

Space Oddity: Exercises in Art and Philosophy

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The Space of the Body from Classical to Contemporary Dance A Matter of Coloniality

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Abstract This essay aims to reveal the changes in the understanding of the space of the body in Western theatrical dance through decolonial lens. Arguing that the dancing body has fallen prey since the Renaissance to the rhetoric of modernity/coloniality, the following pages analyse the main stages from the establishment of the colonial body to recent decolonial experimentations showing how the myth of the efficient body-organism is gradually giving way to the chaos resulting from desire freed from colonial conditioning.

Keywords Dance. Coloniality. Cultural decolonialism. Modernity. Body. Space. Organism.

Summary 1 Introduction. – 2 The Establishment of the Colonial Body. – 3 A New Dance for a New Body. – 4 Against Efficiency, Against Capitalism. – 5 Conclusion.

1 Introduction

To speak about dance is to speak about bodies and space. Bodies may be one or many, humans or not; space may be a dedicated stage or any urban or natural space, public or private. In any case, these two elements are essential, everything else is a *surplus*. This space – conventional or not, urban or natural, public or private – is the ‘objective space’ where the body dancing creates a series of meanings and sig-



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nifiers that generate a 'symbolic space' proper to that dance. Then, there is an internal and hidden space, the 'space of the body', theorised by dance scholar José Gil who, in *Paradoxical Body*, describes it as "the skin extending itself into space; it is skin becoming space" (Gil 2006, 21). The space of the body is not the space that the body occupies, but the body's own space, its internal organisation and extension; it is not exhausted within it, and it is not contained by the skin because the skin is not a boundary but a point of extension. If there is no boundary there is no distinction between inside and outside and the dancer's movement 'in space' is transformed into 'being space'. This characteristic makes the body paradoxical, since it is at the same time different from 'physical space' but not separate from it, so connected to it that it is not possible to distinguish one from the other. Hence, the space of the body has no limit, and it is intensified:

Let's immerse ourselves completely naked in a deep bathtub, leaving only our heads sticking out of the water; let's drop onto the surface of the water, near our submerged feet, a spider. We will feel the animal's contact on the entirety of our skin. What happened? The water created a space of the body defined by the skin-membrane of the bathtub's water. From this example we can extract two consequences pertaining to the properties of the space of the body: it prolongs the body's limits beyond its visible contours; it is an intensified space, when compared with the habitual tactility of the skin. (Gil 2006, 21)

As we can deduce from the example, the paradoxical body and the space of the body do not concern only the dancer's body, but any body under any circumstances. What then defines a dancing body? According to Gil, it is the ability to adapt "to the rhythms and to the imperatives of the dance" (2006, 23) and to move according to a "kind of interior map" (23). The organisation of the interior map is the reference coordinate system for the creation of the symbolic space. It goes without saying that there is no single possible spatial organisation. On the contrary, the map of the space of the body is the result of socio-cultural aspects and changes hand in hand with the transformation of society. And these are precisely objects of investigation of this essay: the processes of change of the space of the body in Western theatrical dance. I tackle the issue with a decolonial approach arguing that, since the Renaissance, the dancing body has been embedded in rigid structures aimed at specific representations that have served "the colonial matrix of power" (Mignolo 2009, 39) and questioning the possibilities of decolonising the space of the body from such subjugation. In support of my analysis, I embrace the thesis that sees the terms 'modernity' and 'coloniality' as the two pillars of Western civilisation "supported by a com-

plex and diverse structure of knowledge, basically, Christian Theology and Secular Sciences and Philosophy” (quoted in Hoffman 2017, 2) in turn backed by institutions that constantly act within the colonial matrix of power. Decoloniality means first of all disengaging from that overall structure of knowledge in order to engage in a reconstruction of knowledge and knowing, ways of thinking and language, ways of living and being part of the world.

