urge was, interestingly enough, characteristic of the new aristocracy rising from the *popolo*, of families like the Medicis and the Sforzas, who were patrons of the humanists. As such, the *quattrocento* was a time of constant dispute. In the midcentury these disputes were momentarily dampened, as exemplified by the Peace of Lodi, though this truce proved to be quite fragile. A tension remained between the dreams of a democratic community and the sober, not to say brutal, pragmatism of the new rulers. The latter prevailed in times when the city-states were forced to succumb to the might of the armies of the King of France, Charles VIII. This brought an end to the golden era of the Italian Renaissance.

We have somewhat provocatively chosen our endpoint to be Machiavelli, claiming that his writings contain traces of choreography of the late Renaissance power. We will try to defend the thesis that *The Prince* is the culmination of the Renaissance dreams, a work in which they are verified in a pragmatic spirit. In Machiavelli we have a vision of agency shorn of its illusions, and with it, of power and the body movements through which it came to be. This vision manifests itself at the intersection of activism and penal incarceration, dreams of liberty and harsh discipline. This path was key to the history of the Modern Era.

A Mechanism of Distinction

We begin with an intriguing quote. In a treatise from the mid fifteenth century entitled *De pratica seu arte tripudii* (*On the Practice or Art of Dancing*, 1463), Guglielmo Ebreo da Pesaro, who studied under Domenico di Piacenza, a dancing master renowned throughout Italy, wrote:

This [art of dancing] most favors and befits those whose hearts are loving and generous and those whose spirits are ennobled by a heavenly bent rather than by a fortuitous inclination. But it is completely alien to, and the mortal enemy of, vile and rude mechanicals who often, with corrupt souls and treacherous minds, turn it from a liberal art and virtuous science into something adulterous and ignoble. And often, in the guise of honor, they even make it pimp for their shameful lewdness so that they may slyly use dancing to satisfy their lust.⁷⁹

What stands behind these words that sound so indelicate to the contemporary ear? To explain this, let us juxtapose the quote with a fragment from a lecture by Fernand Braudel:

In a pre-industrial economy [...] the basic thing struck me as the coexistence of rigid, inert, and heavy elements of an elementary economy with limited and marginal, yet animated and vital movements of modern growth. On the one hand, villagers in their villages living practically autonomously, in a state of autarchy, as it were, and on the other, the expansion of the market economy and capitalism, which spread like oil stains and gradually shape and prefigure our present-day world. Thus: two universes, two isolated ways of life, which, taken together, elucidate one another.⁸⁰

Both texts speak of two worlds, two kinds of life. In this respect we might say that the Renaissance was based on a contrast between two forms of culture. On the one hand, we have “mechanicals” and “villagers,” and on the other, “generous hearts” and “capitalism,” which could be seen as an attempt to describe opposite forms. We will not be focusing on the irony in pairing capitalism and generosity of the heart,⁸¹ we will only be treating the juxtaposition as a point of departure for some questions that will be pivotal to us. What is the distinction being made in each quote? This the present chapter will try to grasp. The Renaissance brought to life a kinesis

⁷⁹ Guglielmo de Ebreo's treatise comes from the work edited and translated by the outstanding Renaissance scholar Barbara Sparti: *De pratica seu arte tripudii: On the Practice or Art of Dancing*, Oxford 1995, p. 91.

⁸⁰ Fernand Braudel, *Dynamika kapitalizmu*, trans. Bogdan Baran, Warsaw 2013, p. 12.

⁸¹ An analysis of the narrative depicting capitalism as an undertaking of generous hearts could undoubtedly serve as the basis of a separate work.

whose roots stretched back to the Middle Ages, and in many respects continued the ideals that sprouted back then, but also – in part, no doubt, to conceal this heritage and to build its own sharp identity – energetically cut itself from the past, at least in the humanities. This is why Guglielmo Ebreo attacks “corrupt souls” and “treacherous minds” with such fervor in the above quotation. Our hypothesis is that he is not speaking of real villagers. His battle is with phantoms and spirits from the past, but in fact the Renaissance man is waging a battle against himself. The danger of this shifting into impure desires remains very real. On the surface he is negating primitive sexuality, but in fact something far broader is to be refined. Let us call it a sensitivity.

We invoke Braudel not in order to unambiguously link the dance theory emerging in Europe with the emerging capitalism. We are not interested in this sort of reductionism. Yet Braudel concisely marks what is key to us here: two increasingly separate universes. There were, of course, cultural divisions in the medieval world. People differed in terms of sensitivity, tastes, ways of thinking. Monastery culture was different from castle culture, and castle culture from rural culture. Yet these differences were balanced by the prevailing world-view community rooted in Christianity and the feudal system. This is Braudel’s state of autarchy. It engendered a distinct sensitivity – on the one hand, brutal, but on the other, familiar; on the one hand extremely sober, taking the world very seriously, on the other, ribald and full of broad laughter. The late Middle Ages shaped strategies for managing corporeality where these tendencies met. In the sphere of the kinetic, this meant leaps from extreme conventionality in official contexts (religious services, political ceremonies)⁸² to the disarray of everyday life. On the one hand, we observe a complex language of gestures in the Middle Ages,⁸³ and on the other, the chaos of sensual impulses. This means that, at the start of the second millennium, though torn by disputes of various kinds, Europe emerges as a relatively coherent whole, rooted in the relationships between social strata. Medieval bodies need one another, they oppose one another to create an organic hierarchy in which, between the praying body of the monk, the fighting body of the knight, and the laboring body of the peasant, we observe close connections. In the fifteenth century, this hierarchy began to fold, and the models to tear apart.

As Braudel notes, movements toward modern growth appeared back in deeply preindustrial times. By the end of the first half of the millennium, the social significance of trade was perpetually on the rise, leading to the development of

⁸² Cf. Gerd Althoff, *Potęga rytuału. Symbolika władzy w średniowieczu*, trans. Agnieszka Gadzała, Warsaw 2013; Geoffrey Koziol, *Begging Pardon and Favor: Ritual and Political Order in Early Medieval France*, Ithaca-London 1992. On problems in using the term “ritual” with regard to medieval forms of culture, cf. Philippe Buc, *The Dangers of Ritual: Between Early Medieval Texts and Social Scientific Theory*, Princeton 2001.

⁸³ Jean-Claude Schmitt, *Gest w średniowiecznej Europie*, trans. Hanna Zaremska, Warsaw 2006.

urban centers both on the northern coasts of Europe (the cities of today's Belgium and Holland, the Hanseatic League) and in the Mediterranean basin (Italy). With this came an energizing of the financial sphere and a slow unwinding of the money game. The significance of ores grew, increasing attention was given to material production, the organization of which became more and more complex. Crafts workshops began developing, guilds were created. The cities slowly gained the upper hand over the countryside, though this did not, of course, mean that the latter entirely lost its significance. The majority of people were still villagers – and this was to remain unchanged until the nineteenth century.⁸⁴

Yet “movements of modern growth” are not exclusively economic. We also observe them in politics, science, religion, and art. The late Middle Ages of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries was a period of widespread ferment. This pertains to the corporeal sphere and kinesis as well. We will try to outline its factors in brief.

As a result of Europeans encountering Arab culture through the Crusades and through the centuries-long presence of Arabs in the southern parts of the continent, ancient thought became increasingly present in European intellectual life. Above all, there were passionate discussions on the work of Aristotle, though other thinkers were also considered. These debates left their mark on the perception of the human body, chiefly because it was a subject of central concern for antiquity, and at least some of the Church Fathers had sought to suppress it. Some of the more enlightened thinkers of the late Middle Ages, such as St. Thomas, took a positive approach to the body, breaking with the radical anti-corporeality of the ascetic movements. The body of antiquity was thus an inspiration for the Renaissance revitalization of physicality.

In the late Middle Ages a fierce power struggle, less spiritual than political, was waged between the Emperor and the Pope, ushering in theories that were practically revolutionary. Dante's treatise,⁸⁵ and above all, the work of Marsilius of Padua,⁸⁶ which asserted the rights of secular rule, are the prime examples here. Though it may seem a bit of stretch, this rivalry also had a corporeal aspect. In the social consciousness, at least among the elite, the secular ruler was increasingly present, and with him the figure of the Prince. This carried a perception of ruling as a real, material process that required requisite administration of physicality not only of the ruler, but also of the state as a temporal community. The ruling body and the political body were more fuel for the Renaissance imagination.⁸⁷

⁸⁴ A splendid introduction to this topic can be found in: Jean Delumeau, *Cywilizacja odrodzenia*, trans. Eligia Bąkowska, Warsaw 1987, pp. 177–244.

⁸⁵ Dante Alighieri, *Monarchy*, trans. Prue Shaw, Cambridge 1999.

⁸⁶ Marsilius of Padua, *The Defender of Peace*, trans. Annabel Brett, Cambridge 2005.

⁸⁷ Cf. Ernst H. Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies*, Princeton 1997.

The Church's situation became increasingly problematic at the twilight of the Middle Ages. Critical movements systematically appeared, nominating alternate ways of being religious, striving for both spiritual and societal renewal. In England John Wycliffe was active, in Czechia Jerome of Prague and Jan Hus rebelled. What is now Benelux and Germany saw a trend of *devotio moderna*, whose tone was first set by Gerardus Groot, and later by Thomas à Kempis. Then there was a blossoming of mysticism. Seldom in history is there such an accumulation of deeply felt religious ecstasy, as in the writings of Meister Eckhart, Johannes Tauler, and Jan van Ruysbroeck. We should recall that this had a physical and kinetic dimension. Thus, a third source of inspiration for Renaissance corporeality was the mystical body.

An empirical, practically experimental movement in the sciences was slowly awakening in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. This meant the development of critical thinking, which came to be symbolized by Occam's razor. In Oxford and Paris, scientific discussions were being held that helped to hammer out an alternative physics to the prevailing Aristotelianism; this was a (perhaps tentative) harbinger of the modern natural sciences. Following Albertus Magnus, Robert Grosseteste, and Roger Bacon came Nicole Oresme and Jean Buridan. Of particular interest to us is the discussion around the concept of *impetus*, facilitating a perspective on movement that less resembled Aristotle's finalistic view than one purely based on physics. The movement of bodies began to be apprehended from the perspective of bodies, examining their principles on an empirical, not a metaphysical plane. This meant the "mechanization" of movement. The Prime Mover began to take a back seat, along with man's natural striving to occupy his place in the universe, to which Aristotle called attention in his physics. This movement would begin gaining ground, echoing in thoughts on dance, albeit in an indirect and complex fashion. This meant we finally had inspiration in the form of physical bodies.⁸⁸

In our view, it is critical that the culture of this period was, to some degree, secular, or that centers at least appeared which shifted the focus from the vanity of the world, including the body and sensuality, to a cultivation of temporal existence. This by no means meant hedonism, it more came from the fact that social life was flourishing at the courts of Burgundy and Provence, with troubadours setting the rhythm. Love poetry was written, songs were sung, instruments were played and dances danced. The same went for the villages and the mercantile towns. Though little is known about it, for we have no writings on the subject, experts claim that dance blossomed in the Middle Ages, as we shall soon demonstrate. This came with the spread of a way of life now far more modern than the mortification of the monastery, an asceticism often more theoretical than practical, or the brutal existence in castles, where refinement and sophistication were seldom the order of

⁸⁸ For more on the theory of "impetus" in the history of European culture, cf. Herbert Butterfield, *The Origins of Contemporary Science 1300–1800*, New York 1997, pp. 13–29.

the day. This, too, was unlike the folk culture, which was often fairly bawdy and elemental, as we are fond of imagining from the scenes in François Rabelais' *Gargantua and Pantagruel*. Reading Provençal poetry and the courtly romances communicates a special kind of kinesis, which is the germ of a Renaissance sensitivity toward movement. It stresses giving attention to another person, particularly in male-female relations. There is care for the form of contact, giving form to one's own movement, which enters a complex relationship with the movements of another. With some simplification, we might say it emphasizes the sublimity of motion. The sociable⁸⁹ body was created.

As such, we might say that the autumn of the Middle Ages was a period of intense awakening and shaping of new kinetic models.⁹⁰ It gave birth to the inspirations we have mentioned, setting tasks for European culture that would keep it occupied throughout the Modern Era, adding other variants over time. The process of distinction was set in motion – culture was increasingly geared toward novelty, people stressed their difference from their static predecessors. Kinesis itself became more multidimensional and complex. Games with bodies emerged, and increasingly complicated relations between them were delineated.

Urban Movement

The Modern ferment meant several models of physicality in movement. Once more, we ought to stress the significance of the urban factor here. The development of cities accompanied the first stage of the Modern Era.

⁸⁹ The original term here is "*ciało towarzyskie*," the adjective "*towarzyski*" has several translations into English. In a dance context it most often appears in contemporary Polish as part of the phrase "*tańce towarzyskie*," roughly equivalent to the English "ballroom dances." The Polish language has no general term for what English calls "social dances," which are most often translated as "*tańce towarzyskie*." In a historical context, the phrase "*tańce historyczne*" (historical dances) is applied for all the dance forms covered in this book, apart from ballet. Stepping outside of the context of dance, we should call attention to the clear distinction in Polish between "*społeczny*" and "*towarzyski*" (both translated into English as "social"). The first has a very general meaning, pertaining to the collective aspect of human life. Conflict, for instance, can be *społeczny*, and we speak of *społeczna antropologia* (social anthropology). *Towarzyski*, on the other hand, pertains to the cultivation of close ties between people. *Społeczny* conflict occurs on a mass scale, as in a class conflict, whereas a *towarzyski* conflict is a quarrel between individuals belonging to the same milieu. We do not speak of a "*towarzyska antropologia*," though an anthropology of *towarzyskość* (sociability) is possible. It would seem that, as a general rule, "social" is best used to translate *społeczny* and "sociable" for *towarzyski*, as suggested by the translation of Georg Simmel's famous essay *Socjologia towarzyskości* as *The Sociology of Sociability*. Yet this distinction is not always possible, as, for instance, the Polish *życie towarzyskie* can only be translated as "social life." (Translator's note.)

⁹⁰ Cf. the classic and still-inspiring study by Johan Huizinga, *The Autumn of the Middle Ages*, trans. Rodney J. Payton and Ulrich Mammitzsch, Chicago 1996.

With the first signs that the economy was coming to life in the eleventh to thirteenth centuries, there began a process of the rebirth of urban centers. This led to cities burgeoning far more quickly than the cumbersome state territories. The latter only appear in a “modern” form in the fifteenth century. The cities burst the structures of the feudal state organisms in which they grew in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. Modern and ahead of their time, they were a forerunner of the future. They already were the future.⁹¹

It was in the cities that the new culture was hatched, the one whose dance incarnation was described by Guglielmo. The cities were centers of movement and growing excitement. It may have seemed that they gave rise to a whole new way of life. This city was a space where the kinetic was different from in the open fields and meadows, or the claustrophobic castles and monasteries. The city was a commotion of activity, of social and professional meetings. In the Renaissance city people knew each other well, it was often essentially a large village, and this made contact frequent and familiar; yet the city, to a greater extent than the countryside, was a space for encountering the foreign and unknown. Guests arrived in the city, and local businessmen often set off. This made the city physically tense, a place where interpersonal contact could not be taken for granted. Yet, we repeat, the breakthrough was neither abrupt nor total. The old culture was not torn up by the roots, especially in terms of the mental structures. This is stressed by many outstanding historians⁹² who have attempted to revise Jacob Burckhardt’s extremely influential theory,⁹³ which most brought about the creation of the myth of the epoch as a time of total renewal.⁹⁴ Perhaps the finest critique of the thesis on the Renaissance as an utterly new beginning was made by Jacques Le Goff, who wrote:

The world that emerged from the crisis of the fourteenth century seemed new. Yet despite its new garb, Christianity – its body and soul – was mainly marked by the endurance of the old. [...] The image of society remains the same, and even retreats to its old concepts: the nobility and clergy still held sway in the society of three estates, though the bourgeoisie was unquestionably more numerous, wealthier, more confident, though it contented itself with either infiltrating the higher classes through noble honors, or representing the whole of the third estate.⁹⁵

⁹¹ Fernand Braudel, *Gramatyka cywilizacji*, trans. Hanna Igalson-Tygielska, Warsaw 2006, p. 346.

⁹² On the impossibility of making a firm distinction between the Middle Ages and Renaissance, on their blending, interlocking, and gradual transition, see: Delumeau, *Cywilizacja odrodzenia* and Peter Burke, *The Renaissance*, New York 1997.

⁹³ This was in a classic work: Jacob Burckhardt, *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*, trans. Samuel G. C. Middlemore, London 1990.

⁹⁴ Cf. Burke, *The Renaissance*, pp. 1–8.

⁹⁵ Jacques Le Goff, *Kultura średniowiecznej Europy*, trans. Hanna Szumańska-Grossowa, Warsaw 1970, p. 360 [this fragment is absent from the English edition, and thus has been translated from the Polish – trans.].

