



Conversations about Death and Dance: the threads weaved by Thanatos and Terpsichore

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ABSTRACT – Conversations about Death and Dance: the threads weaved by Thanatos and Terpsichore – The object of the essay is the relationship between dance and death, reflected from choreographic works in which we understand that dance expresses the existential condition of death in its inexorability, tragedy and poetry. In this thought, it is observed the relationship of death and life with temporality, a time created in which we can transform the body, life and death. In this perspective, we try to weave a network of meanings about this relationship, dialoguing with choreographic art and philosophy. This perception contributes to the understanding of art as an educational phenomenon by nuancing issues of existence, such as death.

Keywords: **Dance. Death. Choreography. Expression. Aesthetics.**

RÉSUMÉ – Conversations à propos de la Mort et de la Danse: les fils tracés par Thanatos et Terpsichore – L'essai traite de la relation entre la danse et la mort, reflétée par des œuvres chorégraphiques dans lesquelles nous comprenons que la danse exprime la condition existentielle de la mort dans son inexorabilité, la tragédie, la poésie. Dans cette pensée, la relation de la mort et de la vie avec la temporalité. La même chose se passe dans la danse, puisque c'est un art du temps, un temps créé dans lequel nous pouvons transformer le corps, la vie et la mort. Dans cette perspective, nous cherchons à tisser un réseau de significations autour de cette relation, dialoguant avec l'art chorégraphique et la philosophie. Cette perception contribue à la compréhension de l'art en tant que phénomène éducatif en nuancant des questions d'existence telles que la mort.

Mots-clés: **Danse. Mort. Chorégraphie. Expression. Esthétique.**

RESUMO – Conversas sobre Morte e Dança: os fios tramados por Thanatos e Terpsícore – O ensaio tem como objeto a relação entre dança e morte, refletida a partir de obras coreográficas nas quais compreendemos que a dança expressa a condição existencial da morte em sua inexorabilidade, tragédia, poesia. Nesse pensamento, percebe-se a relação da morte e da vida com a temporalidade. O mesmo ocorre na dança, posto que esta é uma arte do tempo, um tempo criado no qual podemos transformar o corpo, a vida e a morte. Nessa perspectiva, buscamos tecer uma rede de significações acerca dessa relação, dialogando com a arte coreográfica e a filosofia. Essa percepção contribui para a compreensão da arte como fenômeno educativo ao nuanciar questões da existência como é o caso da morte.

Palavras-chave: **Dança. Morte. Coreografia. Expressão. Estética.**

Living of Death, Dying of Life

The Muses, who were invisible, and in particular Terpsichore¹, in nocturnal procession, as singers-dancers, are invoked in this essay so that, when invading the darkening of the night, Thanatos's² generator – presentifying Death³, show in continuous and perennial flow, with the strength of their songs and dance around a water fountain source, the weaving of a web of intended meanings about the relationship between dance and the existential condition of death. In our text, the threads that make up this fabric, made by Terpsichore and Thanatos, have in the choreographic art the source of their first expression, renewed in the poetic line of time by multiple aesthetic, scenic and technical configurations, which are seen in the coexistence inherent to Life and Art.

Art also fulfils the task of preservation and even of brightening up extinguished and faded memories; when it accomplishes this task it weaves a rope round the ages and causes their spirits to return. It is, certainly, only a phantom-life that results therefrom, as out of graves, or like the return in dreams of our beloved dead, but for some moments, at least, the old sensation lives again and the heart beats to an almost forgotten time (Nietzsche 2000, p. 116).

We show the nature of the choreographic work of art as an event whose power, visibilities and gestures set up an aesthetic and poetic dimension that transits through the unusual, through a certain break with a linearity, beyond the codes and signs, which are peculiar to techniques and, without denying them, use these techniques to communicate a hitherto unknown meaning, a new landscape, configurations and colors never seen before. By opening these interstices, the renewal and reinvention of the cultural upholstery acquire other perspectives, which subvert the established order and, even if only momentarily, penetrate the fissures and destabilize certainties (Nóbrega, 2015).