2 The Establishment of the Colonial Body

Our journey begins with the conquest of the Americas and the related European historical period known as the Renaissance. With the sixteenth century the modern era begins, bringing with it a radical change in society and the economy: we enter the colonial era and witness the emergence of the capitalist economic system. Accomplice to the Europe at the time is the rise of the “rhetoric of modernity – that is, the rhetoric of salvation and newness” (Mignolo 2009, 41). Thanks to scholars such as Anibal Quijano and Walter D. Mignolo, it has recently been pointed out that this narrative carries with it a hidden side involving both the economic sphere and the sphere of knowledge: “human lives became expendable to the benefit of increasing wealth and such expendability was justified by the naturalisation of the racial ranking of human beings” (Mignolo 2009, 41). This grey area is called ‘coloniality’ and is rooted in the idea of a supposed racial and cultural superiority of the Western world. The term, introduced in the 1990s by Quijano, emerges as a result of colonialism but extends far beyond it in terms of both duration and encroachment. Coloniality in fact concerns culture, knowledge production and inter-subjective relations. Dance is also assigned a part in the ‘modernity/coloniality’ project, terms that are “intimately, intricately, explicitly, and complicitly entwined” because “two sides of the same coin” (Mignolo 2018, 4); a coin representing a white, macho, Christian, capitalist society acting in the name of progress. It is from this period onwards that dance loses its social role to become an artistic expression, giving rise first to Renaissance court dances and then to classical dance. With the emergence of ballet as the theatrical dance form *par excellence*, what was previously a societal practice is now structured into a demanding and rigid codification system, which, through a certain body type, aims to represent a certain narrative produced by specific social roles. The dominant narrative expands hegemonically and can be summarised as “una figura femminile, fragile, aerea e in equilibrio sempre precario (come ben mette in evidenza l’uso delle punte), contrapposta ad una mascolinità di supporto” (a female figure, fragile, aerial and always precariously balanced [as the use of pointe shoes makes clear], set against a supporting masculinity) (Pon-

tremoli 2004, 107).¹ But what body to meet these expectations? As the dance scholar André Lepecki reminds us, we witness the “establishment of modernity with the subjectification set in place by the Cartesian division between *res cogita* and *res extensa*” (Lepecki 2006, 10). In fact, the modern Western (and therefore colonial) body is defined in its organisation according to a system of organs with mostly independent functions that together constitute the *res extensa* of which Descartes wrote:

E, benché forse [...] io abbia un corpo a me congiunto molto strettamente, tuttavia, poiché da una parte ho un’idea chiara e distinta di me stesso in quanto soltanto una cosa che pensa non estesa, e, dall’altra un’idea distinta del corpo in quanto soltanto una cosa estesa e non pensante, è certo che io sono distinto realmente dal mio corpo, e che posso esistere senza di esso. (Descartes [1641] 2019, 98-9)

And, although perhaps [...] I have a body joined to me very closely, nevertheless, since on the one hand I have a clear and distinct idea of myself as only a non-extended, thinking thing, and, on the other hand, a distinct idea of the body as only an extended, non-thinking thing, it is certain that I am really distinct from my body, and that I can exist without it.

Given that ecclesiastical power has a crucial influence in the modernity/coloniality, it hardly comes as a surprise that the soul is given a clear superiority over the body, to the extent that man can exist without it. This body is traversed by three imaginary straight lines, the Cartesian axes, which constitute its mapping: the longitudinal axis crosses it vertically from the centre of the head to the heels; the transverse axis divides it with a horizontal line parallel to the ground; the sagittal axis crosses it from front to back. It is around this body map that the rigid execution parameters of academic dance are built, towards an ideal design of the human body inspired by aesthetic canons conceived *a priori*. The Cartesian axes provide the guidelines on which to develop the movements: torsion and rotation around the longitudinal axis, flexion and extension around the transversal axis and inclinations, abductions and adductions following the sagittal axis. This organisation of the space of the body, propagating itself in the physical space by means of lines, curves, diagonals, creates a perspective vision with a univocal vanishing point that coincides with the vision of the spectator. Symmetry is thus ensured. But how to achieve this? Thanks to the invention of choreography. From the

¹ Unless otherwise stated, all the translations are by the Author.