His view is shared by Jean Delumeau:

Has there not been too much made of the advancement of the bourgeoisie in the times of Jacques Cœur, the Medicis and Fluggers? The reality was far more complicated, as the *nouveau riche* were reaching the ranks of the nobility all the faster, bringing in new strengths and bolstering their numbers. The nobility was undoubtedly more submissive with regard to the ruler, but it was still a land-owning class. And in turning to culture – whose importance has not been fully appreciated – it imposed aristocratic aesthetics and tastes upon Western civilization, as well as a contempt for manual labor.⁹⁶

The Renaissance bourgeoisie could have potentially introduced a new social quality, they could have broken with the past more radically, in a kinetic way as well. In the writings of humanists like Coluccio Salutati, Lorenzo Valla, and Leon Battista Alberti, we note a hint of this change in how they accentuate work, creativity, and independence, but this did not fully resonate in the culture as a whole. The cities were the battleground for the new, but also of aspiring to honors sanctioned in the previous epoch, which is why between the Middle Ages and the Modern Era, between the feudal and the bourgeois society, there is a transitional factor – the aristocratic epoch and society.

The Renaissance in Europe⁹⁷ is full of contradictions, in which innovation mixes with obscurantism (it saw the bloom of alchemy and astrology), rationalism with an anti-scientific stance, and individualism with the consolidation of a new kind of communities. Some of these tendencies, such as rationalism and individualism, which historians once viewed as entirely new, had their roots in the Middle Ages.⁹⁸ It suffices to mention Abelard and the scholastic tradition,⁹⁹ which was demonized by some Renaissance thinkers, yet which paved the way for the appearance of Salutati and Valla, and later Descartes and Leibniz. Of course, ancient texts were absolutely key as well, but the Renaissance did not use these blithely, they adapted them for the purposes of an entirely different social landscape, and owed much to the reception of antiquity in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. There was a return to the *vita activa*, but in new garb, and stamped with *vita contemplativa*, somewhat nostalgically. We should bear this in mind as we proceed, though

⁹⁶ Delumeau, *Cywilizacja odrodzenia*, p. 23.

⁹⁷ We should note in passing that Jack Goody suggests we should speak not of one but many Renaissances that took place in various points of the globe at various times (Jack Goody, *Renaissances: The One or the Many?*, Cambridge 2010).

⁹⁸ This is stressed by Frederick Copleston, *History of Philosophy*, Vol. III, London 2003. A similar thought is found throughout the whole of Stefan Swieżawski's *Dzieje filozofii europejskiej XV wieku*, Warsaw 1974–1983, six volumes.

⁹⁹ On the mutual, highly complex and often close relationships between scholasticism and humanism, see the ample material in Swieżawski, *Dzieje filozofii europejskiej XV wieku*, Vol. I, Warsaw 1974, pp. 96–130.

we will be arguing that the mental structures begin to change so substantially in the fourteenth century that the foundation is set for the gradual bloom of a dynamic modern spirit, and with it, dance; this foundation was absent in the Middle Ages.

Even if the cities of Renaissance Italy, which are now our central focus, were in many respects medieval, they made room for an emancipation that is pivotal in our view, one mentioned by Gurevich and reconstructed by Braudel. This emancipation was highly dynamic. According to Delumeau, this dynamism arose from the necessity of dealing with numerous problems in civilization that plagued Europeans in the late Middle Ages:

A whole series of calamities hit Europe in 1320–1450: famine, epidemics, war, a galloping mortality rate, a drop in the extraction of precious metals, an invasion of Turks; these catastrophes were combated with courage and intelligence. The history of the Renaissance is the story of these challenges and this rebuttal. The main aspects of the West's response to all the obstacles in its way was to question medieval clerical thought, halt the population dip, and make technical progress, along with hazardous sea voyages, new aesthetics, a reinvented and rejuvenated Christianity.¹⁰⁰

The foundation of this response was the awakening faith in the creative capabilities of man in his earthly life. Cities were the spaces where this faith was most emphatically declared.

Augustin Renaudet once said of the project of the fifteenth-century Italian intellectuals:

Vital here is the effort of the human individual, aiming, through strict and ongoing discipline, to develop his capabilities, to waste nothing of what makes the greatness and marvel of the human being. This *ethique de noblesse humaine* obliged society to be forever perfecting itself, striving for perfection in every way.¹⁰¹

The concepts of discipline, greatness, nobility, and perfection through constant work on oneself form a new worldview. This is the context in which we should insert the quote from *De pratica* that opened this chapter. Guglielmo's gesture is a severance from the previous epoch, and from what essentially still plagued his times. This is also what we see in the authors of the other surviving early Renaissance dance treatises – Domenico da Piacenza and Antonio Cornazano. All three were city-dwellers. As a result, we see their concerted effort to distance themselves from the immoderate country folk, who symbolize the people of the Middle Ages as such. In *Dela arte di ballare et danzare* (On the Art of Dance, ca. 1455) Domenico

¹⁰⁰ Delumeau, *Cywilizacja odrodzenia*, pp. 22–23.

¹⁰¹ Quoted in: Braudel, *Gramatyka cywilizacji*, p. 365.

urges: “Avoid the extremes of the foreigner from the countryside and of he who is a traveling entertainer [*giugolatore*¹⁰²].”¹⁰³ Cornazano stresses that people of good breeding will not jump and stomp like their rural ancestors, as dance was a matter of restraint, ornament, and tact, engendering a preference for slow and not swift tempos, for refinement and not transgression. We see a clear “us versus them” pattern here. Renaissance dance stands against a model of bodily experience that was inherited from the past but still influential, one tied to a specific anthropology, and a social and power structure. Renaissance dance treatises thus assert a worldview under the guise of technical thoughts on dance. To understand them, we will have to write a few words about what medieval dance looked like. Only then will we see what the Renaissance adapted and what, indeed, it rejected.

Dance in the Late Middle Ages

Even if no theoretical texts exist on the subject, we can be sure of one thing: medieval people danced, frequently and with passion, up and down the social ladder. It is true that there was pressure from some church communities to curtail these practices, but we cannot speak of an unambiguous and widespread discouragement of dance on the part of the Church. In early Christianity there was no consent to total condemnation. On the one hand, they distanced themselves from the dance displays of histrions, the traveling mimes/dancers, who were associated with the excesses of the Roman aristocracy, and thus a hedonistic, debauched, and extremely sensual culture. The Roman “show dance” was performed during spectacles and feasts, and was therefore unequivocally associated with evil. Authorities often compared it to the biblical dance around a golden calf (Ill. 1) or Salome’s steps (Ill. 2). Yet the Bible itself gave examples of praiseworthy dance: such as that of Miriam, Aaron’s sister, celebrating the crossing of the Israelites through the Red Sea and the downfall of the Pharaoh in a dance, and above all, of David dancing before the Ark of the Covenant (Ill. 3).¹⁰⁴ This duality went on to make up the Christian kinesis, from which dance never disappeared, though it did meet constant resistance.

Jean-Claude Schmitt writes:

In terms of the Greeks, it was John Chrysostom (ca. 349–407) who condemned spectacles and dances (his speeches were said to have gained broad popularity among the opponents

¹⁰² An itinerant actor/dancer/juggler/acrobat commonly encountered in medieval times.

¹⁰³ Quoted in: A. William Smith, *Fifteenth-Century Dance and Music*, Hillsdale 1995, p. 15.

¹⁰⁴ For dance motifs in the Old Testament, see: Schmitt, *Gest...*, pp. 90–91.



1. Nicolas Poussin, *L'Adoration du Veau d'or* (Adoration of the Golden Calf), ca. 1634



2. Fra Filippo Lippi, *Banchetto di Erode* (Herod's Feast), fresco, Salome dancing in the foreground, 1452-1465



3. Leonaert Bramer, *Koning David dansend voor de Ark* (King David Dancing before the Ark), 17th c.

of all physical recreations), while Gregory of Nyssa (ca. 330–395) and Gregory of Nazianzus (ca. 330–390) praised the dancing of David.¹⁰⁵

This sort of praise could also be found in the Western Church, as in Ambrose of Milan of the fourth century. As stated by a commentator, Richardus Sancti Victoris: “The Lord, Ambrose says, has commanded us to dance – not with supple motions of the body, but through pious faith.”¹⁰⁶ And thus, dance was permissible, but only if subdued, controlled by reason. Its aim was not to be pleasure, but the adoration of the universe God created, which, *nota bene*, in a Neoplatonic light, might have been seen as dance. The first Christians, we read in Clement of Alexandria, did not refrain from moving during the liturgy.¹⁰⁷ Over time the motif of the dance of angels, which man was to emulate, appeared in Christianity, perhaps borrowed from the Jewish tradition.¹⁰⁸ This heavenly dance is found in St. Basil, and above

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., pp. 91–92.

¹⁰⁶ Quoted in: *ibid.*, p. 92.

¹⁰⁷ Françoise Syson Carter, “Celestial Dance: A Search for Perfection,” *Dance Research* 1987, Vol. 5, No. 2, p. 8.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., p. 7.

all, in Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, a key figure in uniting the Neoplatonic and Christian traditions.¹⁰⁹ The late Middle Ages erased these tropes from its kinetic *imaginarium*.

People dancing like angels is an important kinetic ideal. Striving to accomplish this meant the necessity of cleansing dance of all that was vain, purely sensual, bawdy, and secular. This was the focus of the actions of religious authorities in the late Middle Ages. Dance as such was not the whipping boy here, as, at least in some cases, the Church consented to aspects of dance in liturgical life.¹¹⁰ Secular dance was stigmatized, linked to the other element that had been shaping the culture of those centuries – folk energy, with its vestiges of pagan culture. Jacques de Vitry wrote in the thirteenth century that dance was a circle with the devil at its center. There were a few reasons for condemning secular dance: it drew attention away from spiritual matters and toward the pleasures of the body, it quarreled with the gravity of holy days (the Church especially forbade succumbing to dance during holidays and periods of fasting), and, perhaps above all, it created opportunities for wicked lust, as women and men mingled.

The necessity of this condemnation means that, in fact, dance was sometimes recreational in the Middle Ages, and the erotic aspect of dance was not insignificant. Otherwise, there would have been no reason to make dance an important topic in texts tied to the sacrament of repentance. For us, these texts are a basic source of knowledge about the practice of dance in those times.¹¹¹ Dance was tied to sins against the Third, Sixth, and Ninth Commandments. Often, too, when subjects were cataloged according to the carnal sins, dance appeared in the context of lust, and, interestingly enough, gluttony, as the moralists believed that it was an inseparable companion to feasts and drink. In the surviving texts of sermons we find cautions against unruly, godless dancing. We mainly come across them in the *exemplums* popular in the late Middle Ages, compelling tales of sinners who were rightfully punished or virtuous people who were rewarded.¹¹² Among these, one story stands out (surviving in several variants), of the cursed dancers of Kolbigk. They would not refrain from dancing on Christmas Eve, were cursed by the priest, and sentenced to a year of dancing without pause; most of them died. These were not the only punishments that awaited those who incautiously succumbed to the pleasures of dance. The ground could open under their feet, they could go mad, or even come down with leprosy.

The attention devoted to dance in texts accompanying confessions demonstrate how popular it was in the late Middle Ages. Otherwise, there would have been no

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., pp. 8–11.

¹¹⁰ Schmitt, *Gest...*, pp. 94–95.

¹¹¹ Cf. Alessandro Arcangeli, “Dance under Trial: The Moral Debate 1200–1600,” *Dance Research* 1994, Vol. 12, No. 2, pp. 127–155; idem, “Moral Views on Dance,” in: Jennifer Nevile (ed.), *Dance, Spectacle, and the Body Politick, 1250–1750*, Bloomington–Indianapolis 2008, pp. 282–294.

¹¹² Alessandro Arcangeli, “Dance and Punishment,” *Dance Research* 1992, Vol. 10, No. 2, pp. 30–42.

reason to mobilize such rhetorical threats against it. On the other hand, at the end of the Middle Ages the Church itself was not always sure that these threats were, indeed, necessary. Its more moderate representatives were less prone to limit life to a concern for the transcendental, and even spoke of dance with a certain affection. Albertus Magnus, who became Dean of the Theological Department of the University of Paris in 1245, stressed that recreation, including dance, if organized correctly, was salubrious to overall human development.¹¹³ A similar view was later held by a student of Albertus, St. Thomas, who joined his beloved Aristotle in recalling that a good life requires the proper cultivation of the art of play (*eutrapelia*), in which dance may have its part.¹¹⁴ As such, a proper sort of dance could be present in religious ceremonies or, more generally, in the public space.

The churchyard was used for dancing and feasting by the Lord of Misrule and his merry men. The church itself was the setting for the parish “wake” (French *veillée*, Italian *veglia*). On the eve of the feast of the patron saint, the parishioners might spend the night in church, eating and drinking, singing and dancing.¹¹⁵

This upset some of the clergy, but others viewed it favorably, sometimes even taking part in the kinetic pleasures of the pious folk.

As we can see, dancing took place not only in the villages, but in the cities as well, which adapted the secular folk kinetic energy for the purposes of the new social space. We have reports from thirteenth-century Paris, from surviving memoirs of university students, and one in particular named Henri Bate. He wrote that he knew all kind of popular songs quite well, and that, as a *trouvère*, he created them, and was a live, agreeable, and courteous circle-dance leader. These were recreations, he added, that were no real harm to young people’s studies.¹¹⁶ This means that dance must have played a substantial social role in this central city to the European culture of the time. This is confirmed in other sources. People danced not only for fun, as in these dances organized by students, but also during official ceremonies, such as those held in 1313 in honor of a visit by King Edward II of England.¹¹⁷ It was when dance appeared during various kinds of ceremonies, that it became more sophisticated.

The impulse that drove city-dwellers to dance was very much like the one that came out during folk games – pleasure was key. A change appeared when dance arrived in the aristocratic palaces. The dances between damsels and knights were

¹¹³ From: Karen Silen, “Dance in Late Thirteenth-Century Paris,” in: Nevile (ed.), *Dance, Spectacle...*, p. 70.

¹¹⁴ Arcangeli, “Dance under Trial...,” p. 139; idem, “Moral Views...,” pp. 285–286.

¹¹⁵ Peter Burke, *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe*, New York 2009, pp. 154–155.

¹¹⁶ Silen, “Dance in Late Thirteenth-Century Paris,” p. 67.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., p. 71.

not, admittedly, a spiritual dance of angels, they were certainly an earthly sort of entertainment, yet the form had to be different, for the pleasures of the elite could not be simple pleasures. The element of sublimation was tied to a striving for differentiation that was characteristic of the court culture of the late Middle Ages. As Norbert Elias noted: “the great feudal lords were [...] the richest and most powerful men in their region, and with [the opportunities opening up to them at the time] grew the desire to express this position by the splendor of their courts.”¹¹⁸ This does not mean that courtly dances were the opposite of folk dances. We were more dealing with a mechanism of adaptation: “The nobility regularly took over lively dance forms from the peasantry, gradually made them more sedate, and so had to borrow once more.”¹¹⁹ This meant someone was needed to do the adapting – and this was the dancing master.

The appearance of wealthy feudal lords was linked to structural transformations that began to affect Europe in the mid-eleventh century. The natural economy began gradually phasing toward a goods economy. Trade centers were created, in which the bourgeois strata gained power, a fact exploited by the wealthy who “took care” of them. The prevailing model of chivalry, chiefly connected to battle, began slowly merging with a model based on courtesy, as Elias describes in depth.¹²⁰ To emphasize their prestige, the wealthy magnates sponsored the sumptuous courtly life, which led to them surrounding themselves with artists of all stripes, including poets (in Provence they were called troubadours, and in the northern parts of France, *trouvères*), most of ten landless nobility, but also from bourgeois or even rural backgrounds. They sought to display their value by developing a new model of interpersonal contact, which then became a point of reference for their lords, often through the intermediary of courtly ladies. The concept of good manners, or courtesy, was key to this model (in French, “court” is *cour*).¹²¹ This also had an impact on dance culture, in which the equivalent of the troubadour became the dance teacher.

At the twilight of the Middle Ages there was a gradual transition from the relatively homogeneous folk kinetics to the increasingly diversified dances at court¹²² and in other communities. First of all, the tradition of wandering actors/dancers/

¹¹⁸ Norbert Elias, *The Civilizing Process: Sociogenetic and Psychogenetic Investigations*, trans. Edmund Jephcott, Oxford 2000, p. 244.

¹¹⁹ Burke, *Popular Culture...*, p. 97.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 350–371.

¹²¹ Peter Burke, “The Courtier,” in: Eugenio Garin (ed.), *Renaissance Characters*, trans. Lydia G. Cochrane, Chicago 1988, pp. 98–122. We should stress that “Courtly love, *l’amour courtois*, was a name given in 1883 to what the Middle Ages called *fin’amors*; it was not born suddenly in the minds of a couple of troubadours. It derived, in part, from the Ovid, and Arabic-Andalusian and religious poetry” (Jean Claude Bologne, *Historia uwodzenia. Od Antyku do dziś*, trans. Katarzyna Marczevska, Warsaw 2012, p. 62). The Arabic influence on the culture of the troubadours is stressed by Goody in *Renaissances...*, pp. 39–40.