In the history of dance, we can find choreographic works in which the topic of death is expressed in an emblematic way. However, before entering this tragic universe of dance, it is important to announce a meaningful understanding of our topic, articulating life and death:

Living of death, dying of life. Here is a typical Heraclitus formula. At first sight, it is absurdity or fullness: we live from the death of animals or plants

eaten by us. [...] We can find another meaning for this formula. 'Living of death, dying of life' goes deeper, thanks to what we know today: our body lives of the death of its cells, replaced by young cells, in a permanent regeneration. And do societies not live because people die and others, younger, come and take their place? Life and death are, actually, fundamental enemies, but life fights death with by means of death itself. The two enemies, absolutely antagonistic, are complementary. The cunning life struggles with death, however, incorporating what never ceases to be an enemy (Morin, 2011, p.24-25, authors' translation)⁴.

Perhaps we can perceive death as *something* that fills us with humanity, which brings us closer to each other, because we are all equal to this phenomenon, which is capable of maintaining balance, for instance, with regard to the survival of one's own species. Society works not despite death; its survival and organization are given by death, through death, and in death.

The scientific knowledge developed by humanity recognizes the value of the utensils, the brain and the language in its history and, sometimes, forgets that the human species is the only one who recognizes death in its life, believes in the rebirth of the dead and buries them with rites. When we talk about death, its mysteries and the attitude of man before it, it is necessary to first look at men and seek the revelation of their passions through death and through myths in their humanity (Morin, 1970).

In the human groups that lived in the Paleolithic era, the reality of death was already existing, as well as the belief in an immortality, in a way of life proper to the dead, who do not suffer the abandonment by the living. When we speak of death in these groups, we do not refer to a concept about it, but in the gaze that sees it, among other ways and at the same time, in all these forms together: as a passage, the entrance to the world of the ancestors, an accident, a deep sleep.

Therefore, there is a realistic awareness of death included in the prehistoric and ethnological data of immortality: not the consciousness of the *essence* of death, which has never been known and will never be, for death has no *being*; but rather that of the reality of death: although death has no *being*, it is real, it happens; this reality will later find a proper name: death, and it will be recognized as an ineluctable law: at the same time that one intends to be immortal, man will designate himself as mortal. Thus, the same conscience denies and recognizes death: it denies it as annihilation,

recognizes it as an event. Admittedly, there seems to be a contradiction within this first data of consciousness. But this contradiction would not have held us for the time being if, between the discovery of death and the belief in immortality, there was, no less originally, a zone of malaise and horror (Morin, 1970, p. 26).

From this horror, the idea of the loss of individuality is a traumatic complex that causes all the disturbances experienced at the time of death. It is an idea whose content is the unfathomable, the emptiness of existence, since the *essence* of death appears to us as unreachable and unknown. Morin (1970) refers to this as the death trauma.

The death trauma, the consciousness of death and the belief in immortality form a triple data already felt within the archaic communities, which is continually renewed, unveiling itself as a situation that remains, either with family death as in the Middle Ages, or as it is in the contemporaneity, an unprecedented and rejected death. The *triple anthropological data* (Morin, 1970) is present in the archaic and/or contemporary mentalities.

The history of human's mentalities and attitudes towards death was studied by the French historian Philippe Ariès in his book *Western Attitudes toward Death: From the Middle Ages to the Present* (1989). From his reflections, we consider that the movement of mentalities towards death, regarding to changes in ways of acting and thinking, do not seem to move for very long periods. This fact should not make us believe that such a thing can be an absolute truth, as if from time to time there were no differentiated movements. Nowadays, for instance, these attitudes have changed more rapidly, and we are living a moment when death is repelled, interdicted.

A considerable break in this movement, of seemingly imperceptible rhythm, began in the Renaissance scene, in the core of an imaginary and phantasmagoric world, in which death was soaked by senses that eroticized it. Once homely, like the seasonal periods, and distanced by dancing and convulsive rituals, approached transgression and disruption, as something disarticulating and disorganizing of life, not to be part of it, throwing humans out of their rationality.

