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## INTRODUCTION

In the present world, dancing as a form of art is confronted with a definite impasse: what long was a multi-faceted form of art destined to an élite now finds itself as it were in a potentially schizophrenic state. On the one hand, many young people are displaying great enthusiasm for dancing and seem to be reappraising it, at least in its easiest and most hedonistic manifestations; on the other, artists and operators alike seem to have renounced the idea of communicating through it. Given this first dichotomy, foreseeable future options seem destined to be characterised by an exponential increase in the divergences recorded: on the one hand, we have classical ballet, which – with its nostalgic aesthetic leanings – is increasingly taking on the nature of a museum-piece, on the other, the hermetic closing into themselves of the new generations of contemporary dance choreographers who work only for highly circumscribed and specific audiences.

If we observe what is happening in society at large, above all if one considers dancing in its most openly public aspects, the demand for dancing as a unique expression of one's body or personality, or as a sign of belonging to a group defined by a specific identity is substantial and ever-growing. Discothèques with their ritual nature, for example, are now enjoying a renewed and massive popularity after the boom of the 1980s. In parallel, in other social environments, the most diverse groups offer an ever-larger public a range of classes going from popular dancing to historical dancing, from dance therapy to ballroom dancing, favoured in this by the configuration of the territory and a steadily growing cultural decentralisation.

Moreover, in the last years of the millennium, Western theatre dance began to reveal a particular interest in the sacred, which has made a comeback, above all in terms of thematic inspiration, in the productions of some contemporary choreographers. It is, in all probability, a phenomenon analogous to the one that took place at the turn of the previous century when the pioneers of modern dancing, both in the United States and in Europe, sought an answer to the question about the ultimate meaning of art in a return to natural religiosity and myths. Along with the more specifically artistic phenomena, we now have the attempt of a number of liturgical animation groups or simply groups of religious inspiration to reintroduce dancing in liturgy as a form of authentic prayer, thus reviving the tradition of the early centuries of Christianity.

The present challenge is daunting and demanding. Dancing is expected to rediscover its original calling as a social, ritual and sacred event; to cover, also within the sphere of specific art manifestations as such, the path of the reaffirmation, from the corporeal point of view, of the centrality of the human being, just when thought, above all philosophical thought, reveals its full weakness.

Wishing as we did to grasp the essence of this extremely significant human manifestation, we decided to embark on a journey of discovery to those areas where dancing seems to blur into other forms of art. Like the *seven messengers* from Buzzati's homonymous tale, we purposefully set out to explore frontier areas, exploring the limits of the universe of dance, there where the art itself seems to lose its peculiarities, its necessary characteristics, its distinguishing traits, its identity.

Such an undertaking takes on a particular meaning nowadays in a culture which has once more placed at its centre – even if in a negative perspective – human corporeality in order to crash it, to deny its transcendent role as embodied awareness, to mortify the need for it and its prime importance as a cognitive, perceptive tool and the only way to exist in this world as people.

What we are here presenting are the first findings of a research, I supervised, into dancing as a basic mode of human communication. In its preliminary phase, as a matter of fact, this research looked into the ontological status of the body and the original conditions thanks to which it could dance; later on it focused on some moments of the contemporary dance scene which, because of their nature, shed some light on traits peculiar to the art of dancing, starting with an in-depth analysis of its status and language.

The first part of the volume, with my own contribution and that of Clara Sinibaldi is, as a matter of fact, devoted to the reconstruction of a theoretical path which, in line with the perspective of phenomenological surveys, tries to understand the very basics of dancing as a bodily experience.

The second part, with the essays by Ambra Senatore and Maria Luisa Buzzi, is devoted to the analysis of some significant moments of the history of modern dancing and highlights above all those transitional areas in which dancing is contaminated with circus antics and is dialectically compared to other spectator forms of art or is changed into the virtual corporeality of the television or computer image.

In the end, Sabrina Pollifrone's survey offers a historic experience of dance pedagogy, according to the highly innovative ideas of Sara Acquarone Bertone, one of the few post-war Italian choreographers truly worthy of being numbered among the artists in the world of modern dancing.

Dancing, therefore, is analysed exactly when its original characteristics are being questioned, when – obliged to come to terms with its calling – it must reinvent itself and arise from its own ashes, possibly just when the very rediscovery of a peculiar trait which seemed to have been long forgotten illuminates its very essence.

I'd like to thank Roberto Alonge for putting Ambra Senatore's and Sabrina Pollifrone's essays at disposal, papers based on their graduation theses, which were disputed in the Faculty of Educational Sciences (Performing Arts) at the University of Turin.

**Pensare la danza**