¹²² Cf. F. Hoerburger, “Dance and Dance Music of the 16th Century and Their Relations to Folk Dance and Folk Music,” *Studia Musicologica Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 1965, Vol. 7, fasc. 1/4,

mimes, reaching back to antiquity and denounced by the Church, was still alive and well; known as histrions, minstrels, or jugglers, they demonstrated considerable physical virtuosity for their day.¹²³ They came from a folk milieu, but they often visited the courts, contributing solo dance shows to their culture. Influenced by the troubadours, with whom the minstrels often crossed paths, the show dances became increasingly subtle and lyrical. Second, vivacious dances were performed in the cities, joining people in couples, but also, with the development of a work culture tied to the guilds, dances depicting particular occupations became popular, as a kind of social integration for the dancers. These dances built professional identities, a sense of occupational pride, and strengthened bonds and competition between various guilds.¹²⁴ Finally, there was a luxuriant growth of the most carefully arranged and visually splendid ceremonial dances, which the dancing masters began to oversee. They too built a sense of bonds – in this case, between the members of the higher social spheres; they also assisted in creating the splendor to confirm high status.

We know precious little about the choreographies of medieval dance, apart from the fact that they were mainly for groups. This communal aspect is of the utmost importance here. We should also stress these dances' relative technical simplicity compared to the minstrels and jugglers. From the short surviving literary fragments on medieval forms of dance we can conclude that, for the people of this era, the most important part of dance was the opportunity to come together. Dance could be more sublime, as in the courtly world of the troubadours, or more down-to-earth, as in the student dances, yet the communal kinetic experience was almost invariably at its heart. This is confirmed by analyses of the prevailing form of dance in the late Middle Ages – the *carole*.

At present, specialists debate several issues regarding the *carole*. Some assert that it was a general term that covers a variety of forms, and that it is basically synonymous with “dance.” Others believe that it was a kind of dance, but there is no consensus as to whether it was a circle or line dance. We will concur with Robert Mullally, who devoted a thoroughly documented work to the *carole*, at present the best source of information on the dance of the late Middle Ages.¹²⁵ Mullally

Papers Read at the International Folk Music Council (IFMC) Conference Held in Budapest in August 1964, pp. 79–83.

¹²³ Schmitt writes compellingly on jugglers in, *Gest...*, pp. 274–288. He shows that the Church made use of this tradition: “If David was not ashamed to dance naked in front of his servants, the gestures of consolation the priests copied from the jugglers would be apprehended graciously by God. This is the world turned upside-down: the priests stand in for the histrions” (*ibid.*, p. 288). On the medieval Church's borrowing of forms of communication from ancient pantomime, see also Burke, *Popular Culture...*, pp. 158, 165, and Carol Lee, *Ballet in Western Culture: A History of Its Origin and Evolution*, London–New York 2002, p. 8.

¹²⁴ Lee, *Ballet...*, pp. 8–9.

¹²⁵ Robert Mullally, *The Carole: A Study of a Medieval Dance*, Farnham–Burlington, VT 2011. This book is an edited version of Mullally's PhD, with the slightly altered title *The Carole: A Study of*

argues that the *carole* was a circle dance accompanied by song. He distinguishes it from the *tresche*, another group dance with a simple choreographic structure, which was, however, danced in a line or as a human chain. This difference is subtle and ultimately of secondary importance, as both forms executed the same ideal, which we might call a medieval kinetic dance utopia. To illuminate this, we might read a fragment from the first part of *The Romance of the Rose*, describing a *carole*. This occurs in the lines following 726, where the main protagonist dreams he is in the Garden of Pleasure and begins to watch its dancing inhabitants:

[N]o man living ever saw such fair folk. These people of whom I speak had begun to dance, and a lady was singing to them, whose name was Joy.

[...]

Then you might have seen the dancers move and the people tread daintily, executing many fine steps and turns on the fresh grass.

[...]

Two very charming maidens with their hair in a single braid and dressed only in their tunics were led into the dance by Pleasure, who bore himself most nobly; but I need not say how beautifully they danced: one would approach the other very elegantly, and when they were close together, their lips would touch in such a way that you might have thought they were kissing each other's faces. They knew well how to sway in the dance. I cannot describe it to you, but as long as I could have seen these people thus exerting themselves in the rounds and dances, I would never have wanted to move.¹²⁶

Let us turn our attention to a few aspects of the protagonist's vision. First, to the element of idealization, to the constant emphasis on the beauty of the scene. This dance is on the verge of dream and waking. A spiritual, almost transcendental element is emphasized. Yet not at the expense of the sensual, the erotic, which permeates the entire sequence, culminating in the description of the dance of two girls led to the middle of the circle by Pleasure. Here we come to the composition of the dance, which incorporates two elements. On the one hand, the poem idealizes a circular community, which is constituted, as we see from the iconography associated with the *Romance* (Ills. 4, 5),¹²⁷ by a group participating in a democratic kinetic experience. The genders are mixed, the figures are leveled to the same status, an equality arises from an identical choreography, which every member of the circle is to perform. The circular form of the *carole* is essentially democratic. In this sense, dance can be seen as fundamentally communal, focused inward, strengthening the bonds between the performers.

a Medieval French Dance. Because this PhD thesis is widely available at: <https://kclpure.kcl.ac.uk/portal/files/2925107/539785.pdf> (accessed: 1.03.2015), this is the work we shall be referencing.

¹²⁶ Guillaume de Lorris, Jean de Meun, *The Romance of the Rose*, trans. Frances Horgan, Oxford–New York 2008, p. 13.

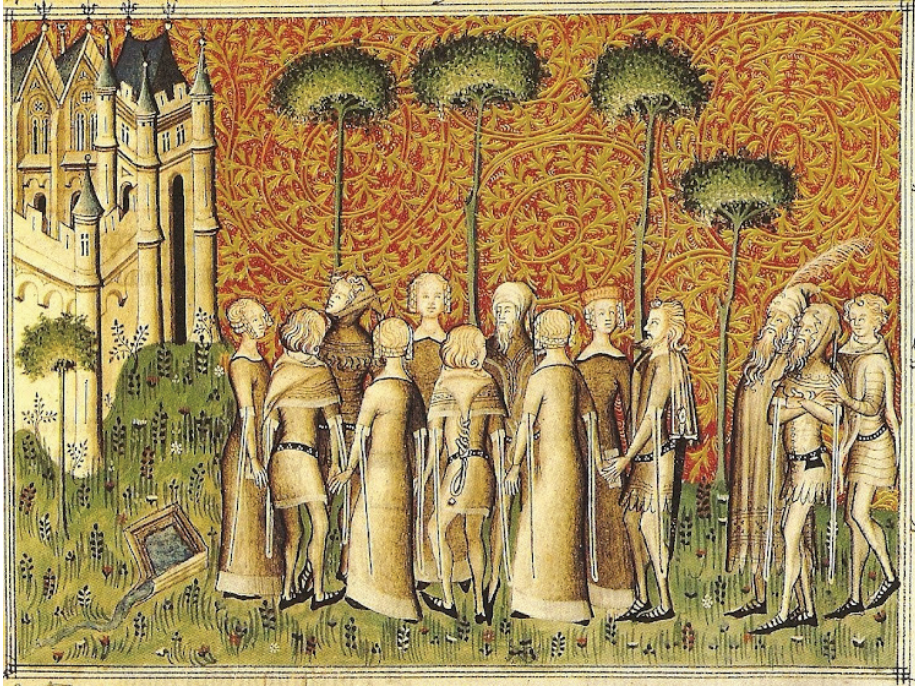
¹²⁷ This is described by Mullally, *The Carole: A Study of a Medieval French Dance*, pp. 209–213.



4. Unknown, miniature illustrating the *Roman de la Rose* by Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun, second half of the 14th century



5. Meister des Rosenromans, miniature illustrating the *Roman de la Rose* by Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun, ca. 1420–1430



6. Unknown, miniature illustrating the *Remede de Fortune* (Medicine for Destiny) by Guillaume de Machaut depicting a medieval *carole*, 14th–15th c.

On the other hand, there is a trio dancing in the community in Guillaume’s vision, or in fact a duo of two girls, coming in more intimate contact with each other than the dancers in the circle surrounding them. It is this intimate contact between these dancers that eroticizes the community, giving it a special appeal. The poetic image captures a fleeting touch, hovering between unity and separation, grazing each other’s skin. Line 769 deserves special attention: “their lips would touch.” This is where the form breaks down, suggesting perhaps that this is a spiritual dance, as described by Ambrose and Pseudo-Dionysius. Guillaume observes a dance of bodies in which the earthly and the transcendental enter an erotic relation. Here we arrive at the third point. The politics of the late Middle Ages, as expressed in this fragment of the *Romance*, the kinetic politics in court circles, straddling two cultures – folk and religious, earthly and mystical – is one in which the body is foregrounded, becoming a multi-aspectual experience.

The *Romance* presented this dialogue of bodies – bodies that were physical, mystical, and sociable. The *carole* form contributed here, as a testimony to the gradual physical finesse that people were acquiring in their interactions (Ill. 6). In the late Middle Ages, “folk dances became more organized, gaining names that indicated

a gradual ordering of steps, patterns, and their accompanying rhythms.”¹²⁸ Thus, the *carole*, as Mullally confirms, and the *Romance of the Rose* subtly depicts, is community raised to a higher level. Here folk culture is tinted with mystical elation. The effect is a symbiosis between the barbarian (the circle dance), and ancient (sublime sensuality, the beauty of geometry), and the Christian (mystical intimacy). We should particularly single out this final element, because court circles in the late Middle Ages saw the development of kinetic forms in which intimacy and the individuality sprouting within it could fully develop.

In French, in addition to the words *carole* and *danse*, *bal* was used in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries; apart from its general meaning (a dance), Mullally finds something more specific in it. The *bal* “seems to indicate a more theatrical kind of dance with movements and steps quite distinct from those of the *carole*.”¹²⁹ In the knightly romances and poetry of the period, we seem to find the suggestion that dance can be a form of self-presentation, a show chiefly performed for the opposite sex.¹³⁰ Kinetic games between people appeared, with the aim of accentuating individuality, but also of inviting others to share a situation of intimacy within a wider community. This was how couples dancing was born.

Obviously, people danced in couples in folk culture.¹³¹ Yet we do not know if there were forms of dance based on a pair of performers. We do encounter these forms in the court culture, which formalized aspects of touch. Mullally points to the latter half of the fourteenth century, when the term *hove danse* (Dutch: *hof dans*, Ger. *Hof tanz*) appeared in literature, meaning court dance (Ill. 7). This was a couples dance, and, according to the writings of the famed chronicler Jean Froissart, for one, it was preceded by a collective *carole*.¹³² The term *danse* in this context means a different kind of kinetic experience than the *carole*. People joined in couples that, admittedly, did not isolate themselves, yet the intimacy between two people was increased, and simultaneously, made sublime.

We should note the process that Elias reconstructs here – the rise of women’s social position in the culture of the late Middle Ages:

the women surpassed [the men] in the sphere of peaceful society. [...] The wealth of the great courts gave the woman the possibility of filling her leisure time and pursuing [...] luxury interests. She could attract poets, singers, and learned clerics. And so it was about women that the first circles of peaceful intellectual activity were established.¹³³

¹²⁸ Lee, *Ballet...*, p. 10.

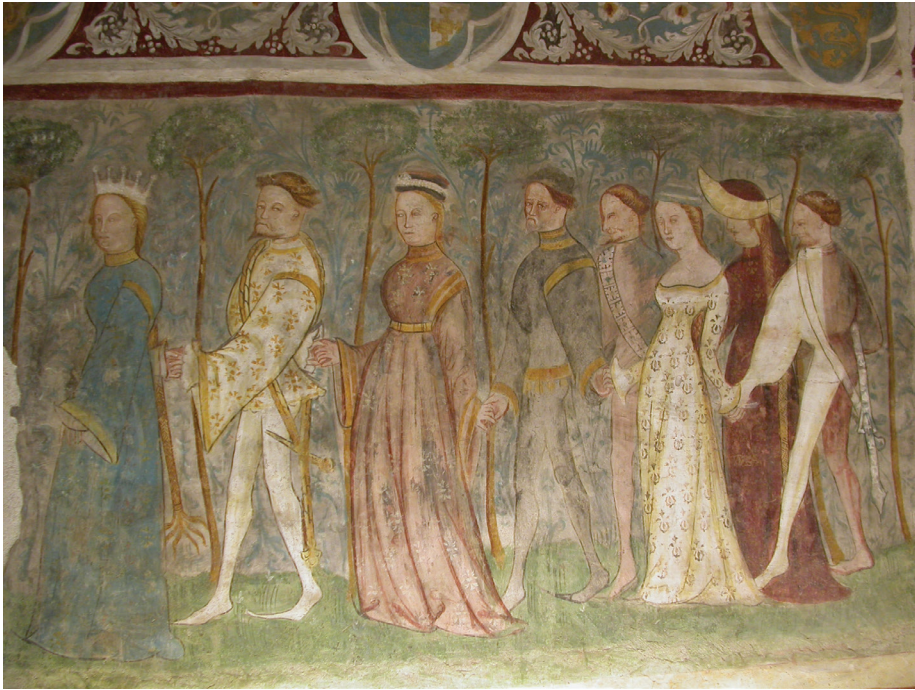
¹²⁹ Mullally, *The Carole: A Study of a Medieval French Dance*, p. 56.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 129–130.

¹³¹ Lee, *Ballet...*, pp. 10–11.

¹³² Mullally, *The Carole: A Study of a Medieval French Dance*, pp. 118–120.

¹³³ Elias, *The Civilizing Process...*, p. 249.



7. Unknown, fresco depicting a medieval court dance (*hove danse*), 14th–15th c.

Probably it was in these “circles” that more refined forms of couples dances were created. These were the kinetic equivalents of the troubadours’ love poetry, in which the sublime was tied to the unattainable object of one’s affections. The troubadour praised his lady in words or dance, though she was beyond his reach: “it was only the relation of a socially inferior and dependent man to a woman of higher rank that led to the restraint, renunciation and the consequent transformation of drives.”¹³⁴ This meant dance became less free, one could permit oneself far less in an erotic sense. Touch was systematized. Hence the couples dance, on the one hand, emphasized male-female relations, and on the other, desexualized them.

In this period, couples dances began to be accompanied by instrumental music, and not, as was in the *carole*, mainly song.¹³⁵ Steps became more complicated and movements more refined, intricate, as a result of individual dancers paying more attention to form. Attentiveness to form did not preclude pleasure, however; in fact, this was its aim. This was a critical moment. At the end of the fourteenth century, the secular element in dance came to the fore, connected with the *hove danse*.

¹³⁴ Ibid., p. 254.

¹³⁵ Mullally, *The Carole: A Study of a Medieval French Dance*, pp. 132–135.

Dance as courtly entertainment allowed the upper echelons to have a pleasant time to the accompaniment of instruments, which were often brass, and therefore joyful, giving life to the movements; this takes us to modern-era kinesis (Ills. 8, 9). To feel it, we may listen to surviving late-medieval dances known as *estampie* (Ital. *istampitta/istanpitta*).¹³⁶ This was the music that accompanied the *hove danse*.¹³⁷ It has nobility, a rhythmic step, something persistent and sliding, but also an intricate structure, and it breathes with a grazing touch, as Guillaume de Lorris wrote. The compositions by the troubadours have a charming weightlessness and grace, but also a sensual tension. They join a lightness with a rhythmic deliberation. This music is just as multidimensional as the dance we have described.

Michele Temple has shown that the Italian late-fourteenth-century *istampitta* is clearly influenced by Arabic music culture.¹³⁸ We can only speculate if the Arabic element did not also affect the steps, and thus if the modern kinesis was constructed at the intersection of cultures. The first Christians, after all, adopted the Jewish acceptance of joyful dance to celebrate God. For the Arabs, too, at least during their culture's most rapid development, when it had the greatest impact on Europe, dance was a basic form of self-expression, and above all, a way for the two sexes to mingle, with sensual and religious elements intertwined. The same went for the emerging European court culture, which flourished during the Renaissance. The *hove danse* with its accompanying *estampie* created a new kinetic space – a place for couples to be public, intimate, and performative all at once. As Carol Lee notes, dance became a show:

a dance for two performed by one couple at a time, while the others [...] watched. Without the constraints of being linked in a circle or line, they danced freely and for their own pleasure, the male surely delighting in showing off the charms of his partner and she, in turn, flattered by his presentation of her to viewers. [...] the *estampie*¹³⁹ was directed to onlookers, whereas the *carole* circled or wandered indifferently.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁶ We might recommend, for instance, the two-disc edition of *Istampitta* containing Medieval dances performed by New York's Ensemble for Early Music, Lyricord Music, Vol. I: 1995, Vol. II: 1996. *Medieval Dance Music "A L'Estampida"*, Grammercy Records 2003, is also worth investigating.

¹³⁷ Mullally, *The Carole: A Study of a Medieval French Dance*, pp. 191–193.

¹³⁸ Michele Temple, *The Middle Eastern Influence on Late Medieval Italian Dances: Origins of the 29987 Istampittas*, Lewiston–Queenston–Lampeter 2001.