This imaginary and erotic world invades the real and measurable one, an instance in which dying and feeling the death of the others will become, soon after, a cruel and distressing burden. The pain of separation from the other by death is accentuated by the appreciation of family ties from the second half of the eighteenth century. The ancestral death trauma is reaffirmed. However, the rupture with the passing of existence, as if death came from outside and was not in us from birth, becomes stronger, acquires a greater force, establishing a crisis of death, a crisis of individuality, which cannot do without the general crisis of the contemporary world (Morin, 1970).

This bourgeois individuality, born in the machine world, in the process of ascension, departs from the possibilities of life of the past, also dedicated to mystical, magical participation, with a closer contact with nature, and that approaches a style of living in which the economic, competitive and industrial lifestyle dictates. These two poles live within that individuality, which longs for the past, refuses the present, feels enthusiastic about the future and feels inadequate. Morin (1970) perceives this crisis through his literary, poetic and philosophical writings. This mismatch was presented by the Romantic Movement, which, in its confrontation with the present of bourgeois ascension, presented much more than a dispute of classes and their ideologies. Such a movement arose by constantly questioning the past times in which beliefs in magic and contact with the natural existed, in which economic dictates did not arise so vehemently and the machine did not invade human space.

It is precisely with the romantic aesthetics, so strongly expressed in the context of choreographic art, that the works will begin to be presented in this essay. It is the romantic, dramatized death, so well represented in the ballets. Next, we will invoke the Expressionist movement and the Butoh dance as poetic and aesthetic aspects in whose natures we find communicability about death as an ineluctable presence in life, internalized in its measurable cells, spaces and time. As well as in its mythic spacetime.

The Death Expressed by the Choreographic Art

The choreographic works, shown below, are suspended from the context of creation and visibility of dance, “[...] just as the net brings the

fish and algae palpitating from the bottom of the sea” (Merleau-Ponty, 1999, p. 12), from our point of view, understanding its relevance and significance, both for the purpose of this essay and for the production of thought and the artistic framework of dance, in the quality of human expression and culture. We do not dwell on a certain historical linearity, but, in a certain way, we focus on the condition that they are works that invade the interstices of time and memory and, we believe, speak to humans of all times: archaic, immemorial, permanent and future times-spaces, poetic times engendered by dance, as a fundamental art, and its works:

It is a crucial art, such as its universality, its immemorial antiquity, the solemn uses which have been made of it, the ideas and reflections which it has always engendered, suggested or provided. This is because dance is an art deduced from life itself, since it is not only the action of the whole human body; but the action that transposes us to another world, in a type of space-time that is no longer the same as that of practical life (Valéry, 2015, p. 10-11, authors’ translation)⁵.

*Giselle*⁶: masterpiece of romantic ballet. In the piece, the hearts of the *willis* – girls who died before consummating their marriages – keep their passion for dance. At midnight, they rise and, in the search for their pairs, compel the young men they meet along the way to dance untiringly until they are dead. *Giselle*, already turned into *willi*, is chosen by Myrtha, her queen, to enchant the Duke Loys Albrecht, leading him to dance until death. But this duke is Giselle’s love, and she, with her fascinating steps, offers herself and dances in his place every time he shows up tired, until the dawn of day, when the *willis* will retire. He survives and Giselle never reappears (Bogéa, 2007).

This choreographic work brought in its dramaturgical plot, in the scenic elements and characterization, all the vaporization of ethereal creatures, the force of the supernatural, the tragedy of destiny consummated with death, the anguish of unattainable ideals, the implantation of a whole technology and machinery to create the illusion of the diaphanous, ethereal, in the bodily presence of the dancers, and definitively strengthened the female presence on stage and the western symbol of the classical ballerina: the *ballerina*, symbol of delicacy, pallor and unattainability, dressed with her pointe shoes and her “[...] romantic *tutu*, with a fitted bodice that leaves

the shoulders and shoulder blades bare, and a vaporous fabric skirt with several layers of *mi-mollet* lengths” (Portinari, 1989, p. 87).