Greek *choréa* 'dance' and *gráphō* 'write', the art of choreography is a further product of modernity. In 1589,

a Jesuit priest who happened to be an ecclesiastical judge and a lawyer who happened to be a mathematician – Thoinot Arbeau and his alter ego, the student Capriol – join forces under the power of State, Justice, Science, and God to create the new art of moving rigorously and privately, which Arbeau named *orchesography*. (Lepecki 2007, 123; emphasis in the original)

Although the term choreography would not appear until later in the eighteenth century, with *orchesography* Arbeau proposed choreographic models to follow, and it is no coincidence that the first exercise published in the homonymous book is a march with a military rhythm. In accordance with Lepecki, this testifies to the will to subjugate dance on the part of the State and the Church, a will that was to become customary with the rise of choreography, defined by the scholar as an “apparatus of capture”, an expression borrowed from philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. With the codification of steps, the hegemony of narratives, the schematisation of the space of the body and the disciplining of bodies, the game is played:

at a certain point in the history of Western subjectivities, a certain social (and socialising) activity called dance fell prey to a stately (and theological) apparatus of capture called choreography. (Lepecki 2007, 122)

A body deprived of the depth of its space, stiffened and sectarianised, a space of the body emptied of its soul, a dancer reduced to a mere executor; this is the result of a dance that

loses its powers (*puissance*) as it is submitted to the power (*pouvoir*) of the choreographic [...], a very specific masculinist, fatherly, Stately, judicial, theological and disciplinary project. (122)²

Until the end of the nineteenth century, this corporeal model imposed itself as the normative body, son and servant of the colonial matrix of power; an aesthetic body, efficient and in perpetual motion, a metaphor for a society intoxicated by progress, productive and constantly advancing. Then, at a certain point, from this body comes the need for a break with the rigidity of the academic code.

² Lepecki explains that *puissances* is a matter of becoming, whilst *pouvoir* is a matter of the State.

3 A New Dance for a New Body

We are now in late-nineteenth-century Europe. The narrative of the fragile and ethereal female figure hovering lightly in her pointe shoes begins to feel narrow. The paradigms of classical dance begin to waver, leaving room for a new conception of man and the rethinking of the role of the subject in a society that is changing profoundly: from aristocratic-bourgeois society to the mass society. Dance moved to the forefront in the fight against academicism. In this widespread climate of cultural and social ferment, the search for a renewed expressive possibility of the body in movement began, aimed at overcoming Cartesian dualism and a reconciliation between body and mind. It was the Frenchman François Delsarte who theorised those principles that were to give birth to modern dance. He polemised against the traditional principles of teaching, which “ignorano, secondo lui, i codici dell’espressione gestuale e riducono le possibilità dell’animo umano di esprimersi ad un infimo repertorio di atti convenzionali stereotipati e per ciò stesso falsi” (ignore, according to him, the codes of gestural expression and reduce the possibilities of the human soul to express itself to a lowly repertoire of stereotyped conventional acts, and for this very reason false) (Pontremoli 2004, 9), fighting, on the contrary, for the search for a truth of expression. The manifestation of the exterior gesture should correspond to the emotional dimension, becoming a direct agent of the soul. Thanks to Delsarte’s theories we see a strengthening of the organic unity of the body, once again a body made up of an ordered and efficient set of organs, each with its own role in the proper functioning of the body-organism. But the soul and psyche are also an integral part of bodily unity. The Cartesian reference system leaves room for a conception of the human being as one and triune and “come tale, le sue parti intellettuale, emotiva e fisica vanno esercitate in modo penetrato” (as such, its intellectual, emotional and physical parts must be exercised in an interpenetrating manner) (Randi 2018, 25). Delsarte’s theories will have great success overseas, finding fortunate application in the revolutionary insights of the three American pioneers: Ruth St. Denis, Loie Fuller and Isadora Duncan. We should not be surprised that the protagonists are three women since