¹³⁹ Lee believes that the *estampie* was a kind of dance in the sense of both music and movement (*Ballet...*, p. 18). Other scholars agree, such as Joan Rimmer, who writes: "it was not communal like *carole*, but for a single couple or couples in sequence, and earlier, sometimes an exhibitionist solo man's dance. It is the first recorded Western European dance type with what is known as a 'front,' that is, danced first towards a personage or point then in reverse back to the starting place, a floor pattern exactly paralleled in the open and closed forms of each section of the *estampie*-related music" ("Medieval Instrumental Dance Music," *Music & Letters* 1991, Vol. 72, No. 1, p. 64). Mullally, in turn, uses the term *estampie* only for defined musical forms in *The Carole: A Study of a Medieval French Dance*.

¹⁴⁰ Lee, *Ballet...*, p. 18.



8. Luca della Robbia,
Cantoria (detail),
a sculpted decorative
panel for the choir,
ca. 1438



9. Luca della Robbia,
Cantoria (detail),
a sculpted decorative
panel for the choir,
ca. 1438



10. Unknown, miniature illustrating the *De pratica seu arte tripudii* (On the Practice or Art of Dancing) manuscript by Guglielmo Ebreo, depicting an early Renaissance dance, probably a *bassadanza*, ca. 1463

Over time, the *hoves danses* were replaced in France by *basses danses*, which we shall explore in the next chapter; this was a more developed form of couples dance (Ill. 10). Yet this change would not usher in an entirely new quality, it would only continue a trend spreading across all of Europe. In its refined form, dance turned out to be just as infectious a phenomenon as the folk dance of pure joy and fertility. The beauty that derived from form seduced the courts at Provence and Burgundy, but also other places, such as the Italian cities undergoing turbulent social transformations.¹⁴¹

¹⁴¹ On how the Provençal culture of the thirteenth century was implanted in Italy by the troubadours, both in the aristocracy and the educated bourgeoisie, see Jean-Claude Maire Vigueur, *Rycerze i mieszczanie. Wojna, konflikty i społeczeństwo w średniowiecznych Włoszech*, trans. Anna Gabryś, Warsaw 2008, pp. 302–304.



11. Ambrogio Lorenzetti, *Allegoria ed Effetti del Buono e del Cattivo Governo* (Allegory of the Effects of Good and Bad Rule), fresco (detail), ca. 1338–1339

The Italians, of course, had danced before the works by Domenico, Cornazano, and Guglielmo were published. The dancing masters' efforts to systematize dance would not have been possible if there had not previously been a dance culture. What might this have looked like? In the music accompanying Italian dances, as we have mentioned, we find clear Arabic influences. Their sensuality has been immortalized in famous fourteenth-century frescoes, which are a basic source of how we imagine the pre-Renaissance forms of dance in Italy. In 1338–1339, Ambrogio Lorenzetti created *Allegoria ed Effetti del Buono e del Cattivo Governo* (*The Allegory of Good and Bad Government*) in Siena. Part of this monumental composition is “Effects of Good Government in the City and Country,” in which we see a group of women performing a chain-dance, with the highly characteristic trope of passing under the hands of two dancers interwoven to make a bridge (Ill. 11). This trope endures to this day, in the Polonez, for instance. In Lorenzetti we are struck by the full acceptance of this type of activity, this secular dance expressing joy that springs from good governance. The kinetic harmony illustrates the desired social harmony. At the same time, this dance, though simple, is in no way mundane. There is a sophisticated physicality, in which the Neoplatonic ideal gives shape to the folk impulse. We could say the same for the wall painting *Esaltazione dell'ordine domenicano* (*The Exaltation of the Dominican Order*)

in Florence, in the Santa Maria Novella Church, created by Andrea di Bonaiuto (1366).¹⁴² Here too, dance (which is not the main subject of the fresco, only one of the details) has little in common with folk vivacity, it comes across as refined for its day,¹⁴³ even idealized (Ill. 12). We see two groups of dancers. One seems to be dancing a *carole* in a circle, accompanied by song. The same goes for a second group of dancers, but here it is far more difficult to determine the form of dance. Three figures are lined up, accompanied by a fourth playing a large tambourine (Ill. 13). This could be a *tresche*, but this is pure speculation. Yet establishing the concrete form is less vital to us than calling attention to the presence of a secular dance in a religious picture. This quite clearly shows that dance was part of a vivid kinetic politics in Italy even as it was entering the Modern Era – an ideal by which the earthly structure of dance was meant to reflect an ideal, transcendental structure, to be a space for the sensory enactment of the spiritual in a controlled and formalized manner.

We often find the image of dance as a structured, elevated community in the *trecento*. It appears, for example, in the *Divine Comedy*, in which Dante most often uses the term *carola*. This simply means “dance,” not a specific form, yet the term has the metaphysical level that was described at the time using the word *carola*, and not *danza* (Fr. *danse*) or *ballo* (Fr. *bal*). Generally speaking, in Italian literature of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, the most popular term was *danza*. This, however, had more earthly than mystical connotations. This is how it is used in Rinaldo d’Aquino’s love poetry.¹⁴⁴ Much like Jacopone da Todi,¹⁴⁵ however, Dante was interested in dance as a spiritual activity, thus the differing terminology. He is more akin to Ambrose or Pseudo-Dionysius than to Albertus Magnus. The *carola* opening Canto XXIV of the final book of the *Divine Comedy* is a dance of blessed souls in heaven. Its circular movement illustrates the divine adoration of the Lamb. The spirits move at varying speeds, like the parts of a clock. This is the perfection Dante tries to grasp with the term.¹⁴⁶ Yet it is not the only dance the *Divine Comedy* mentions. There are also dances of the damned, which Dante describes as *tresca* and *ridda*. These are now more specialist terms. The first, appearing in Canto XIV of *The Inferno*, signifies a dance that places special importance on the arms and legs. This form is more expressive and dynamic than the *carole*,¹⁴⁷ so Dante uses *tresca* to create a compelling image:

¹⁴² I take the dates of either fresco from: Rimmer, “Medieval Instrumental Dance Music,” p. 62.

¹⁴³ Joan Rimmer points out a characteristic detail that joins the works of Lorenzetti and Bonaiuto – the dancers hold each other’s small, bent fingers (*ibid.*, p. 63).

¹⁴⁴ Mullally, *The Carole: A Study of a Medieval French Dance*, pp. 215–216.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 216–217.

¹⁴⁶ This dancing aspect is preserved in John Ciardi’s translation. Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy*, trans. John Ciardi, New York 1970.

¹⁴⁷ Mullally, *The Carole: A Study of a Medieval French Dance*, pp. 222–223.



12. Andrea di Bonaiuto, fresco in the Santa Maria Novella Basilica (detail), 1366



13. Andrea di Bonaiuto, fresco in the Santa Maria Novella Basilica (detail), 1366

In a never-ending fit upon these sands,
 the arms of the damned twiched all about their bodies
 now here, now there, brushing away the brands.¹⁴⁸

This “fit” in Ciardi’s translation is a *tresca* in the original, which specialists reconstruct as a lively show dance, clearly derived from the folk-histrion tradition. Along with the great majority of the church communities, Dante disapproved of this dance. It was accused of being excessive, resulting in a lack of harmony. The poet clearly comes out in favor of the circular forms, and against the stilted and meandering ones. This becomes apparent when we look at another form of dance in Dante – the *ridda*. We know little about this variant, apart from the fact that it was compared to the movement of water,¹⁴⁹ for its tumult, the crashing of waves, as Dante describes it in Canto VII of *The Inferno*. Again, this was a secular dance, an outlet for social pleasure, which Dante was incapable of fully accepting.

Italian culture had to wait for the appearance of its other great literary master of the *trecento*, Boccaccio, for an acceptance of dance not only metaphysical and

¹⁴⁸ Dante, *The Divine Comedy*, p. 114.

¹⁴⁹ Mullally, *The Carole: A Study of a Medieval French Dance*, pp. 228–232.

spiritual, but also earthly. The *Decameron* uses various terms – *danza*, *ballo*, *carola* – essentially synonymously.¹⁵⁰ Boccaccio is less interested in technical differences than in capturing the experience of dance as a whole.

An important context for Boccaccio's way of thinking is the plague. The epidemic that was consuming Europe and appears in the *Decameron* brought along a cultural shock. Human life was exposed as fragile, and therefore more appreciated. Everyday pleasures became more treasured in uncertain times. Yet we cannot speak of a counter-epidemic of hedonism. A pessimistic tone prevailed in Italian culture at the time. Death cast a pall over everyday life, permeating its every aspect. This included dance – as in the *danse macabre* we know from countless poems and depictions. On the one side a dance of Death, on the other a dance of the dead.¹⁵¹ This motif is grotesque and nearly hysterical, though it practically never translated into practice.¹⁵² The dance that was actually performed in those difficult times was more often an escape, a stubborn clinging to life rather than a celebration of death. The prose of Boccaccio shows that in the face of the plague, at least some danced with charm, grace, and joy, accompanied by instruments and charming songs.

The *Decameron* is a tale of people (mainly women) fleeing from a plague. They are aristocrats, spending time in the country, in secluded homes, whiling away the hours by telling stories, eating, drinking, playing games and music, and dancing. These last two activities wind through the entire narrative. In the prologue we observe the protagonists who, having arrived at their first place of shelter, choose the queen of the day to lead their activities. After a meal, she orders instruments to be brought. Two musicians begin to play a dance melody. Then, Boccaccio writes, “the Queen, having sent the servants away to eat, formed a circle with the other ladies and the two young men, and all began dancing [in the Italian: *carole*] at a state-ly pace.”¹⁵³ The scene is quite typical for the history of dance to come. Dances often appear in *The Decameron* at the end of the day, as they do on Day One. They are an important form of entertainment, a way of enjoying company, building an exclusive community of those who could afford (in a monetary sense) to flee the plague.

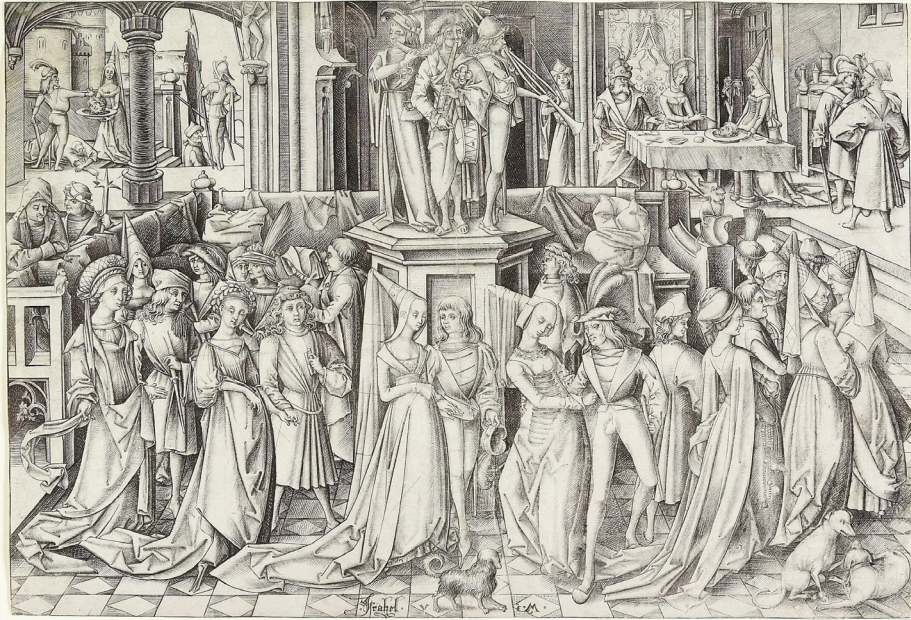
With Boccaccio we enter an aristocratic world in which Guillaume de Lorris' vision comes to life, acquiring a most earthly hue (Ills. 14, 15). Dance in the *Decameron* is no longer one of two things – a spiritual experience of salvation or a corporeal state of damnation – as it was in Dante. The odium is gone from physicality. Hell is elsewhere. It came from the same side as salvation, so it was perhaps not right to believe naively that the human body was cursed. The curse was easier to locate,

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., pp. 218–225, 236–237.

¹⁵¹ On the images of death in the late Middle Ages, and in particular the dances of death, cf. Huizinga, *Autumn...*, pp. 156–172.

¹⁵² Lee, *Ballet...*, pp. 12–13. The author describes dances performed in cemeteries, but not, strictly speaking, *danses macabres*.

¹⁵³ Giovanni Boccaccio, *Decameron*, trans. Wayne A. Rebhorn, New York 2015, p. 39.



14. Israhel van Meckenem, *Der Tanz der Herodias* (The Dance of the Daughters of Herodias), copper plate, 15th c.



15. Unknown, nineteenth-century graphic work based on a miniature by Pierre Wolgemuth, *Weihnachtstanz* (Christmas Eve Dance), placed in *Liber Cronicarum* of 1493

it was in the pestilential air, and the body ought no longer to have been burdened by an unbearable sense of guilt. In this revolt is an essential craving, a long-suppressed energy. As if dance, albeit filtered through the sieve of courtly sophistication, had returned to the kinetic desire of life characteristic of cultures less complex than those of Christian Europe. Let us look at the end of Day Six. “The King [elected for that day], who was in a merry mood, sent for Tindaro and ordered him to produce his bagpipe. To its strains he then had them do a fair number of dances, after which, since a good part of the night had already passed he told them, each and every one, that they should go to sleep.”¹⁵⁴ When the world is dying all around, there is a stubborn longing for kinetic pleasures. The dancers must be told to rest, because they will not stop dancing of their own accord. The conclusion we might draw from the recurrent dances at day’s end in *The Decameron* is basically of Renaissance origin. If we are to dance, it should be passionate, with a love for life. This was a dance, we should add, that not everyone could join, as it entailed skills obtained through a proper education.

Humanism and Dance

The Renaissance took its beginning from a great many overlapping phenomena, including the plague. It would seem that the experience of the pestilence played a major role on a physical level, which is our subject of interest. It provided a crucial impulse to love the body more, to care more for the body, and brought a consciousness of its frailty. The material aspect of the body was deeply felt in medieval times, obviously. The fourteenth-century plague was a kind of apogee of “physiological” corporeality – sometimes as a corpse. This is why the healthy body could again seem beautiful, and become a great asset. It is also why sensual love began to be appreciated. Boccaccio writes about this in his author’s note to the *Decameron*, before moving on to the fourth day. In this beautiful text, he demands the right to love women, and thus by extension, to feel passion, sensuality, to live in the here and now. The sociable body prevails in him, he stands up for its autonomy, presents it as a beacon of hope and love. This is a trope that we shall find later in the treatises of the dancing masters.

We might call the Italian fifteenth century the triumph of the sociable body. On the one hand, it was the stage of constant conflicts, the political atmosphere was generally quite tense; on the other – in opposition to this tension, as it were – a culture of increasingly sophisticated social forms flourished. People enjoyed themselves, savoring each other’s company and accumulating wealth. Renaissance Italy

¹⁵⁴ Boccaccio, *Decameron*, p. 517.

was very much a place of excess – balls, feasts, spectacles, games, and dance. We still have many descriptions of the celebrations of those times: held on holidays, for guests of honor, to mark important events in the lives of the governing families.¹⁵⁵ These descriptions show that dance was a major presence in Italians' lives. Only the elite are portrayed, but we may assume that dance also played a considerable role on the lower rungs of society. It was not a simple show of hedonism, it was more a complex power game, reflecting the transformations of society. The spectacles, games, and dances of Renaissance Italy were essentially political – they gave the social sphere rhythm and structure.

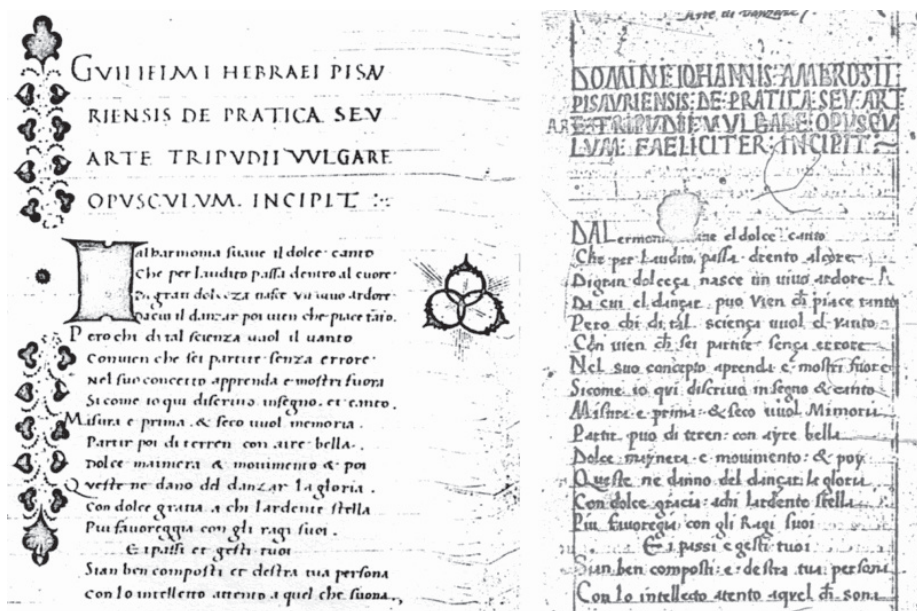
Italian society danced often and enthusiastically, and increasingly gave thought to dance, approaching it more systematically. This was tied, on the one hand, to the spread of ideas pertaining to temporal matters. The Renaissance wrote about and discussed a growing number of topics. It was also connected to the return of the ancient model of public discourse on earthly matters – politics, the public space, and spectacles. This does not mean these were not discussed in the Middle Ages, yet the Renaissance brought a considerable revival of these issues. This is a familiar story, and need not be repeated. On the other hand, we had an unprecedented phenomenon – the first treatises on dance detailing specific choreographies (Ill. 16). This sort of text was unknown in antiquity. Of course, writing about dance itself was an ancient notion. Yet the Italian Renaissance began writing about dance in a new way, and this was because the nature of dance had changed.