The death motive is moving, dramatic, exalted, touching and inspiring. The plots are created from medieval legends, fairy tales, and cover elements of romanticism as an artistic and aesthetic movement, as well as the thinking of an era, such as: inflation of feelings, love between a mortal human and a spirit, the relationship between the material and immaterial worlds, destiny consumed with death, the appreciation of the supernatural, and delicate and unattainable women who are disconnected from the earthly world.

In that historical moment, dance had already consolidated itself as an artistic, scenic and technical expression, and had, in the aesthetic configuration of the romantic spectacles, so many other stories carefully contextualized in a choreographic and scenic plot, similar to *Giselle*. The beautiful threads woven by *Thanatos* and *Terpsichore*, in works created under the gaze of Romanticism, as choreographic work, manifested a dialogue between two worlds – that of the *living* and of the *dead*, the question of the desire for immortality and the idea of life after death. In addition, we emphasize that it made flourish technology, inventions and scenic artifacts appropriate to express, in the most reliable manner, the created tragedies and drama, in a desire to generate, in its aesthetics, the visibilities of the diaphanous and the intangible. The attitude of the artist, in the face of a new tragedy, is the “[...] pleasure in the clever technical inventions and tricks, in the management and distribution of the material, in the novel arrangement of old motives and old ideas. His attitude is the aesthetic attitude towards a work of art, that of the creator [...]” (Nietzsche, 2000, p. 128).

The choreographic art manifested the romantic values in creations of romantic ballets repertoire, in a remarkable way, until the beginning of the twentieth century, personifying them in masterpieces that characterize a period in which death seems to abruptly withdraw man of their daily world and makes them suffer more dramatically and strongly. Its presence is markedly strong until the present, in a process of perpetuating techniques, aesthetics and practices by the bodies of dancers of major repertoire

companies, such as the Paris Opera Ballet and the Russian Ballet Companies, Bolshoi Theater and Kirov Theater.

Nowadays, ballets from the classical repertoire coexist with other dance perspectives, already born under other horizons of senses in the early twentieth century, in the context of the events of two World Wars, famine, decimated cities, a marked number of civilian casualties and, soon after, the Cold War, the increase of nuclear weapons, all this in a quickly and intensely exploited planet. That is, at the same time that family ties were established and the conditions for prolonging life were consolidated, we are also undermined by violent circumstances of power (Morin, 1970). In this context, in which subjectivities seek answers to such urgent and pertinent issues in the arts,

[...] the Expressionist movement took the bet of an independent research and without links with the tradition that re-recorded and validated the artistic products. The new dance art, which gained visibility in Germany at the same period, also made use of some precepts of Expressionism to assert itself as an autonomous art. Above all, the idea of art as an expression of an 'inner need', as spelled out in Wassily Kandinsky's book 'Concerning the Spiritual in Art' (1911), seems to have been tailor-made for this emerging art that questioned the tradition of Classical Dance, submissive to music and coded gestures. The inner need appreciated the subject's experience and approached creation as the act of bringing forth a presence from the labyrinth of the unconscious by manipulating the materials that give visible form to an artistic product. Kandinsky claimed the expressiveness of painting itself without the obligation of the representation of the outside world, which allowed the artist to express his personal vision (Grebler, 2011, p. 1-2).

Under this point of view, in the expressionist dance of the German choreographer and dancer Mary Wigman (1886-1973), we find the remarkable presence of the event of death and the two World Wars that marked the twentieth century. For Wigman, life seems "[...] a crush between the weight of two 'nothingness'. The two poles of its art: despair and revolt" (Bourcier, 1987, p. 296). Her dance and perception of movement are understood from the relationship she has with space: real space is limiting. It is urgently necessary a poetic space bloomed from the interior of each performer, from what there is in the labyrinth of his/her unconscious to be experienced and elaborated in the process of creating a

language that is not previously ready and does not consolidate itself within existing signs. At the time it is unveiled, it creates its own means of unveiling. German Expressionism profoundly marks her dance, born and lived for many years between the First and Second World War in a Europe devastated by conflicts, hunger, deaths and undermined perspectives of life. This condition was the reason for her dance, authentic in her crossing before the reality of death and the possibility of a less distressing life (Garaudy, 1980). Perhaps when dancing life would be less difficult, the oppressive space would be defeated.