The agents (and institutions) creating and managing the logic of coloniality were Western Europeans, mostly men [...]. And they were - in general - mostly white and Christian [...]. Thus, the enunciation of the colonial matrix was founded in two embodied and geo-historically located pillars: the seed for the subsequent racial classification of the planet population and the superiority of white men over men of colour but also over white women. (Mignolo 2009, 49)

Lepecki identifies in the revolution that will lead to modern dance an attempt to escape the tyranny, so present in the history of Western dance, namely to free dance from the apparatus of choreographic capture. Each attempt “fell back into the strata of the choreographic” (Lepecki 2007, 123) but this relapse at least opens new possibilities for dance and non-Eurocentric models begin to be taken as examples (even if the approach to them remains extremely colonial). In particular, St. Denis, together with her husband Ted Shawn, founded the Denishshawn School for Movement and Dance Education in Los Angeles in 1924, where the main exponents of modern American dance were trained. At Denishawn, an effort is made to widen the perspective by offering courses in different types of dances from different parts of the world with the aim of creating a plurality of aesthetic perspectives that each student can use to create his or her own dance technique. We thus move from the codified and pre-established framework of academic dance to a range of possibilities from which to draw to find a personal style. This process, however, does not lead to a real liberation of movement, but to different codifications of it that have given rise to the different modern dance techniques. What is shared by all these techniques is a bodily architecture composed of a system of triads that from the three inner faculties (spirit, soul and life) becomes more and more particular, in the image and likeness of the universal order that governs the cosmos. In one of Ted Shawn’s lectures at the George Peabody College for Teachers in 1938, he explains that “the body was divided into three zones [...] the physical (lower trunks and legs), the spiritual-emotional (torso and arms) and the mental (head and neck)” (Shawn 1950, 49). Three types of movement correspond to this bodily division:

oppositions, denoting physical strength and brute force, parallelisms, denoting, on the physical plane, weakness, but also on the mental plane being used for decorative and stylized movement, and successions, the highest and greatest order of movement which passing through the body moves every muscle. (49)

This natural architecture of the human body is corrupted in modern man because of the inhibitions and education to which Western man is subjected. The civilisation of modern society has, according to Shawn, poisoned the body by making the adult Western body “rigido, poco flessibile, inibito, diseducato e dunque inespessivo o mal espressivo” (rigid, inflexible, inhibited, uneducated and therefore inexpressive or poorly expressive) (Randi 2018, 37), thus leading to constant lying. The mission of modern dance is therefore to educate the body disciplining it (interestingly, it is necessary to discipline in order to liberate) so that it returns to the archetypal model of unity. Shawn writes:

The Zones of the Body, Doctrine of Special Organs, Realms of Space, Orders of Movement and Laws of Motion all inter-pen-
 etrate, are all simultaneously operative, and each affects and has
 influence on all the others – they are like the skeleton of the body,
 the muscular, nervous, circulatory, digestive and other systems
 and parts, which may be separated in thought for the purpose of
 study, but which in actuality are all parts of a complex unity; or,
 like a fabric, all of these laws are threads-the warp and weft of
 a unit (the fabric) which also has qualities, colours, textures, de-
 sign. (Shawn [1963] 2016, 43)