The texts that interest us are often referred to as the tradition of Domenico da Piacenza, because the other two authors, Antonio Cornazano and Guglielmo Ebreo da Pesaro (Giovanni Ambrosio¹⁵⁶), called him the maestro. Domenico was not the first, nor the only dancing master in the mid-century. Jennifer Nevile calls attention to the quite varied dance culture in Italy compared to other court cultures across Europe, from at least the thirteenth century on.¹⁵⁷ We have already looked at Boccaccio, who might be called the chronicler of the dance sensitivity of the latter half of the fourteenth century. This is a subtle sensitivity, its form greatly influenced by the increasing professionalization of dance education, which arose

¹⁵⁵ Several of these descriptions are cited by A. William Smith in the introduction to *Fifteenth-Century...*, pp. XI–XXII. A translation of the whole of an anonymous description of Renaissance celebrations of April 1459 in Florence in tribute to the visiting Pope Pius II and successor to the Prince of Milan, Galeazzo Maria Sforza, can be found in the first appendix to: Jennifer Nevile, *The Eloquent Body: Dance and Humanist Culture in Fifteenth-Century Italy*, Bloomington 2004. We should mention that Nevile's excellent book is a central point of reference for our explorations in this chapter.

¹⁵⁶ As a mature adult, after the release of the first edition (which scholars call PnG) of his treatise, Guglielmo probably converted from Judaism to Christianity, which meant changing his first and last name. The second edition (known as PnA; this will be our main reference, as it repeats most of PnG, while adding new parts) was signed Giovanni Ambrosio. To keep from complicating things excessively, we will refer to him by his given name.

¹⁵⁷ Nevile, *The Eloquent Body...*, pp. 16–19.



16. Guglielmo Ebreo, *De pratica seu arte tripudii* (On the Practice or Art of Dancing) manuscript, ca. 1463

from and responded to the needs of society. The upper echelons no longer wanted to dance like the country folk, they wanted to be more refined. This was taught by dancing masters like Guglielmo's father, Moses of Sicily who came to the court in Pesaro in the 1430s.¹⁵⁸ Yet Domenico was the first to write a treatise – the aforementioned *Della arte di ballare et danzare*.¹⁵⁹

We know little about his life, yet one piece of information is especially intriguing. Domenico was a knight of the Golden Spur. The fact of his being sworn in as a knight might stand as evidence that dancing masters enjoyed social prestige and it was natural to place them among the upper classes, though an invisible wall still divided them from the patrons. This is Jennifer Nevile's opinion, citing the fact that dancing masters had direct access to the elite. They were allowed to have physical contact with them. They often danced with the most elevated ladies – with the daughters, wives, and sisters of their wealthy sponsors.¹⁶⁰ If the dance teachers

¹⁵⁸ A. William Smith, *Fifteenth-Century...*, p. 109.

¹⁵⁹ As of yet, two earlier renaissance work on dance has been discovered.

¹⁶⁰ Nevile, *The Eloquent Body...*, pp. 15–16. On the role of women in one of the more significant Italian families, the d'Este house, in the dance culture at the turn of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, see: Barbara Sparti, "Isabella and the Dancing Este Brides, 1473–1514," in: Lynn Matluck Brooks (ed.), *Women's Work: Making Dance in Europe before 1800*, Madison, WI–London 2007, pp. 19–48.

were less valued, such public contacts would surely have been forbidden. Domenico's knighthood only confirms this recognition. Barbara Sparti takes an entirely different view of the dancing masters, citing a wide variety of material to defend the thesis that their position was subordinate.¹⁶¹ Dancing masters earned relatively little. The source materials describing dance ceremonies focus on the costumes and the food, not the dance. An education in the humanities did not include dance as a separate subject. This means, according to Sparti, it was of no special importance, it was only one of many elements of society culture and consumption for show. In this context, dance treatises were an attempt to gain an existence, to give prestige to an activity that was not treated seriously at all. Whatever the case, it remains intriguing that in Renaissance Italy the first modern dance theorist emerged. Let us try to appreciate this fact in as wide a context as possible.

Domenico, like his students, moved in aristocratic circles.¹⁶² Yet this was an aristocracy in constant transformation. One look at the most important dance centers of the period might give us the impression that mainly the traditional nobility were fond of dance, hiring troubadours and implanting a Provençal-style court culture in Italy. Domenico, Cornazano, and Guglielmo appeared in the celebrated courts of Ferrara, Naples, Florence, Urbino, and Milan. Yet when we look at these courts more closely, we see that only some of those who governed them had been aristocratic families for generations. This was the case with the d'Este family in Ferrara and the Montefeltro in Novafeltria, but in two major cultural centers of the fifteenth century – Florence and Milan – the ruling families had gained their aristocratic titles through very modern activities: banking (the Medicis in Florence) and mercenary armies (the Sforzas in Milan). This was new aristocracy, then, to match the new movements of growth that we described at the opening of the chapter.

Let us have a look at the culture tied to the emergence of the new aristocratic elite from the bourgeoisie. Above all, initiative and individual action were accentuated. Tradition was perceived as ballast, which the outstanding individual could happily discard. During this period we see nearly Nietzschean voices come to the fore, such as this statement by Poggio Bracciolini:

Serious, intelligent and modest men need no laws. Their lives have their own laws, for their education and the formation of their character leads them automatically to

¹⁶¹ Barbara Sparti, "The Function and Status of Dance in the Fifteenth-Century Italian Courts," *Dance Research* 1996, Vol. 14, No. 1, pp. 42–61.

¹⁶² This does not mean that only aristocrats wanted to learn to dance. Outside the courts, among the wealthier bourgeoisie, teachers passed on steps developed with the elite. This was how dances composed for the wealthy were popularized. Vitally, the bourgeoisie's dances were often far from primitive. Surviving sources show that their repertoire was sometimes even more sophisticated and difficult than those transcribed by Domenico and his students. See: Barbara Sparti, "Breaking Down Barriers in the Study of Renaissance and Baroque Dance," *Dance Chronicle* 1996, Vol. 19, No. 3, pp. 256–257.

the exercise of virtues and to good manners... Strong men transgress and reject the laws that seem suitable enough for the weak, for cowards, for pedlars and the miserable rabble, for the lazy and the poor.¹⁶³

Humanism inspired thoughts of humanity as self-creation. A person ceased to be a plaything cast into the world, whose main task was to serve his *vocatio*, to play out some predetermined role. Humanists resuscitated the active ideal.¹⁶⁴ A famous text expressing this worldview is Pico della Mirandola's *Oration on the Dignity of Man*. Here is a fragment where God speaks to man:

We have given you, Adam, no fixed seat or form of your own, no talent peculiar to you alone. This we have done so that whatever seat, whatever form, whatever talent you may judge desirable, these same you may have and possess according to your desire and judgment.¹⁶⁵

As such, the main task of our time on Earth is no longer to make our way to eternity, it is to work on ourselves and the rest of creation. This is why another humanist, Giovanni Pontano, was able to say: "I created myself."¹⁶⁶

Pontano's bold words demonstrate the mobilization that emerged in fifteenth-century Italy and moved on to other European states.

In the middle of the universe, where the earth and the heavens cross paths, the optimism of the Neoplatonists puts [...] man as the ruler who acts and foresees how to act. He, a grain of dust, can, if he wishes, be lord and ruler of the world, who is very like him and who epitomizes him within.¹⁶⁷

The Neoplatonists were not alone in thinking this way. Other Renaissance movements were even bolder. Renaissance thought gloated over human creativity.

The strong were the heart of the new aristocracy – an aristocracy by talent, not blood. In the Renaissance, the individual was no longer evaluated strictly in terms of the social group, strata, or class to which they belonged. The Renaissance, it turned out, was a period when social structures became less binding.

¹⁶³ Quoted in: Eugenio Garin, *Italian Humanism: Philosophy and Civic Life in the Renaissance*, trans. Peter Munz, London 1975, p. 34.

¹⁶⁴ "There was a new emphasis in the Renaissance on human action, on man's role in completing God's creation and bringing the cosmos to its full nature. We see this with Nicholas of Cusa, for instance, and later with Bovillus. And one can argue that the emphasis on production of Renaissance magi like Dee and Paracelus helped lay the groundwork for the Baconian revolution" (Charles Taylor, *Sources of Self: The Making of the Modern Identity*, Cambridge 2012, p. 200).

¹⁶⁵ Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *Oration on the Dignity of Man*, trans. Francesco Borghesi, Michael Papio, Massimo Riva, Cambridge 2016, p. 117.

¹⁶⁶ Quoted in: Delumeau, *Cywilizacja odrodzenia*, p. 295.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 307.

People in the ruling class earned themselves general admiration or respect. Strong personalities could develop freely and more plentifully than before. The continual bloody wars, doubt in the authority of the Roman Catholic Church [though not in faith as such], a strong turn in art and literature to the ideals of antiquity, economic progress, and growing wealth, urbanization, the growing popularization of culture, encounters with exotic lands¹⁶⁸ – all this worked in a single direction, creating people who were clever, with greater entrepreneurial capabilities than were once provided by a less mobile, and more hierarchical, disciplined, and rural society.¹⁶⁹

These individuals were the germ of a humanist society.

We should also note that humanism and trade walk hand-in-hand in a mobilizing society. They are two sides of the same coin, used to buy the opportunity to create one's own destiny. The more profitable (and thus, socially important) trade became, the greater the chances of advancement through individual entrepreneurship, and not descent. Biases against trade as a way of life, which medieval Christians had seen as "something disgraceful [...] sordid and shameful,"¹⁷⁰ began disappearing. Moneylending and forms of drawing profit from financial capital alone, which the clergy found even more offensive, were still stigmatized, though less and less, as merchants and bankers found sly means of hiding these activities. Humanism was thus more than an idealistic theory, it was also a worldview of the new elite, built both in opposition to the older elite and to the lower estates. It clearly revealed mechanisms of distinction.¹⁷¹

The new aristocracy was very much in search of an identity. Dance played a considerable role. We should note that the literature highlights a link between early dance theory and humanism.¹⁷² This occurred on a very basic level – humanism initiated a fashion for creating theoretical treatises on activities that had been merely practical. The Renaissance was indebted to the humanists for the demand to be literal. Whatever was not on paper did not enjoy prestige in the most influential social circles. Thus, the very idea of writing dance treatises was humanist in origin. They also owed their form to many humanists. A fondness for antiquity, fragments of dialogue, the development of the specialist vocabulary we find in these texts – all this was inspired by humanism. Yet this is not all. Among the authors of the first

¹⁶⁸ Owing to space limitations, we will not be going more in-depth into geographical discoveries, though these considerably expanded European horizons of thought.

¹⁶⁹ Delumeau, *Cywilizacja odrodzenia*, p. 290.

¹⁷⁰ Aron Gurevich, *Categories of Medieval Culture*, trans. G. L. Campbell, London 1985, p. 272.

¹⁷¹ "It is characteristic that humanists, in speaking of education and upbringing, thought only about children from good families, while Medieval teaching included children from all the social classes, for during this time, the Church needed priests more prepared for their profession. The Renaissance certainly involved an aristocratization of culture and intellectual circles" (Delumeau, *Cywilizacja odrodzenia*, p. 330).

¹⁷² Nevile, *The Eloquent Body...*

theoretical treatises on dance was a humanist *par excellence*, Antonio Cornazano, whose *Libro dell'arte del danzare* (*The Book on the Art of Dancing*, 1455) was merely one of his humanist works.¹⁷³ Cornazano also wrote poetry and comedies, and was the author of a life of the Virgin Mary, an epic about the Sforza clan, and even a treatise on the art of war. He knew many humanists, and was counted among them. Another adherent of humanist culture was Guglielmo, who was the subject of a tribute written for the first edition of *De pratica* by Mario Filelfo, son of the famous Francesco, from the first generation of Italian humanists.

The ties between the authors of the dance treatises and the humanists of other fields are not only formal and personal. They were also linked by the general spirit of their thought, the dynamic they longed to express. Belonging more to a culture of merit than a culture of birthright, dance could be a useful emancipatory tool. Nearly anyone, showing initiative and activity, could learn to dance. Like humanist thought, dance was a symbol of the new elite's dynamics. Of course, they aspired to set ideals, but they strove with unprecedented energy. They were accompanied by the humanist dancing masters – a profession whose demand was always on the rise. They glamorized their patrons' aspirations. A symbiosis grew between them that was highly characteristic of the times. The Medicis and the Sforzas wanted to dance beautifully, as in the courts of the old nobility. But in fact only their dancing skill was to be the same, for they aimed to outstrip the latter in taste and splendor. This is why the dance culture of the fifteenth century had so much to offer. This was reproduction ultimately becoming distinction. It was based on an old court model in order to sublimate it (in the Hegelian sense of *Aufheben*). This is why the Medicis' court, for instance, became an aristocratic court, but a new, more sophisticated, refined, and energetic model of aristocratic life was shaped within this movement. This energy was shared with more traditional courts, such as those of Ferrara or Urbino, leading to a total transformation that lets us speak of a clear distinction between Renaissance court culture and its medieval predecessor. The bourgeois element's entry to the cultural scene and its ambitions embodied by people like Francesco I Sforza and Cosimo de' Medici were pivotal to this shift. Ambitions tied to the yearning for social advancement inspired the bodies of the dancers. They were fundamental to the kinesis of the Italian Renaissance. The treatises we will be examining show this clearly.

In humanist dance, the point was not ambitions that were simple or made plainly visible. On the contrary, the "humanization" of dance involved sophisticated theoretical tools. As we have indicated, it was more than a simple reproduction or negation of what had come before, it was a creative sublation. This is also why Renaissance treatises make a kind of arc that stretches from the past to the future. We find little brash innovation, as in other fields of Renaissance culture. The

¹⁷³ Ibid., pp. 87–88.

Renaissance preferred slogans of renewal to starting anew. The paradox is that, in reality, this renewal *was* an innovation. It used traditional models to create new traits. It has often been demonstrated that this was the pattern for the Renaissance assimilation of ancient heritage. We can observe it as well in dance.

Let us take a look at the opening of Domenico's treatise. In his first words he gives thanks to God, an essentially conservative medieval gesture. Crucially, however, this gratitude does not concern, for example, the gift of faith or humility. Domenico gives thanks for the gift of intellect. This means a decidedly rationalistic perspective, confirmed in later fragments, when Domenico evokes none other than Aristotle and his famous principle of the golden mean as a law which should also be applied in dance.¹⁷⁴ Here we see the author becoming entangled in a complex style of argumentation characteristic of the epoch. Aristotle had become, thanks to Thomas Aquinas, the main authority of the late Middle Ages. As such, it might have seemed that Domenico would take his place firmly in the scholastic tradition. As we shall see, however, this was only superficial, as Domenico's dance rationalism, though scholastic in form, held a dynamic core.

The dynamism of humanist dance can be discovered not only in instructions for dancers, though these are important as well, but most of all in the general landscape of the imagination, the backdrop against which Domenico and his students developed. Its tone is borrowed from antiquity. Cornazano's treatise begins with an invocation to the "Amazonian nymph, not daughter of Leda, but of Diana," who would surely understand the "graceful motion of dancing feet."¹⁷⁵ Guglielmo's text, in turn, opens with a relatively long prologue spiked with references to mythological gods and characters, but also figures from the Old Testament. It has much of the antiquarianism that was fashionable in the day, for works of the period were generally saturated with ancient motifs; yet in a dance text of this sort the imagination sends us back to an important context – the ancient cult of the body (not only Greek and Roman, but Jewish as well). In the humanist epoch it was evoked in the context of the ideal citizen and ruler. If the Greeks took care of their bodies, the humanists would urge the same. We cite Leon Battista Alberti:

Body and mind should be exercised. Indeed it is not easy to give enough praise to the value and necessity of all sorts of exercise. [...] The only person who should not engage in exercise is one who does not wish to lead a happy, joyous, healthy life. Socrates [...] often used to dance and jump, both at home and in company. In this way he kept fit, and

¹⁷⁴ Cf. A. William Smith, *Fifteenth-Century...*, p. 11.