On the inspiration for creating the choreography *Death call*, Mary Wigman says:

At first, the feeling of its calling, an appeal coming from afar, emerging from the darkness, nagging, demanding. It was like a force drawing my gaze to distant depths, forcing my arms to reach out and rise like a barrier, approaching that power. But even at the first steps, I was already forced to stop, as if my body had been pierced. I was nailed to the ground as if by a magic command. Who or what was calling me that and soon made me stop? A voice? A human being? A memory? None of this. And yet she was there, an undeniable presence, a pole opposed to me, a point in space that petrified my eyes and my footsteps. The tension created in me imposed a twist on my body, arched my back tightly, stretched my arms, this time in a feeling of disarray and despair. That force paralyzed me, and its immense shadow, thickening around me, prevented me from running away. Enough! Enough of weakness! No, I no longer want to separate myself from this presence, but rather to penetrate deeply into it, to live this experience fully (Garaudy, 1980, p. 111).

Something draws her down, letting itself be overcome by gravity, as one lets oneself recognize the inevitable: death. Knowing it, exploring it, not denying it. Experiencing her anguish and dread could lead us to the knowledge of these life-sapping forces as a path of responsibility for the realization of a more spiritual world. She believed that this configuration of dance sensitized people directly, without intermissions, because this experience of the tragic was already in the daily life and in the human language. There is a sensibility towards the grotesque, the discontinuity and the unforeseen, in a reading of this tension between life and death, chaos, passions and ecstasies, lived in the poetic space-time engendered by choreographic art (Portinari, 1989; Bourcier, 1987).

She does not back down. In her expressive operation, the process and the work make us to see, in its visibilities and gestures, a dance that has, as its central point, the confrontation or tragic destiny inherent to the human: the challenge of living before the inevitable death. Her artistic and choreographic expression does not prevail for lightness, but rather for focus, minimal space, strong gestures in intimate contact with the floor. Her movements evoked solitude and terror, her head hung down, her shoulders slumped, her arms moved in a sense of opposition and struggle.

When acting, through her body synergy, Mary Wigman makes us see her ecstasy in the personification and interpretation of pain, in the experience of emptying oneself, exposing phantoms as well as precarious and actual conditions of life, in an artistic language that acted on letting go of established codes and on the construction of creative processes and choreographic works in which the performer's singularity and his inner ecstasies could express elements of one's unconscious in a "[...] movement shaped by the interiority of each individual, found in body memory which replaces, for her, the strange and external movement that is copied and learned" (Grebler, 2011, p. 4).

As a last reference, even if not born from Western culture, but accepted and recognized by it, we bring, for these talks about dance and death, the path traced by the Butoh dance. We consider its expression and visuality as crucial to the understanding of the relation between dance and death in human existence, in our contemporaneity. "Born in Japan, the Butoh carries in its gesture the culture of people who worship their dead, [...] ritualize death itself in the body" (Tibúrcio, 2005, p. 21).

Butoh emerges in the post-war environment (Second World War), in a moment of nationalism and recovery of a devastated country, by bodies such as Tatsumi Hijikata (1928-1986), Kazuo Ohno (1906-2010) and Akira Kasai (1943-), who give themselves in a journey of investigations about the body and its metamorphic potential and the overlapping with existential questions like the unconscious, birth, the grotesque, sexuality, love and death. We highlight here, in an interlacing of their lives and their studies and practices in choreographic art, that Kazuo Ohno was a student of Mary Wigman's at the *Mary Wigman's Dance Institute*,

[...] from where he brought the influence of Expressionism to Butoh with an emphasis on the dramatic, grotesque and mystical. Thus, along with Tatsumi Hijikata (1928-1986), Ohno made of this approach the basis for his choreographic aesthetics. The inner emphasis of the body is evident in the Butoh dance in which, even in the non-movement, the movement is present as an internal bodily flow (Reis, 2007, p. 54).