As a consequence of this different conception of the space of the body,
 a different relationship between artist and spectator makes its way:
 the symbolic space is no longer aimed at telling a story but is rath-
 er the result of an attempt at expression, from the inside out. Chore-
 ographic movement in physical space has no aesthetic purpose, but
 each gesture must arise from a communicative need. This is clearly
 seen in the choreographic work of Marta Graham, a student of Den-
 ishawn commonly considered the mother of American modern dance.
 In 1926, she founded the Marta Graham Dance Company and the
 Martha Graham School of Contemporary Dance, where she taught her
 dance technique. According to Graham, the typical body of moder-
 nity, codified in classical ballet technique, is a body “‘a pezzi’ - fatto
 di sezioni tra loro slegate” (‘in pieces’ - made up of unconnected sec-
 tions) and, therefore, is inevitably “il riflesso di una psiche spezzata”
 (the reflection of a broken psyche), whereas “una macchina anatom-
 ica intera, invece, perfettamente connessa nei suoi elementi, rispec-
 chierebbe un’anima integra e armoniosa” (a whole anatomical ma-
 chine, on the other hand, perfectly connected in its elements, would
 reflect an intact and harmonious soul) (Randi 2018, 58). This idea con-
 firms the conception of an organic and effective body in its entire-
 ty. A body that once it has been “shaped, disciplined, honoured, and
 in time, trusted” (Graham 1991, 4), moves in outer space to express
 what lies within. According to Graham, “The spine is your body’s tree
 of life” (8) and the movement that propagates in space is consequent
 to the perpetual motion of inhalation and exhalation, translated into
 dance in the ‘contraction-release’ technique, in which a widening and
 involvement of the entire body in the act of breathing takes place. Ac-
 cording to this model of the space of the body, the spatial map sees a
 set of well-organised organs that give rise to a movement that starts
 from the centre, identified as the propulsive core, and propagates to
 the extremities (i.e., arms, legs and head), then projecting into objec-
 tive space. This bodily unity produces a symbolic space that is made
 possible by a “Movement [that] never lies” (Graham 1991, 4). In the
 words of Graham,

It is the magic of what I call the outer space of the imagination. There is a great deal of outer space, distant from our daily lives, where I feel our imagination wanders sometimes. (1991, 8)

This new space of the body of modern dance was systematically theorised by the German naturalised Hungarian Rudolf von Laban. His research goes towards a free movement, which is a personal expression of the individual and is accompanied by a mathematical and geometric will to investigate the dynamics of the body in space. Free dance does not mean spontaneous dance, on the contrary, it means liberation from all physical conditioning and pre-established technique. Once again, the effort therefore is that of a 'de-civilisation' of man, that is, 'de-colonisation' following our thesis that sees the advancement of Western civilisation coinciding with coloniality. Again, by this term I do not mean territorial colonialism, but coloniality of knowledge and imaginaries. Laban spatial research departs from the spatial scheme of classical dance in that he replaces "a static theory dealing with states of bodily carriage and positions" with "a dynamic theory of form which will deal with the process of movement and dance" (Maletic 1987, 59). The choreographer introduces the concept of 'kinesphere' - drawing inspiration from the Greek *kinesis* 'movement', and *sphaira* 'sphere' - to indicate the space around the body within reach of the dancer and the rotational movement of arms and legs at maximum amplitude. This space is distinct from the infinite space and is the extension of the space of the body. Laban writes:

The human body is completely oriented towards itself. It stands free in space. Its only resource, if we can call it that, is its environment, the spatial sphere which surrounds it, and into which it can reach with its limbs. (quoted in Maletic 1987, 59)

Despite his desire to deviate from classical technique, in his paper *Choreographie* he takes the six feet positions of academic dance as a starting point, bringing as a difference the fact that "they are spatial directions towards which the legs move, and to which the upper body makes an obvious counter-movement" (Maletic 1987, 59) and not "only referred to the placement of the feet" (59). Furthermore, instead of merely considering the three directions of the Cartesian axes, he determines the directions according to the angle of deviation from the vertical. To the six positions of the feet, Laban adds as many opposing positions of the arms. This creates a system of twelve spatial situations. The three axes of classical dance become with Laban three planes - vertical, horizontal, sagittal -, which in turn give rise to six dimensional directions - up, down, right, left, front, back. From the union of these points, several geometric figures arise that delimit the kinesphere: the figure of the octahedron