¹⁷⁵ Quoted in: *ibid.*, pp. 84–85. This treatise was written for the daughter of the Prince of Milan and she is the nymph in question; not only the scaffolding, but above all the ideas pertaining to dance come from antiquity.

so he even favored exercise activities which certainly would otherwise have been lascivious and improper.¹⁷⁶

Socrates appears neither in Domenico nor in his students, but Alberti's injunction was theirs as well. We see this in the necessity for the dancer to have a beautiful body. If it is not harmoniously developed, not cared for and trained, the ideal can not be reached. This means that the penitential body is in no way the appropriate medium.¹⁷⁷ There could no longer be talk of denying the physical body in favor of the spiritual body, though the latter is always assumed to be present, as according to the humanists, dance was not merely the materiality of the body. Physicality was meant to regain its proper place,¹⁷⁸ and its model was the ancient body, scrupulously restored by humanist culture. We should recall that the fifteenth century saw a real trend for Greek and Roman art, including sculpture. The social imaginary gradually became saturated with images of harmoniously constructed, muscular bodies. This quite worldly take on antiquity was generally unknown in the Middle Ages, but the Italian Renaissance reveled in it. "Man is not, above all, who he is in a system that makes him belong to an estate and a social function; first and foremost, he is his own body, ensuring him real life, a temporal existence on earth."¹⁷⁹

The body of the Italian Renaissance is a triumphant body, a measure of the world of which so much was being written. We see this clearly in the art of the period – in the works of Masaccio and Donatello, and then in Botticelli, Michelangelo, and Giorgione. This was theoretically expressed by Alberti in *De pictura*.

In the program he proposes to artists and their patrons that the human body is not merely a privileged bearer of truth or an expression of passion – it is a foundation, measure, and model of the unity of the performance as a whole. This special appreciation of it lays the groundwork for what we generally call "modernity" in art, and falls in line with a more general tendency to collapse two traditions, ancient and Christian, although in many respects they were antagonistic.¹⁸⁰

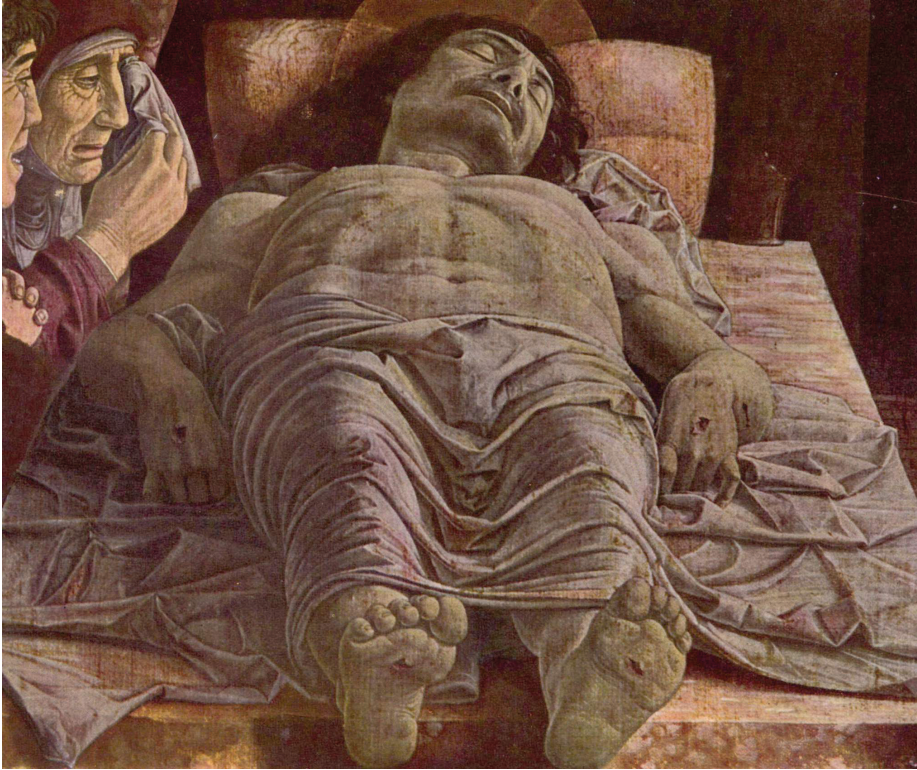
¹⁷⁶ Quoted in: Nevile, *The Eloquent Body...*, p. 20.

¹⁷⁷ A particularly eloquent opponent of the mortification of the body was the humanist Lorenzo Valla. His views are described by Garin as such: "Nature is of divine origin and [...] mediates between God and men. Whoever suppresses or prunes nature commits a sin against her. Therefore it is the vocation of man not to kill his own self but to display his own love of action and to enjoy the serene movement of his soul, the agreeable gaiety of the body which is called ἡδονή [delight]. Valla objected to Christian and Stoic asceticism: pleasure is to be enjoyed in this world and valued as the goal and prize of action. It is a sign of true wisdom" (Garin, *Italian Humanism...*, p. 51).

¹⁷⁸ Poggio Bracciolini wrote: "I do not understand how one can forget the body, given that man is not just a soul" (quoted in: Garin, *Filozofia...*, p. 70).

¹⁷⁹ Bogdan Suchodolski, "Wstęp," in: idem (ed.), *Rozwój myśli o wychowaniu fizycznym w dobie odrodzenia*, Wrocław 1959, pp. XII–XIII.

¹⁸⁰ Daniel Arasse, "Ciało, wdzięk, wzniosłość," in: Georges Vigarello (ed.), *Historia ciała*, Vol. 1: *Od renesansu do oświecenia*, trans. Tomasz Stróżyński, Gdańsk 2011, p. 386.



17. Andrea Mantegna, *Cristo morto* (The Lamentation of Christ), 1475–1478

The word “Christianity” might seem odd in this context, but we first ought to remember the favorable treatment of the body in the St. Thomas tradition, and secondly mention that Renaissance Christianity was no longer the medieval pessimism toward man. It was stressed that man was created in the likeness of God and, as such, was the most beautiful of all creatures. The depiction of Christ as the fullest expression of this likeness illustrates this brilliantly. His body was depicted by Italian Renaissance artists as remarkably harmonious, and his build was strong. It suffices to recall *The Last Judgment* in the Sistine Chapel. In Renaissance depictions Jesus is lithe, the ideally sculpted body, even when taken down from the cross, as we see in Mantegna’s *Lamentation of Christ* (Ill. 17). If we compare this with Grunewald’s *Crucifixion*, for example, the difference is clear.

The new/old ideal of the prim and physically fit body was tied to a conviction of the basic role of discipline in life. One was not meant to simply succumb to the carnal temptations – physicality was to be consciously sculpted, for the spirit was shaped along with it. The Renaissance hastened the “civilizational process”

tied to the increasingly popular guidebooks to good manners.¹⁸¹ “The axiom upon which the construction of the body as a presentation of oneself in society and an artifact in civilization is built states that, with its posture and movements, the body ‘helps us imagine the attributes of the spirit.’”¹⁸² Increasingly complicated fitness programs were created in the Renaissance. The humanist initiative had plenty of space to roam. Man was believed to be master of his body, and his creative impulse came out through discipline. Imposing restrictions on oneself was a sign of greatness, except that it no longer led to the negation of the body, but to its fullest development. Life, especially at court, was more and more about building façades, the strategic management of physical capital.

As the visible and physical limit of the spiritual and invisible subject, the body can be perceived as a compulsion and restriction to the “straining of the soul” toward infinity, but also the reverse – it can be used as a cover in social relations, behind which the individual protects his or her “inner freedom.”¹⁸³

While it is true that the body was not yet an autotelic value, it turned out to be far more than a sack of bones.

We can speak of the Renaissance man’s corporeal self-creation – he sculpted his body with increasing care, regarding it as *his* property. Alongside his body, man shaped himself, beginning to feel his autonomy to the full.

Thus, in the literature on good manners and in the system for social presentation of the body, the key distinction introduced by the Modern Era was “to be a body” and “to have a body”: through his behavior, an oaf, like an animal, is merely a body, while the cultivated person has a body, which he controls through civilized expression.¹⁸⁴

As we can see, emancipation was inevitably accompanied by social distinction. Only after several hundred years would this hierarchy of values be overturned. The twentieth century saw a break with the concept of possessing a body, replaced with the ideal of being a body. We may doubt if this has eradicated the distinction.

Inspired by Antiquity, the authors of the treatises on dance saw the body, as we have mentioned, as a basic point of reference, though their work of adapting ancient models was rather complex.¹⁸⁵ Unlike the sculptors or painters, for instance, they

¹⁸¹ Cf. Elias, *The Civilizing Process...*, pp. 140–154.

¹⁸² Arasse, “Cialo...,” p. 414.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 417.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 412.

¹⁸⁵ Mark Franko goes as far as to claim that the body is absent from Renaissance dance treatises (*The Dancing Body in Renaissance Choreography [c 1416–1589]*, Birmingham, AL 1986). This is true in terms of the literal text, but we must bear in mind that the treatise is not only what is written, but

could not turn to pure emulation of the rediscovered heritage. There were no choreographies to be precisely copied. Antiquity brought an acceptance for the body, for forms of kinetic coexistence, among which dance reigned; yet the people of Renaissance Italy did not dance like the Greeks. At any rate, this would have been impossible, owing to the varied social structures. This is, in turn, why a courtier of the mid-fifteenth century was not a muscular athlete from the gym, but a subtle and prim dancer.

To some degree, the key to the creation of the new ideal was the desire to break with the old chivalrous culture, in which the body was not neglected, though the aim was to acquire as much physical strength as possible. In Renaissance cities, muscular power ceased to be of the essence; it was replaced by a humanist finesse. A person was meant to be agile enough to perform dances with grace. A special kinetic idiom emerged, one which Nevile called “the eloquent body.”

All the early Renaissance authors we have mentioned saw dance as an art of civility, restraint, and harmony, seemingly reiterating the medieval view drawn from Aristotle.¹⁸⁶ Yet it is essential we understand what civility and harmony we mean, precisely, for these concepts become complex, foisting detailed technical requirements upon the dancing body, which came to have little in common with the medieval good dance practice as it was seen by Albert or Thomas. This is shown by the extensive terminology applied by the dancing masters. These treatises codified abilities that the good dancer had to possess, and of these there were several. A list of these would include:

- a) *misura* (Domenico, Cornazano, Guglielmo) – musicality, rhythm, moving in time;
- b) *memoria* (Domenico, Cornazano, Guglielmo) – focus, memory, constant attentiveness;

also the assumptions behind it. In this sense, the body is the evident protagonist of these texts, functioning as their tacit backdrop.

¹⁸⁶ The concept of *grazia* is key for Baldassare Castiglione in his famous *Il Cortegiano* (*Book of the Courtier*, 1528), which, though it came after other dance treatises, might be regarded as an expression of the same kinesis. Castiglione defines *grazia* as follows: “Having already thought a great deal about how this grace is acquired, and leaving aside those who are endowed with it by their stars, I have discovered a universal rule which seems to apply more than any other in all human actions or words: namely, to steer away from affectation at all costs, as if it were a rough and dangerous reef, and (to perhaps use a novel word for it) to practice in all things a certain nonchalance which conceals all artistry and makes whatever ones says or does seem uncontrived and effortless” (*Book of the Courtier*, trans. George Bull, London–New York 1976, p. 67). As Robert Zimmer writes: “Another key notion in Castiglione is *mediocrità*, which means a rational balance between too-offensive and too-defensive behavior” (Robert Zimmer, *Moralisci europejsy. Przewodnik*, trans. Piotr Graczyk, Warsaw 2008, p. 36). The ideal of grace, whose basic meaning is restraint and harmony, joins dance and painting theory of fifteenth-century Italy, as Jennifer Nevile describes in “‘Certain Sweet Movements’: The Development of the Concept of Grace in 15th-Century Italian Dance and Painting,” *Dance Research* 1991, Vol. 9, No. 1, pp. 3–12.

- c) *maniera* (Domenico, Cornazano, Guglielmo) – grace in execution, style, balance;
- d) *compartimento di terreno* (Cornazano) / *partire del terreno* (Guglielmo) – a control over the space;
- e) *movimento corporeo* (Cornazano, Guglielmo) – physical agility, correct build and posture;
- f) *agilitade* (Domenico) – liveliness;
- g) *fantasmata* (Domenico) – ability to shift tempo, to move from staticity to dynamic movement;
- h) *aire* (Cornazano) – care for the supple form of movements, making them appealing to the eye, a sublimity of execution;
- i) *diversita di cose* (Cornazano) – versatility, an avoidance of repetition.

We will not be exploring these categories in detail, as this has already been done in the relevant literature.¹⁸⁷ For our purposes it is important to note their abundance, and that they describe a kind of physical presence that dance actualizes. This is a perfect example of the development of self-reflexivity in this field. Dance was becoming more and more codified, and less and less was left to chance. It had more and more rational management, and less and less spontaneous pleasure.

As we see, the first dancing masters, exemplary products of their times, though not as far from their medieval influences as they might have liked, still made a fundamental reevaluation, making man once more the measure of all things, at least on earth. The lists and descriptions in the treatises bring to mind a Scholastic precision, but they were also compiled in the name of a new ideal – elaborate beauty. Dance, above all, was meant to be rational.¹⁸⁸ The point of departure for dancing was firm principles, which reason had set and enforced upon the defiant tendencies of the unfortunate body, as we saw, for instance, in Guglielmo. In this way, distinctions were formed to confirm the power of bourgeois ambitions.¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁷ Of special value here is Nevile, *The Eloquent Body...*, Chapters 2 and 3, and Barbara Sparti, "Antiquity as Inspiration in the Renaissance of Dance: The Classical Connection and Fifteenth-Century Italian Dance," *Dance Chronicle* 1993, Vol. 16, No. 3, pp. 373–390, which demonstrates the link between Renaissance dance virtues and ancient thought.

¹⁸⁸ As Domenico writes: "Note that aside from being blessed by God with a good mind and body, one has to learn to discern the underlying structure of this refined art form" (quoted in: A. William Smith, *Fifteenth-Century...*, p. 13).

¹⁸⁹ Dance as defined by the humanist dancing masters required the correct training, which, in turn, demanded funds and time. Few in society had the necessary funds and requisite amount of time, and these were people in the highest positions. This is why dance was perfectly suited to assert their status. The logic came full circle. Dance and money went hand-in-hand. Money was presented in dancing, money was a basic condition for dance. People were aware of this and admitted it openly. When we read descriptions of dance ceremonies, we are struck by the fact that the stage design gets more attention than the movement. We can particularly see this in Guglielmo, who peppers his theoretical remarks with reports on weddings and holidays in which he participated. He is obviously fond of the clothes, presents, and food. He is the only one to write about the difference clothing makes to

“Natural” Elevation

We have made an initial reconstruction of the total ideal of physical civility, to create an outline of the kinetic politics cultivated in the courts of Renaissance Italy, in tune with a humanist worldview. This ideal allowed the individual to achieve a kinetic mastery, distinguishing the “generous hearts and gentle souls” of the new elite from the simpletons, or the world retreating into the past. In Domenico we find an image which renders the search for elegance in dance in an evocative manner. It is an almost hypnotic vision, though contained in only a few words. When the master of Piacenza attempts to describe the perfect dancer, his imagination drifts to the element of water. He recommends rising and falling like a boat on the waves. He writes: “With smoothness, appear like a gondola that is propelled by two oars through waves when the sea is calm.”¹⁹⁰

The image of the body as a boat rocking on waves is highly evocative. In Domenico, it is tied to a basic conviction that “natural” movement is most beautiful, paradoxically arising from extremely artificial training. The point was to gain control of oneself and one’s environment entirely, but so that this control did not seem to come from the outside, but followed an internal, spontaneous rhythm. The authors of the other treatises think similarly. All of them demonstrate Italian humanism’s fundamental striving for naturalness (illustrated by water, its fluidity and softness), but in all of them naturalness does not come naturally. It must be developed. Only through work can it be achieved. In theory, anyone can do it; in practice it only comes through the work of those who have proven their nobility. This is why the last word of the kinetic ideal is not the fluidity of water, but the majesty of the gondola upon it.

This is the context, it seems, in which to place the Aristotelian ideal of the golden mean, mentioned several times by Domenico, making it an absolutely fundamental principal. The word “gold” is not accidental here. The ideal of moderation is, figuratively speaking, built on bourgeois gold. When Domenico writes about avoiding extremes, it is basically as though he speaks of avoiding two mutually affecting

the dance. He describes dance in a long dress and a short tunic separately, and supplies a short chapter on dancing in a cape. This means that the dancer’s look became increasingly important over time. Decor and garb had been united, but now their mutual relations were complicated, and so due attention had to be paid to them. Much as the garb highlighted the dance, the dance highlighted the outfit. There could not be the slightest dissonance between these elements. Knowledge was needed for the kinetic requirements of a short tunic, and for choosing the right garb for a slow dance. Different outfits were needed for various occasions. Thus, truly refined dance, recognized as truly human, was only for the select few. Importantly, dance allowed one to present clothing without accusations of excessive vanity. Clothing was presented in dance incidentally, as it were, seemingly not as part of the main attraction. Dance allowed one to flaunt clothing without fear of being called a dandy.

¹⁹⁰ Quoted in: A. William Smith, *Fifteenth-Century...*, p. 13.

poles of the old world – the physical simplicity of rural life and the physical excess of the castles and monasteries. The new kinesis revolts against both qualities, postulating civility, control, and calculation, expressing the modern bourgeoisie at their first stage of development.