Dance, without a guiding code, as we know it here in the West, but with defined principles and rules, makes its first steps and presentations at the end of the 1950s. The learning of Butoh does not begin with a synthesis of steps and gestures that are classified as Butoh. This dance rejects classifications, it accepts and maintains:

[...] similarities that make us say ‘this is or is not Butoh’. [...] The rules that manipulate the game are the content, the ‘flesh of Butoh’. One of these rules is linked to a space-temporal conception and [...] another rule appears in the formatting of Butoh, which here is understood as a kind of singular organization of the laws that are present in the state of being alive, therefore, in the body. [...] For most researchers and artists, the so-called ‘shape’ of the Butoh was born in Hijikata’s work (Greiner 1998, p. 63).

As a work created under the component of Butoh dance, we bring a more recent example, titled UTT. Here, appreciated in film recording of September 21, 2015. “UTT is a journey, the journey of a woman from life to death, or it can be from death to birth. UTT is a cry, an onomatopoeia, as if we were receiving a brutal blow to the belly”. This is how Carlota Ikeda delineates her own work, choreographed in partnership with Ko Murobushi and danced by Mai Ishiwata at the *Maison du Japon* (2014).

In UTT, there is blackness, and from it emerges a body in its shape, revealed by the light to fill the space and that same body in its whiteness. A body that seems to come from the black and white space, curved and hidden, distending that same space by its slow steps. Everything happens as a call; the call of that body that we see and that looks at us, summoning us to a journey of unveiling ourselves, our shadows and our translucent and ambiguous dimensions. The bellies – mine, yours, ours, those of others –, loaded with ancestry, open and give birth to new horizons of senses and possibilities. All those bellies are there, in the dancer’s gestures. Her body in its synergy and expressive operation unveils all the historical, subjective bellies. Space-time becomes cyclical, mythical in a temporality and flows of

movements that express images and landscapes to summon us to the experience of pre-reflexive language, of the order of the sensitive and the mythical space-time.

This space-temporal conception refers to *ma*, researched from the Japanese myths, as a discontinuous time-space interval, which establishes a state of permanence in time and space. It is not an abstract idea, but the actual interval between actions:

Ma is the space or time between one movement and the next. However, it is not merely the empty space. It is a time-space that can be transported artistically [...]. It is the basis of the physical and aesthetic sense of people's movement. For this reason, there is no clear and logical definition of the word (Greiner, 1998, p. 40).

“Discontinuous, mythical time-space, possible to return to the beginning to be different, breaking with the linear evolutionary flow and following the intensities of the body in each event, including its pauses and its silences” (Tibúrcio, 2005, p. 106), in which other fissures and folds open in space, allowing the remembrance of our ancestry, the memories lost in our guts, bones and muscles congested by a linear and logical flow of time and space.

It is in the state of being alive, of being body, that the dancer presents us the *dead body*, the body in a situation that can “inhabit the *ma*”. Hijikata establishes it as the way to dance off the evolutionary axis. It is the body that has the quality to dance in this interval, which recognizes the weaves and threads of this time-space. “Only death breaks the flow of time. It suspends the body in this space-time interval. It works with discontinuities, destruction, and creation” (Greiner, 1998, p. 44).

It is a deconstruction for the birth of connections, folds, gestures and other forms that spring from the *dead body*, from the access of possibilities of feeling and of moving that are already in the body; but they do not come up clearly, easily. They need death as a continuity of life, in order to allow themselves a discontinuity in the flow that triggers mappings, singularities and other gestures. It is an emergence from the corporeal depths.