given by the union of points, the cube that derives from the tracing of diagonals and the icosahedron given by the intersection of planes and the connection of angles. In the elaboration of this spatial orientation, Laban completely abandoned the traditional one-directionality and two-dimensionality of classical ballet to approach a dynamic theory of the body in its three-dimensional movement in space. In line with this theory, the icosahedron is the “rappresentazione plastica di tutte le sequenze armoniche” (plastic representation of all harmonic sequences) (Pontremoli 2004, 72) and it is from the different combinations of spatial orientations that dance is born, made up of geometric figures that respond to a law of correspondence between straight line and immobility, curved line and instability, etc. To this study of movement body Laban gives the name ‘Choreutics’ or ‘space harmony’. The spatial directions “always going through the centre of gravity of the body” (Maletic 1987, 82) and aim at maintaining a certain symmetry, while always serving an expressive purpose and not movement as an end in itself. To summarise, with the transition from classical to modern dance there was a shift from the two-dimensional to the three-dimensional and from a body separated from the soul and placed second to it to a unity of body and mind that makes the body a functional, complete and efficient organism. The result of this bodily organisation is an objective space animated by constant movement choreographed in precise steps and directions, though no longer the result of a unique codification, but the expression of an interiority that presents itself to the world through dance. In *Exhausting Dance*, André Lepecki points out how the dance/movement paradigm that was established as the norm with the advent of modernity/coloniality, becomes even more entrenched with modern dance. At the beginning of the twentieth century, therefore, if on the one hand the space of the body welcomes the soul within it and opens to different expressive possibilities, liberating gender roles from pre-established and stereotyped models, on the other hand it is confirmed “that the ground of modernity is the colonised, flattened, bulldozed terrain where the fantasy of endless and self-sufficient motility takes place” (Lepecki 2006, 13). Confirming this, the famous dance critic John Martin stated during his lectures at the New School in New York City in 1933 that only with modern dance did dance discover its true essence “which it found to be movement” (quoted in Lepecki 2006, 4). Classical dance was in fact too bound to the plot, whereas dance must be pure movement, only then does it acquire autonomy as art. Modern dance thus is as another step in the modernity/coloniality project “where the privileged subject of discourse is always [...] experiencing its truth as (and within) a ceaseless drive for autonomous, self-motivated, endless, spectacular movement” (13).

4 Against Efficiency, Against Capitalism

To find a critique of this model of efficiency and progress we must wait a few decades. During these decades, the capitalist regime, which, as we have mentioned, took hold as a new economic model hand in hand with colonial conquests, evolved into its contemporary “financierizada, neoliberal y globalitaria” (financialised, neoliberal and globalitarian) (Rolnik 2019, 25) version between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (the period in which we saw the birth of modern dance) and intensified after the First World War, when capital became internationalised. Towards the middle of the twentieth century, the capitalist aspect of modernity/coloniality begins to be explicitly targeted and rethinking the space of the body is the pivotal point for getting rid of it. In 1947, the French theatre writer Antonine Artaud complained about the fiercely efficient organic body, considering it the slave body of the prevailing capitalism in the Western world, and proposed the Body Without Organs as an alternative. This provocation would later be taken up by the philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari and further applied to Dance Studies by José Gil in the article we mentioned at the beginning: “Paradoxical Body”. In “To End God’s Judgement”, Artaud (1965) rebels against the body map as an organisation of organs. This condition, in his view, makes us victims of God’s judgement, by which I mean God who has the Power, making us slaves to a predetermined system in which we are but cogs in the capitalist machine, just as every organ is but a cog in the bodily machine. According to Artaud (1965, 76), “there is nothing more useless than an organ”, indeed,

Man is sick because he is badly made | We must decide to lay him bare so we can | scratch this insect for him, which itches him to death | god | and with god | his organs. (76)