Dance treatises moved in the same direction as all of humanism. The ideal of moderation is evident in *Vita civile*, written by Matteo Palmieri in the 1430s.¹⁹¹ Palmieri recalled the rule of the golden mean in managing physicality in daily life and movement. His near obsession on this count – one was to walk neither too fast nor too slow, be neither too stiff nor too relaxed, neither cocky nor timid, and remember one’s age and station¹⁹² – is rooted in a widespread conviction in the elite at the time, that civility was the measure of a person. “Palmieri, like the dance masters, believed that the nature of a person’s soul was revealed by movements and facial expressions.”¹⁹³ The body here is a mirror of the soul, with a stress on the latter – a beautiful body means a beautiful soul. Guglielmo elaborates further when he writes: “The virtue of dancing is an external demonstration of spiritual *movimenti* which corresponds with the orderly arranged and perfect consonances of the [cosmic] harmony.”¹⁹⁴ When a person dances beautifully, it means his or her soul is beautiful, a vulgar dance reflects a vulgar inner life, and the entire person along with it. This is why the kinetic distinction is a fundamental piece of evidence, an ontological difference. “The emotions of the dancers – sorrow, anger, or happiness for instance – were made visible through the movements of their body, thus giving them both a tremendous power and responsibility: a power to affect the emotions of those who watched, and their responsibility only to represent morally edifying emotions.”¹⁹⁵ Dance concentrated a social play of forces, it was a public space in which distinctions were contemporized, disarming both those watching and those who were watched. Dance was a space in which the essence of society emerged; a game of power was enacted, even if, as Sparti asserts, it was not noticed. The winners were those whose bodies were eloquent, shaped according to the humanist model. “Naturalness” was, in this context, a particularly important word. Only “natural,” or unforced and free movement, which remained elegant, was considered truly human.

Humanist “naturalness” presupposed an active approach to the world. A distinction had to be developed through rationalist tools. In dance, this yielded not only the flourishing development of practice, but also theory. Theory, after all, is a sort of creativity, reality taken into one’s hands. We might call this mechanism

¹⁹¹ On the similarities between Palmieri’s thought and the content of the Italian Renaissance dance treatises, see Nevile, *The Eloquent Body...*

¹⁹² *Ibid.*, pp. 87–88.

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 87.

¹⁹⁴ Quoted in: A. William Smith, *Fifteenth-Century...*, p. 126.

¹⁹⁵ Jennifer Nevile, “Dance and Society in Quattrocento Italy,” in: Nevile (ed.), *Dance, Spectacle...*, p. 87.

“elevation,” as this accentuates the action. Theory is a testimonial, a record of this elevation, this fundamental upward movement, toward domination and control. The dancing masters, after all, not only took notes, they were creative people who built structure. The theoretical parts of their treatises are accompanied by expansive choreographic descriptions of their invention. Here they proved that their principles could be used to create new approaches. They emerge as not only systematizers, but as artists as well.¹⁹⁶ It is in this sense that we can fully understand the writing of treatises as fulfilling a duty to eloquence, providing ample evidence of possessing “a beautiful soul.”

What is choreography? It might be best described as a selective imitation of nature. This idea appears in treatises when the authors are differentiating between kinds of dance movements. “Natural” ones prevail, based on simple, everyday actions – walking, pivoting and bowing. The overall impression was also meant to be natural; for the dance to be properly refined one had to add a touch of artificiality, which, paradoxically, only enhanced the naturalness of the overall effect. As such, choreography is the right assortment of natural and artificial movements. It is the creation of moving structures of an original nature, inventing dances, or indeed, a *selective* imitation of nature.

This is another important moment in our study. The dance treatises we are examining introduce a novelty that cannot be overestimated – individual and unique sequences of movements with titles, often for specially composed music. These sequences were based on selection, and not reproduction. This means that we no longer had a general notion of dance or general varieties thereof, such as *carole*, *hove danse*, or *ridda* – these were now highly specified works within two major genres: the *ballo* and *bassadanza*. These genres differed not in terms of the substance of the movement, for they featured the same elements, made up of the same “natural,” and thus artificial, conventional movements, but in their tempo and accompaniment. *Balli* were more complex. Here the tempo changed, and music had to be composed to match. *Bassadanze* were not similarly changeable, they were based on a steady tempo, the *bassadanza*,¹⁹⁷ and thus could be danced to any music composed at that tempo. This does not mean, however, that the choreography was standardized as well. On the contrary, the dancing masters seemed to be fascinated by building original variations on a shared foundation. The results can be observed in the extensive practical sections of the treatises, in descriptions of individualized dances composed by a particular artist.

¹⁹⁶ We should point out that Guglielmo most often defines dance with the phrase *scienza & arte*, as though seeking to stress the duality we describe: not only the ability of imitative structuring, or an intangible creativity, but both together create a master of dance.

¹⁹⁷ Dancing masters distinguish between four kinds of tempos (from fastest to slowest): *piva*, *saltarello*, *quadernaria*, and *bassadanza*. All the authors devote long fragments to the numerical relations between these tempos, creating a fascinating mathematics of dance.

The dancing masters based their work on familiar forms, on the folk tradition, at the same time taking the first steps toward the individualization of creative dance. Dance was no longer a form of physical intermingling, it was a highly specific kinetic construct invented by a creative individual. Dance began to have an author, a designer. By the same token, reflections upon dance were tied to a broader cultural tendency, rendered by a word that was gaining popularity in this period: *disegno*. Władysław Tatarkiewicz traces it back to ca. 1400 in Cennino Cennini. Cennini wrote of painting that “it should find things that have *not been seen* [...]. He added that these were to be found in ‘the shadows of natural things’ [...]. These remarks stated that imitating nature was a means, not an end for art.”¹⁹⁸ The dancing masters were moving in the same direction in their concept of selective imitation. At any rate, this imitation was essentially only a pretext for presenting the ability to choose, to make an original combination of steps. Moreover, the naturalness in the performances of the lower classes was vulgar, according to dance teachers. This is why the *disegno* was needed, “not what the artist imitates, but what he creates. This is the active component in art, as opposed to the passive element.”¹⁹⁹

The creative element was stressed by authors as varied as Nicholas of Cusa,²⁰⁰ Leone Battista Alberti,²⁰¹ and Giannozzo Manetti.²⁰² The appreciation of creativity sprung from deeds, and not birthright, admiring and even elevating the concept of work. Alberti stated that “man was not born to dwell in morose inactivity, but to give himself to marvelous labors and great works.”²⁰³ Other thinkers expressed the same ideas, which led to personhood being increasingly defined in terms of action, will, and freedom. The authors may have differed on the details, but a voluntaristic activism was the prevailing viewpoint in the Italian Renaissance. This was the general tone of Salutati,²⁰⁴ Valla, Alberti, and even the Neoplatonist-influenced Marsilio Ficino²⁰⁵ and Pico della Mirandola. Only a creative person was a person to the full. Man was an artist *par excellence*. Every artist strove for one thing – to create works of art. The work of art was made to be admired. Dance could be no exception here.

Dance theory was planted in activist soil, in which the concept of authorship became increasingly essential. We see this clearly when we juxtapose Domenico’s

¹⁹⁸ Władysław Tatarkiewicz, *Historia estetyki 3: Estetyka nowożytna*, Warsaw 1991, p. 38.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 68–70.

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 92; Garin, *Filozofia...*, pp. 92–93.

²⁰² Garin, *Filozofia...*, pp. 86–87.

²⁰³ Quoted in: Stefan Swieżawski, *Dzieje filozofii europejskiej XV wieku*, Vol. 6, Warsaw 1983, p. 199. We find an identical observation in Garin, *Filozofia...*, p. 93.

²⁰⁴ Garin writes of the “supremacy of the will” in Salutati’s philosophy (*Filozofia...*, pp. 46–51).

²⁰⁵ Swieżawski, *Dzieje filozofii europejskiej XV wieku*, Vol. 6, pp. 393–411.

text with Guglielmo's later treatise. In the latter, the author steps much more visibly into the foreground. It suffices to read his opening dialogue with an imaginary adversary, defending the value of dance. The dialogue form is, as we have said, a nod to antiquity, a way of livening up the proceedings. But the key is that the dialogue allows the dancing master's characters to present their opinions. Defending dance against his conservative adversaries, Guglielmo asserts his position as an authority. This authority emerges from the polemics, sharpened through contrasts. Due to the polemic nature of the text, Guglielmo's work is simply saturated with confidence.

With the accentuation of concepts like design, creativity, art, will, and freedom, we see a growth in a tendency that Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt discover as far back as Duns Scotus, who "tells his contemporaries that the confusion and decadence of the times can be remedied only by recentering thought on the singularity of being. This singularity is not ephemeral nor accidental but ontological."²⁰⁶ In the Renaissance, views of this type became widespread. Burckhardt was the first to grasp this in the nineteenth century, in his famous thesis of the individualism of Renaissance.²⁰⁷ It has been criticized many times since,²⁰⁸ but never entirely discredited, for we cannot fully deny man's appreciation as a creative individual in the Renaissance. According to the humanists, man's task was to be forever searching, thinking creatively, inventing works of the mind and material goods,

²⁰⁶ Michael Hardt, Antonio Negri, *Empire*, Boston 2001, p. 71.

²⁰⁷ Burckhardt, *Civilization...*, particularly pp. 98–103.

²⁰⁸ It has been suggested that the humanism of the fifteenth century in fact only developed what was already contained in the works of Abelard, Duns Scotus, Dante, Petrarch, and even St. Thomas. Only the stress had shifted. At "a certain stage in the development of medieval society, however, the individual begins to find ways of expressing himself. The turning-point comes in the thirteenth century. In all walks of life we find evidence that the claims of the personal self to be recognized are becoming more and more pressing. In art we see people individually depicted, the beginnings of portraiture; in literature, more and more is written in the vernacular languages, which show themselves to be more capable than Latin of expressing the various shades of human emotion; individual styles in handwriting begin to appear" (Gurevich, *Categories...*, p. 308). If we acknowledge this argument, and yet wish to defend Burckhardt, we might say that the Renaissance belief in man as a creative individual was the seed of something new and the crowning of a long process of abandoning the medieval contempt for worldly life. Peter Burke encapsulates this well: "Many of the arguments for the dignity of man (the beauty of the human body, its upright posture, and so on) are commonplaces of the medieval as well as the classical and Renaissance traditions. The themes of dignity and misery were considered as complementary rather than contradictory. All the same, there does appear to have been a change of emphasis revealing an increasing confidence in man in intellectual circles in the period [the Italian Renaissance]. Lorenzo Valla, with characteristic boldness, called the soul the 'man-God' (*homo deus*) and wrote of the soul's ascent to heaven in the language of a Roman triumph. Pietro Pomponazzi declared that those (few) men who had managed to achieve almost complete rationality deserved to be numbered among the gods. Adjectives such as 'divine' or 'heroic' were increasingly used to describe painters, princes, and other mortals" (Peter Burke, *The Italian Renaissance: Culture and Society in Italy*, Princeton 2014, pp. 208–209).

including things as seemingly inessential as dance steps. Then it was only a small step to postulating creativity in the political sphere as well. Humanist circles fully supported the idea of administering public life in accordance with purely rational principles. This yielded an enduring vision of power as secular, with a theology of sorts, naturally, yet derived from purely human activities and initiatives.²⁰⁹ Politics and physicality took a major step toward each other. The same activism began to prevail in either field, “movement that never ends.”

Yet to return to the treatises under discussion, let us sum up our findings so far. We have noted that dance as described by Domenico and his students was ruled by the principle of elevation. This acquires a most literal aspect. Among the principles of dance the dancing masters of the Italian Renaissance mention not only the absolute harmony of dance and music, perfect memory, command of space, grace throughout the body, but also, we should note, an elevation of the body, which Cornazano and Guglielmo call *aiere* and define as “an act of airy presence and elevated movement, with one’s own person showing with agility a sweet and gentle rising movement in the dance.”²¹⁰ Such is the movement of the virtuoso dancer, taking his example from the gondola, rhythmically rising on the waves. That a quite physical act of rising above the floor was the guiding principle of dance ought not to surprise us if we recall Pico della Mirandola, who wrote: “Let our souls be pervaded by a certain holy and Junonian ambition so that we, not satisfied with what is mediocre, may aspire to what is *loftiest*, and may apply ourselves with all our strength in that pursuit, for we shall succeed if we are so minded.”²¹¹ Guglielmo, like his maestro Domenico, clearly follows the same trope. Dance was meant to elevate man above the common animal state. As such, the peasant dancing at a folk festival was not in essence a dancer, for his movements were too close to the ground (Ill. 18). In his leaps and turns he forgot the higher ideals. His kinesis was oriented downward. He was only motivated by his desires, and thus fumbled in the dust. He lacked the “discreet nonchalance” (*sprezzatura*), which would be urged a few decades later by Baldassare Castiglione in *Il Cortegiano* (*The Courtier*, 1528),²¹² and which alone could cultivate an *aire*. Humanist dance lifted man not only above his inclinations, but above the primitive masses. It was a tool of distinction, and as we have seen, a quite physical elevation.

²⁰⁹ Cf. Ernst Kantorowicz, *The King’s Two Bodies...* The author provides an impressive description of the shift from royal power in the Christological sense to royal power through the concept of the law, to the shaping of the modern concept of the state and tying to it a figure standing above the law, the secular monarchy. This shows the complex history of dualism, in light of which the king has two natures – earthly/mortal and supernatural/immortal. The modern monarchy does not supersede the mystical body of the king, only it transfers the mysticism from the realm of religion to the realm of the state, the nation, and the community.

²¹⁰ Quoted in Nevile, *The Eloquent Body...*, p. 84.

²¹¹ Pico della Mirandola, *Oratio de hominis dignitate...*, p. 135, emphasis – W. K.

²¹² Cf. Zimmer, *Moralisci...*, pp. 35–36.



18. Sebalde Beham, *Das Bauernfest* or *Die zwolf Monate* (The Peasants' Feast, or Twelve Months), engraving, 1546–1547

Distinguished Celebrations – The Holy Body of the Community

We should stress once more that elevation, physical or otherwise, was a rational project at heart. The choreographer was in control of his material, like the painter over his. He was extracting its secrets to produce the seductive naturalness of an illusion. Let us note that dance theory developed alongside the theory of perspective. The latter, as Erwin Panofsky observed, was not merely a scientific project, it was chiefly a new creative method, even a signal of a new imagination marked by *disegno*. Perspective is not re-creation, it is creation which requires a specific kind of genius, which Alberti called *ingenio*. *Ingenio* is the capacity to have a rational grasp of empirical material in an evocative visual structure. In the case of perspective in painting, of which Alberti was a great advocate,²¹³ it meant the creative transposition of a three-dimensional world onto a flat surface; “creative” meant accentuating the moment of forming or designing a vision of perspective, and not slavishly reiterating the “original.” The culture of perspective seduces by images, it is a culture of evocative staging – it was familiar in that it was based on what people knew, yet profoundly innovative, subjective, as it involved cleverly devised transformations, a gesture of projection.

In Renaissance social dancing we are not dealing with the issue of perspective as such, and yet this is a space in which, as in art, visual sensitivity gradually began to take precedence over tactile awareness. The efforts of the dancing masters began to move away from the physical shared presence of the participants, and toward a spectacle for observers. The dancers not only gave themselves to their partners, but also presented themselves to the audience together. The result was an increased tendency that had already been suggested in the Middle Ages – dance in aristocratic circles became primarily a show. The task of the dancing master now became the design of this presentation, ensuring it was pleasurable to the external viewer. In this regard, we can speak of the correspondence between this transformation and the visual arts. Just as painters infected the European gaze with the logic of the image, choreographers saturated kinesis with the quality of a spectacle, moving from dance as an internal community to dance as an external show. This does not mean that the former perished. In Renaissance dance, the participants continued to mingle, all the more so in that dances were also done privately, in the quiet of the home, and not only for public display. Yet dance in the public sphere was increasingly common, and required specialist assistance.

Dance as a show was in particular need of *disegno*. It had to be precisely planned. Humanist eloquence was of special importance, a mastery of a language that enabled precise communication. Much as humanist writers put emphasis on

²¹³ Jean-Marie Pradier, *Cialo widowiskowe...*, pp. 154–155.

rhetorical skills, extolling their debts to Cicero or Quintilian, the dancing masters made every effort to ensure their sequences of steps expressed as much as possible. Both activities were, in fact, the art of using language evocatively (for the rhetoricians – an articulated language; in dance – body language) to capture the audience's attention.

The very capability of building dance narratives demonstrates the creativity of the Renaissance masters who, through formal tactics derived from the dance principles enumerated above, were able to create a purely kinetic tale. When we read descriptions of *balli* and *bassadanze*, it is this aspect that strikes us. Everything is scrupulously planned, the steps and figures make a dynamic whole, sketches of plotlines even emerge. There were dances of seduction, envy, fidelity, the battle of the sexes, and the might of the ruler.

Even when they were not intended for the wider public, *balli* and *bassadanze* were small performances, in which the theatrical element was more clearly present than in the medieval *carole*, for instance. The element of “show” is evident in the dance treatises of the *quattrocento*. Dancers were given complicated requirements, because dance was always treated as if it were (at least potentially) on show. While the accent in Domenico is placed more on the performer and cooperation with a partner, in Guglielmo it is the show aspect that is at the fore. This is not by chance.