The idea of the dead body is intimately bound up with this question of ceasing to be something or someone and being reborn as something else or another person. But it can also be understood as a sort of reading of Hijikata

to the *ma*. The discovery of this path involves different forms of thought. [...] This is so because one thing is to be aware that the dead body can be transformed into dance or be aware of the possibility of becoming a stone or a plant; another thing is to be aware of the dead body, the stone and the vegetable to dance. [...] What matters at this moment is that only the dead body seems capable of working on this record, inhabiting the place/non-place called, by the Japanese, *ma*. [...] it is a body that works in a universe of particular laws. [...]. It works with invisible processes, borrowed from other creative universes, like those that coexist in our body, but that do not appear clearly. [...] The dead body is still an affirmation of life (Greiner, 1998, p. 61-62).

In Butoh dance, as we perceive in UTT, the dancer puts herself at the mercy of death, to live a distinct mapping of her actions and her dance. It does not follow a pattern, nor does it live the classifications that lead us to a unique model of dancing. At the same time, it maintains the similarities and aesthetic peculiarities of the guiding principles of a dance configuration that puts the body into constant experimentations and syntheses that are not concluded, they are open but do not operate senseless.

We imagine it to be like a metamorphosis that is not based on biological determinism, but rather on the possibility of records, mappings and creations that spring from the continuity of life that dies, lives, plays and dances in a mythical space-time, discontinuous of their memories and ancestralities, in a reframing, clarifying or, perhaps, a birth of knowledge, smell, dances, plots and other gestures, so well revealed in the bodies and images they produce.

To think this choreographic work is an attempt to generate a state of tensioning and questioning about death in a more recent context, of its accentuated confiscation and negation. In the work, death and life do not separate from each other, they are complementary, inherent in the journey of that woman who expresses, in her body and gestures, the journey of us all, towards death. What happens in the twentieth century, more precisely in the last thirty years, is an unprecedented and brutal attitude when we refer to death: once homely, part of domestic life, it becomes unspoken, not referred, refused. Which does not mean that we should keep our eyes shut to it. It does not necessarily have to be desired, but its refusal, nowadays, has been shocking.

In contemporary times, the Western men manifest a difficulty in dealing with death, perceive it as external to us; an event contrary to life. The old attitude, related to a homely, attenuated death, is very much opposed to ours, in which death causes us fear. Ariès (1989) calls this homely death a *domesticated death*. By this, the author does not mean to say that death was previously savage, but, rather, that it has become wild in our day. There is no room for living the mourning in an attitude towards life in which a state of constant happiness is desired. We cannot be sad or downhearted, and we must avoid events that cause us unpleasure, in addition to being always animated before others (Morin, 1970). At this point, we refer to a need that presents itself as an imposition, or a state of denial of the existential difficulties by which any human being passes. We refer to a feeling of happiness that denies the moments of anguish socially and culturally constructed inherent to the human species, which feels, intervenes and constantly restores itself.

Final remarks

Montaigne, referring to Cicero, shows us that to philosophize is to learn to die, since contemplation pulls us out of ourselves, separating us from the body, which, in short, resembles death. The goal of our existence is death. Chiron refused to immortality when Saturn, his father, the god of time and mortality, revealed its condition: “Every day leads us to death, only the latter reaches it” (Montaigne 1975, p. 54).

In this thought, the relationship of death and life with temporality is strongly perceived. The same occurs in dance, since this is an art of time as we learn from the reading of Paul Valéry, for whom dance is a form of time, a created time in which we can transform the body, space, life and death. In his essay on dance philosophy, the philosopher states that the person who dances closes him/herself, in some way, in a duration made up of a current energy, which exists only at the moment of its own duration: “In the dance state, all the sensations of the moving and moved body are at the same time intertwined” (Valéry, 2015, p. 24, authors’ translation)⁷. We can say that, in the dancing state, we can also experience sensations of life and death, such as those highlighted in this essay in choreographic works that transmute the body of their dancers, our gaze, our reading of this topic.