Deleuze and Guattari developed the Artaudian idea by posing the theoretical foundations for overcoming the conditioning of the body and offer an alternative to the space of the body that initiates a decapitalisation, or decolonisation, of the corporeal conception of the dancer. In hindsight, it is not the individual organs that are useless but the organism; it is precisely the organisation of the organs that is subject to the judgement of God (or of those who hold Power) since God is the one who makes “un’organizzazione di organi che si chiama organismo, perché non può sopportare il CsO” (an organisation of organs called an organism, because it cannot bear the BWO) (Deleuze, Guattari [1980] 2017, 238). And God cannot endure the Body Without Organs because He would be confronted with a disjointed and formless body that lives a life of its own driven by God’s enemy: desire. The Body Without Organs is the field of immanence of desire, “là dove il desiderio si definisce come processo di produzione, sen-

za referenza a nessuna istanza esterna, mancanza che verrebbe a scavarlo, piacere che verrebbe a colmarlo” (where desire defines itself as a process of production, without reference to any external instance, lack that would come to excavate it, pleasure that would come to fill it) (232). Desire itself must escape the negative judgement that God attributes to it, on the one hand connoting it as something that is generated in the presence of a lack and on the other condemning the pleasure that should satisfy it. But the aim of desire cannot be the attainment of pleasure because this would lead to its exhaustion, or at least, to its interruption; desire must make itself unattainable through the coincidence of subject and object: desire desires other desire. It is not born to fill a lack but comes to life from the Body Without Organs and, in the words of José Gil,

[desire] augments itself by assembling. To create new connections between heterogeneous materials, new bonds, other passageways for energy; to connect, to put in contact, to symbiose, to make something pass, to create machines, mechanisms, articulations - this is what it means to assemble. (2006, 29)

To assemble, therefore, and to desire connections that are always different, never finished and never the same, to continuously create mechanisms that allow connections: this is the investigation from which symbolic space is generated, which is populated with multiple actions and as many vanishing points. The symbolic space coincides with the ‘plane of consistency’ of desire - a word that in Deleuze and Guattari contains a double meaning, in addition to being a geometric figure it is also the noun of planning in the sense of ‘drawing a plan, a map’ - in which the Body Without Organs undoes all those layers that enchain it in the correspondence between “significante e significato, tra interprete e interpretato” (signifier and signified, between interpreter and interpreted) (Deleuze, Guattari [1980] 2003, 239) and “si rivela per quello che è, connessione di desideri, congiunzione di flussi, continuum di intensità” (reveals itself for what it is, connection of desires, conjunction of flows, continuum of intensity) (241). The result: a dance made of “materia intensa e non formata” (intense, unformed matter) (231) that is the energy generated by desire, a space for experimentation and not for interpretation. But what is a body if it is not a collection of organs? Perhaps, a paradox. According to José Gil, the dancer’s body is paradoxical, its first dimension is depth, and it is devoid of internal limits; the body is paradoxical because it becomes space and “the movements of the space of the body do not stop at the frontier of the body itself, but they imply the body in its entirety” (Gil 2006, 26). The paradoxical body of the dancer is always open and cannot but be so since there is no boundary between inside and outside, the internal space spills outwards revealing what is the space of the

body. The symbolic space is devoid of logic and narrative, it is ambivalent and hosts a multiplicity of contemporary actions without hierarchy. The *Body Without Organs* dances a “dance backwards again [...] | and that reversal will be his proper place” (Artaud 1965, 76) because, as Artaud says (76), only “when you have given him a body without organs | then you will have freed him from all his automatisms | and returned him to his true freedom”. Freedom is substituted for the efficiency willed by God’s judgement: no norms, no rules, no footholds of known meaning. No choreography understood as a system of codified steps. We are therefore faced with an objective space populated with several disorganised points of view, and perspective univocity gives way to the multiplicity arising from the chaos of desire. ‘Desire’ therefore becomes a key and problematic word: are our bodies able to truly desire autonomously from the colonial conditioning imposed for centuries by Western capitalism? What does a decolonial body desire? The answer is given to us by psychoanalyst Suely Rolnik, who urges the arts, and thus also dance, to search for our body knowledge that she calls the knowing-body. We have seen so far how dominant politics have influenced throughout history – and continue to do so in the present – macro and microscopically in the construction of standardised corporality organised according to an insurmountable hierarchical order. This conditioning that is as invisible as it is dangerous and long-lasting is defined by Rolnik as “the unconscious repression of the knowing-body” and reduces subjectivity to a subject that the philosopher calls a ‘zombie’.³ Zombie subjects are normalised and blinded by a shiny world that someone has prepared for them, a world that catalyses their desire without ever letting them cross the threshold. Zombie subjects are not masters of their own desire because they are victims of cultural capitalism. From the 1960s onwards, the capitalist regime in fact expanded to invade the cultural sphere as well, this means that