We have mentioned that, in the fifteenth century, dance was more and more present in official ceremonies, which were simultaneously undergoing secularization. Lorenzo de' Medici, who composed his own dances, spoke out against the remnants of mystery plays, “recommending a new, secular form of recreation, based on traditional Italian folk games – the spring processions.”²¹⁴ Other wealthy men followed suit, investing considerable funds into secular ceremonies. As part of these games the masquerades and dance intermedia flourished,²¹⁵ furnishing opportunities for the members of the new elite to demonstrate their dancing skills.

Care for staging was particularly essential in the intermedia and masquerades. Plot, elaborate set design, and costumes were all appreciated. The choreography especially had to please the eye. Not only dances for private *balli* and *bassadanze*, but also dances for ceremonies were deemed to require dancing masters, also ensuring the survival of a figure who is vital to our story – the professional dancer with a background in acrobatics, juggling, and minstrelry, with whom some medieval stewards of conscience waged a fierce battle. For the most part, the elite danced at the events they organized themselves. Yet the professionals – the jugglers and histrions, who were especially useful at a time when spectacles were organized by the courts – returned to good graces, and were increasingly spectacular. There was

²¹⁴ Irena Turska, *Krótki zarys historii tańca i baletu*, Cracow 2009, p. 86.

²¹⁵ Intermedia were dances that took place between the acts of a theatrical piece.

a growing appreciation for acrobatic demonstrations, in addition to the dances furnished by the humanist masters.

This trend only increased as the fifteenth century wore on. The extravagant *moresca* became increasingly popular. This name is likely derived from the Moors, and dates back to performances of conflicts between Europeans and Arabs, which were popular in Europe during the Crusades; this genealogy is highly speculative, however, based only on the etymology and created *post factum*. Yet something is known about the *moresca*. Its subject could be armed battle (sword fights were especially popular),²¹⁶ mythology, exotic lands, and even everyday life (such as presentations of farming activities). Dancers had to be familiar with the tricks of pantomime, they often appeared in blackface or in masks, all the while moving to the music.²¹⁷ This generated the impression of an agility that was unattainable for most members of society.

Based on descriptions of fifteenth-century festivities in Italian cities, from which we draw information about the *moresca*, we may come to some interesting conclusions: “The *moresche* were all part of public spectacles, spectacles in which this dance form was used to help establish the identity of a city – or state – and also to perpetuate or unify the city.”²¹⁸ Intermedia accompanying dramatic performances, masquerades and other forms of spectacle made the kinetic eloquence of the new elite widely visible. Nevile writes of building the identity of the city or state, but this was inseparable from the identity of its elite. Dancing in the court spectacles and observing the dance of their companions and professional performers and, above all, commissioning the design of dances to hired specialists, the new elite strengthened its position and gained prestige. Spectacles (including dance) were often panegyric. This helped build the position of the elite. It not only testified to the vanity of the ruling strata. If we are to understand the Renaissance elite’s fondness for spectacles, we must place the search for a new identity in a broader context. For the generation raised on humanist ideals, power meant more than the capacity for primitive dominance, focused on accumulating material goods. Of course, the distribution of these goods was extremely unequal, yet the extravagant consumption of the Renaissance courts was not, as we have said, simple hedonism. Renaissance spectacles, balls, and feasts were not vulgar orgies, they were tools for bolstering and refining what might be called the political body.

In the first half of the fifteenth century, people such as Salutati or Leonardo Bruni brought to Florence “a type of humanism that was called civic, or bourgeois.”²¹⁹ This was an attempt to reanimate the ancient ideal of the active life, admired by

²¹⁶ Sword dances were the specialty of craftsmen in the German cities (Burke, *Popular Culture...*, p. 164).

²¹⁷ Quoted from: Nevile, *The Eloquent Body...*, p. 34.

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 33.

²¹⁹ Swieżawski, *Dzieje filozofii europejskiej XV wieku*, Vol. 2, Warsaw 1974, p. 343.

the secular rulers and joined with political activity. According to the humanists of the first generation, the complete human, as noted by Stefan Swieżawski,²²⁰ was meant to tend to individual salvation, but also to the salvation of others, conceived as individuals. He was not only meant to cultivate spiritual values. His basic task was to attend to the common good and public affairs, to nurture, as much as possible, the earthly community, which had just acquired a physical dimension.

The member of the new elite raised on humanist ideals believed that: “To have a taste of joy, one ought to give oneself to another. This is not a static value, a walled-off contemplation, an Aristotelian *βίος θεωρητικός* [theoretical life], a Stoic asceticism, or a cloistered life.”²²¹ The Italian Renaissance might be called a renaissance of politics conceived as an active shaping of the communal body. It meant an appreciation for the Earthly City and its attendant forces – the local community, city, people. The stress shifted from seeking the path to transcendence to working on earthly eternity.²²² As such, secular forms of agency – outstanding individuals and modern communities and the states tied to them – began gaining more prominence in how social life was apprehended.

When it came to great people, it was only in terms of appreciating secular time that the idea of earthly fame could develop as an impulse to act, a factor both Burckhardt and Burke link to the development of Italian humanism.²²³ For the humanists, the desire for fame meant a drive to distinguish themselves in society, and this led to rivalry between people. Rivalry, in turn, prompted more self-reflection, making life more dynamic. Ambitious individuals sought new ways of standing

²²⁰ Ibid., p. 344.

²²¹ Garin, *Filozofia...*, p. 63.

²²² A key shift here was in the new approach to time ushered in by late-medieval Averroist thought. As Kantorowicz wrote: “The crisis in man’s approach to Time, while previously latent, came to a head when the doctrine of the uncreatedness and infinite continuity of the world was recovered from Aristotelian philosophy. This tenet dealt an all but mortal blow to the supremacy of the traditional Augustinian concepts of Time and Eternity” (*The King’s Two Bodies...*, p. 275). According to Augustine, the Church’s greatest authority for centuries, time was infinitely worse than Eternity. It began with creation and was to end with it as well. As such, it was equivalent to the transitory, decay, and human weakness. The Averroists undermined this view, citing Aristotle, according to whom both time and movement were eternal. They maintained that “by corruption and generation the dispositions of the world might change but that the present world itself was permanent by the laws of nature, and that Time was infinite, a continuum of successive moments rolling forth perpetually from endlessness to endlessness. *Tempus*, the limited span of terrestrial Time, thereby lost its ephemeral frailty and limitation, and its character also changed morally: Time no longer appeared predominantly as a symbol of caducity, of Death; Time, to the Averroists, became a vivifying element, a symbol of endless duration, of Life” (ibid., p. 276–277). Here we find a remarkably interesting and consequential idea of an eternity and immortality in the world. Kantorowicz writes: “To be sure, not the individual life was immortal; but immortal was the life of the genera and species which the mortal individual represented. Time now became the symbol of the eternal continuity and immortality of the great collective called the human race, of the species of man, of the seminal powers, of the forces of germination” (ibid., p. 277).

²²³ Burke, *Culture and Society...*

out, which made social life a kind of race in various fields – philosophy, the arts, and politics. The ancient category of statesman returned to the public discourse, paving the way for the figure of the Prince.

From a collective standpoint, we ought to stress the birth of a logic of political immanence, and thus the gradual forming of a conviction that not only God, His Church, and the empire were eternal, but also the People, as the medieval commentators of Justinian had noted.²²⁴ Kantorowicz observed that “immortality of the genera and continuity of species was almost indispensable, since it was most convenient for the jurists to identify the immortal bodies corporate and other collectives with species.”²²⁵ This was the cornerstone for thinking in terms of *universitas* – a community, a mystical collective body that never dies, though the generations should pass to the next world. This is where, it seems, we should seek the source of the modern vision of the state. The people become the sovereign, and the people have the right to shape their reality.²²⁶ This opens a space of permanent instability, as the political system is not the fruit of God’s plan, and terrestrial existence is significantly more than a pale shadow of eternity. Secular eternity requires practical action, taking the fate of the world into people’s hands. And again, the people of Italy were the first in modern Europe to grasp this fully – not, at first, in theory, but in practice.

It seems that only when we take into account the humanist postulate of tending to the body of the state, to its harmonious development and beauty, does the stress on public ceremonies by the Medicis and other powerful families become fully comprehensible. These were ceremonies for the political body. The dances performed during its course were its expression. Images of the moresche or intermedia must be interpreted here as attempts to depict this collective body. The basic aim of these attempts was to demonstrate the agency and power of the collective *corpus*, the mobilization of the modern community. The political corpus could, however, be represented by the many or by the individual. In the *quattrocento* there was constant debate as to which of these scenarios was proper. While the beginning of the century was dominated by Republican utopias, at its close the initiative came from individual rulers. Spectacles could essentially serve both aims – they could show a utopia of cooperation or be a panegyric for an individual ruler. Renaissance dance also had this ambivalence, and not only in terms of spectacles. We can show this by exploring the significance of the dancing body coming to rest in Domenico’s treatise.

²²⁴ Cf. Kantorowicz, *The King’s Two Bodies...*

²²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 300.

²²⁶ In writing on Machiavelli, Konstanty Grzybowski notes: “If there is goodness in a society it is in the people, not in the nobility, not in the rabble, it is in the masses, who are disenfranchised and thus, not interested in the accumulation of wealth or power of the state, which are one and the same” (Konstanty Grzybowski, “Wstęp,” in: Niccolò Machiavelli, *Książę*, trans. Wincenty Rzymowski, Wrocław 1979, p. LI).

In the Renaissance, motionlessness was an ideal that competed with activism. The Renaissance, clearly, also had its static side. To quote Swieżawski:

Thinkers in the Neoplatonist sphere of influence restored the eternal motif of the greater perfection of duration and permanence than fleeting changeability; motionlessness was thus a state more perfect than movement. Movement is imperfect as it is a transition from one state of rest to another, while abiding and total tranquility are the most proper and ideal modes of being.²²⁷

Interestingly, we also find motionlessness in the dance treatises. In Domenico, for instance, we find intriguing exhortations – that the dancer be capable of stopping on a dime, “freezing one’s movement at the end of a step as if ‘one had seen the head of Medusa [...] and then immediately take flight like the falcon swooping on its prey’.”²²⁸ The stress falls here on the basic opposition behind dance – the contrast being stopping and moving. Domenico realized that motionlessness was just as essential as movement, and thus that dance was not about movement alone, that it was a game of *dynamis* and *stasis*. Moreover, he extolled stopping most decisively, in a manner that revealed the inner strength of the dancer and the external power of the dance composition. These entered into a complex relationship. Dance mastery emerged with the perfect execution a carefully planned stop.²²⁹

Through its mastery, the dancer became truly spectacular. Let us recall the list of abilities the perfect dancer was to master. It includes an intriguing word – *fantasmata*. Domenico introduces this with the description “physical quickness which is controlled by the understanding of the *misura*.”²³⁰ The concept of *misura*, in turn, is earlier defined as a slowness tempered by speed. As a kinetic quality, *misura* was portrayed by the image of the transition from freezing at the sight of Medusa

²²⁷ Stefan Swieżawski, *Dzieje filozofii europejskiej XV wieku*, Vol. 5, Warsaw 1980, p. 248.

²²⁸ Quoted in: Barbara Sparti, “Humanism and the Arts: Parallels between Alberti’s ‘On Painting’ and Guglielmo Ebreo’s ‘On ... Dancing,’” in: Katherine A. McIver (ed.), *Art and Music in the Early Modern Period: Essays in Honor of Franca Trinchieri Camiz*, Aldershot 2003, p. 181.

²²⁹ Seeta Chaganti joins Mark Franko in calling attention to the dynamic, future-oriented nature of this opposition. In the treatises of Domenico, Cornazano, and Guglielmo, she sees an evident emphasis on anticipation, memory as an impulse to create the future, and thus a highly dynamic vision of the present. This is not simply progressivism, yet it does seem indelibly inscribed in the very form of the dance handbook. Education is based on anticipation, after all, and instruction is always geared toward the future. Perhaps here we might resolve the debate between Neville and Sparti. In Renaissance Italy a revolution occurred in dance not because it suddenly began to play a greater role in society, but because dance education acquired a new formula, one that was more dynamic. The movement of anticipation in verbal instruction is less emphatic than in writing. In direct contact between teacher and student, the present is always front and center, while in a treatise the future is always key. Cf. Seeta Chaganti, “Proleptic Steps: Rethinking Historical Period in the Fifteenth-Century Dance Manual,” *Dance Research Journal* 2012, Vol. 44, No. 2, pp. 33–41.

²³⁰ Quoted in: A. William Smith, *Fifteenth-Century...*, p. 13.

to the dynamic flight of a falcon. Cornazano called attention to the etymology of the word here – *fantasmata* might derive from *fantasma*, or ghost.²³¹ Domenico's student writes that, according to the master, "dancing, especially of slow *misure*, should be similar to a ghostly shadow [*ombra phantasmatica*]." ²³²

Here we ought to mention the theory of *spiritus* derived from Avicenna, which accompanied the Renaissance concept of the astral body:

Spiritus, of a nature unlike bodies composed of four elements, combining physicality with properties of astral origins [...] was brilliantly suited – or so it was believed – to play the role of intermediary between the sublunar physicality of our bodies and the utterly non-material souls.²³³

Perhaps Domenico's *fantasmata* has something of the *spiritus* and the astral body, though this cannot be determined, all the more so in that, as Cornazano writes, his thought is not expressed precisely. Yet in *Dela arte...* we find not only dynamism, but also slowing down, and even motionlessness, making the dancer like a specter, nearly incorporeal; as Neoplatonism would have it, a superhuman being.

In Renaissance dance, we can interpret stopping the body in several ways. Firstly, as a tactic to electrify physical action through contrast. We might say that the dancer's virtuosity was revealed less through a particular temperament while moving than in the ability to beautifully come to rest, to complete a movement, to perform a pause correctly. The dancer's self-control involved reflection, which meant motionlessness had a certain subversive potential. Emphasizing the moment before a movement occurs, dance theory created a space for self-reflection and self-presentation. This meant the dancer's individuality was accentuated more by motionlessness than by movement.²³⁴ Because motionlessness was performative, it could not be reduced to the pure embodiment of an external structure; it provided an opening for individual expression. The external structure was suspended when the dancer stopped, social pressure was frozen. This brought the ideal of individual autonomy into play.

On the other hand, no less than geometrically composed movement, motionlessness permitted the viewer to admire the perfection of a bodily composition. Motionlessness revealed the power of human reason, capable of learning the mechanisms that governed the cosmos, containing them in formulae, and then commanding the body to dance obediently to these formulae. Thus conceived, motionlessness was an extension of the power of the political body that controlled kinesis. The dancer froze when

²³¹ Nevile, *The Eloquent Body...*, pp. 86–87; see also: Sparti, *Antiquity...*, p. 377.

²³² Quoted in: A. William Smith, *Fifteenth-Century...*, p. 88.

²³³ Swieżawski, *Dzieje filozofii europejskiej XV wieku*, Vol. 6, p. 180.

²³⁴ Cf. Mark Franko, *Dance as Text: Ideologies of the Baroque Body*, Cambridge 1993.

the dancing master, i.e., the will of the collective, so desired. Thus, motionlessness was a tool for communal discipline. In motionlessness, man could feel part of what was greater than himself – an extra-individual agency.

Motionlessness thus occupied an ambiguous place in Renaissance kinesics. It a) demonstrated perfection, and thus harmony, inscribing the dancer in a higher structure, b) was a sign of mastery over one's own body, or a sign of inner strength, but also c) prompted reflection upon how one moved, perhaps making the individual cognizant of both his strength and futility, and d) subordinated the dancer, making him recall that harmony is not created by itself – one participates in harmony. As long as harmony was conceived in a Republican fashion, an idealized community of equal citizens, motionlessness could be seen as noble self-denial, as subordination to the common good. Yet when it began to be associated with servitude to a tyrant, its pathos became painful. This led to flight into a land of utopia.

A Beguiling Harmony

From what we have so far, Italian cities of the Renaissance emerged as spaces of social, political, and aesthetic progress. The arena of history became littered with increasingly ambitious individuals, their sights set on wielding power. Taste as an instrument of distinction became an emancipatory tool. Dance was a useful skill here, providing sensory pleasure, but also allowing the individual to assert his political position. Yet it would be a mistake to reduce the Italian Renaissance to activism or dynamism, a dance focused on the temporal world. Even if secular culture was developing and man increasingly saw his life in terms of worldly interests and projects, the spiritual aspect was in no way neglected. This must be remembered in sketching a kinetic portrait of the Renaissance in Italy. The dance imagination of the day involved not only panegyric political spectacles, not only sumptuous masquerades to win the praise of the ruling elite. At the same time, dance was a way of tending to the non-material, of eluding secular politics. Paradoxically, the Renaissance nurtured the mystical, non-physical body whirling in dance, thus complicating the intellectual background of the newly emerging dance theory.

Even before the Modern Era truly began, it was tired with itself. This fatigue had an aftertaste of ancient skepticism. The burgeoning humanism, discovering the ancients without intermediaries of explanations and commentaries, also meant reassessing antiquity's distance from the matters of this world, its disdain for pretension, and the ideal of the *vita contemplativa*. This last factor gave the Renaissance a special resonance. It inspired a fashion for fleeing the world, the crush of daily affairs, to the womb of nature, to cozy retreats where one could think, seek the deeper