Our thinking about death is also reflected in the choices and dialogues with our interlocutors, realizing that the *triple anthropological data* on death studied by Morin (1970) is, for us humans, an ancestral question that is continually renewed. We live in a condition to feel mortal and immortal, we worship our dead in funerary rites from prehistoric or archaic times, and slowly we have modified them, as Ariès (1989) points out. Beyond religious or spiritual beliefs, in general the human believes in immortality, in the continuation of life, whether it occurs in a world of the dead, parallel to the world of the living, or in the ancestry we bring in our cells and in our habits and customs, in our culture, which perpetuates and resignifies the attitudes and thoughts that were of our grandparents, great grandparents, and so many others that preceded us.

We understand that the dance artworks with which we have spoken, carry out choreographic plots that reveal and are revealed by bodies that express the visibility of the corporal, spiritual, paradoxical, rational and poetic human, *all* at the same time, all the time, in a single space of concreteness: the body that is made and is reborn in existence. Thus, “[...] while dancing, we surpass the physiological needs of the body in an exasperated driving ecstasy whose vibration echoes in time and space and transforms the connections, the senses, the habits” (Nóbrega, 2015, p. 126).

The scenic and choreographic constructions, as well as the aesthetic configurations that permeate our text, reflect historically a relationship between dance and death that is independent of obedience to an established technical and artistic code. Death is already born with us; or rather, perhaps it would be better to say that we are born with it. We do not know if it makes any difference. For Montaigne, it is indifferent, as we have seen previously. “How many different ways does death surprise us?” (Montaigne 1975, p. 50).

Thereby, the Muses, invisible, especially Terpsichore, in nocturnal procession, as singers-dancers, when evoked, they invade the black Night, which generates Thanatos – presentification of Death –, and present us with the presentification and renewal of Dance as a place of communicability of Death. The threads that weave the fabric made by Terpsichore and Thanatos in this essay, while we were talking with our interlocutors, show us a diversity of gestures and thoughts that make us

reflect on the extensive symbolic and creative human capacity to produce and to be nurtured of disparate images, at times dissonant, about the same motive: death and the experiential records of our experiences with it, in a poetic line of time that can be seen in a process of coexistence, in circles of renewed voices, gestures and languages, continuously...

Notes

- ¹ Terpsichore: Dance Muse (Tibúrcio, 2005).
- ² Thanatos: Death God (Feitosa, 2004).
- ³ See Hesiod (2007).
- ⁴ Originally in French: “Vivre de mort, mourir de vie. Voilà une formule typique d’Héraclite. À première vue, Il s’agit d’un non-sens, ou d’une planitude: nous vivons de la mort des animaux ou des plantes que nous mangeons. [...] On peut découvrir un autre sens à cette formule. ‘Vivre de mort, mourir de vie’, s’approfondit grâce à ce que l’on sait aujourd’hui: notre organisme vit de la mort de ses cellules remplacées par des cellules jeunes dans une régénération permanente. Et les sociétés ne vivent-elles pas parce que des personnes meurent et d’autres, plus jeunes, arrivent et prennent leur place? La vie et la mort sont certes ennemies fondamentales, mais la vie lutte contre la mort en utilisant la mort. Les deux ennemies, absolument antagonistes, sont complémentaires. La vie ruse pour lutter contre la mort, elle intègre celle-ci, que ne cesse pas pourtant d’être une ennemie”.
- ⁵ Originally in French: “Elle est un art fondamental, comme son universalité, son antiquité immémoriale, les usages solennels qu’on en a fait, les idées et les réflexions qu’elle a de tout temps engendrées, le suggèrent ou le prouvent. C’est que la Danse est un art déduit de la vie même, puisqu’elle n’est que l’action de l’ensemble du corps humain; mais action transposée dans un monde, dans une sorte d’espace-temps que n’est plus tout à fait de même que celui de la vie pratique”.
- ⁶ Giselle premiered on June 28, 1841, at the Paris Opera, with Carlotta Grisi playing the role of Giselle. The music was composed by Adolphe Adam. The choreography went through several hands, being Marius Petipa’s the most known version (Portinari, 1989).

- ⁷ Originally in French: “Dans l’état dansant, toutes les sensations du corps à la fois moteur et mû sont enchaînées”.

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