es de la propia vida que el capital se apropia; más precisamente, de su potencia de creación y transformación en la emergencia misma de su impulso [...]. La fuerza vital de creación y de cooperación es así canalizada por el régimen para construir un mundo acorde con sus designios. (Rolnik 2019, 28)

it is life itself that capital appropriates; more precisely, its power of creation and transformation in the very emergence of its impulse [...]. The vital force of creation and cooperation is thus channelled by the regime to build a world in accordance with its designs.

3 Videoconference “Suely Rolnik: The Return of the *Knowing Body*”. Hemispheric Institute, São Paulo. <https://hemisphericinstitute.org/en/enc13-keynote-lectures/item/2085-enc13-%20keynote-rolnik.html>.

And this world operates as:

Una religión monoteísta cuyo escenario es básicamente el mismo de todas las religiones de esta tradición: existe un Dios todopoderoso que promete el paraíso, con la diferencia de que el capital está en la función de Dios y el paraíso que promete está en esta vida y no más allá de ella. Los seres glamorosos de los mundos de la propaganda y del entretenimiento cultural de masas, con su garantido glamour, son los santos de un panteón comercial: ‘superestrellas’ que brillan en el cielo-imagen por encima de las cabezas de cada uno, anunciando la posibilidad de unirse a ellos. (Rolnik 2005, 9)

A monotheistic religion whose scenario is basically the same as that of all religions in this tradition: there is an all-powerful God who promises paradise, with the difference that capital is in God’s role and the paradise it promises is in this life and not beyond it. The glamorous beings of the worlds of propaganda and mass cultural entertainment, with their guaranteed glamour, are the saints of a commercial pantheon: ‘superstars’ shining in the sky-image above everyone’s heads, announcing the possibility of joining them.

With this scenario in mind, it is clear that it is not enough to reject the body as it is imposed on us by Power, but we must also free ourselves from induced desire in order to be able to reorganise the body according to our real and pure, deconditioned bodily knowledge.

5 Conclusion

In conclusion, to decolonise its interior space and the way it acts in the world, body needs to delink from all socio-cultural imposition by disposing of the efficient organism. To be effective in making itself a Body Without Organs, it must become master of its own desire and to do this it must return to the knowing-body. Dance, as the art of the body, is the right terrain in which to search. Or better said, dance cannot elude this responsibility. Seeking “the bodily power to listen to the diagram of the forces of the present”⁴ is the only way to transform and increase our powers of existence through differentiation. Differentiation instead of normalisation: if capitalist colonial power wants us to be normative beings, returning to unconditional

⁴ Videoconference “Suely Rolnik: The Return of the *Knowing Body*”. Hemispheric Institute, São Paulo. <https://hemisphericinstitute.org/en/enc13-keynote-lectures/item/2085-enc13-%20keynote-rolnik.html>.

bodily knowledge necessarily leads to diversity. Every body has its own space, always different. And this is the space of the decolonial body: disorganised, undisciplined, but above all desiring. There is no longer any paradigm and no recognisable technique; dance does not mean movement; immobility is accepted as mere presence. Symbolic space is no longer the space in which the dancer conveys a message to the spectator but is an anti-narrative and fragmentary space that requires the desire to be present on the part of each spectator overcoming the division of roles between artist (active) and audience (passive).

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