

The ‘Esthétiques’ of the Body

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ABSTRACT— *The study of the body has been neglected for a long time by Arab researchers. They have not given this subject notable importance due to the conservative religious and traditional customs and attitudes which hold the body sacred and beyond investigation in any physical or intellectual sense. Thus, the purpose of this paper is to reveal the importance of the body and its cultural and sacred position as held by the Arabs and to treat this subject from various points of view in the Arab societies. This study is intended to raise awareness and understanding of the relation between the developments of these societies in relation to any changes attitudes towards the body at the different periods of time. The aim of this paper is thus twofold: an investigation of a subject that has been and is still considered a “taboo” in the traditions and morals in many fields and to note the historical changes as far as the Arab society is concerned.*

1. DEFINITION OF THE BODY AND DANCE

The study and concept of the body for anatomists, differs from that of the physiologists or biologists as defined by the medical and biological fields are different than the definition of the body according to political, informational, aesthetical, spiritual and sportive fields. . It is certain that the body has a physical unity and a structure independent of the different representation forms and demonstrative contexts which give it a symbolic meaning. . This body deprived of cultural morals, intellectual depth, and expression of the self-consciousness does not have meaning without its bodily representations in moves and dance that is a language of its own.

Lucrece defines the body as a cover of the spirit considering that this latter is its protector and guardian¹. As for Spinoza, he defines it saying that it is the mode that expresses the definition of God as a result of its positive and precise extinction². Leibnitz defines it as “a kind of a divine machine or the lead one that overcomes all the other artificial machines³. Marleau – Ponty says: “it is a system of motivator forces or a group of perceptive forces. It is much more; it is a group of lived meanings which give it balance⁴.

After having defined the body, how can we define dancing then?

Dancing is defined as a primary activity, it a game, a habit and a ritual. It became one of the most important arts after its position ^{was} despicable for many centuries. Despite its liberality now from all the chains or previous negative

¹ Alain, his real name is Emile CHARTIER; he was born in Murtagne – in Perce in the Normandy in 1868. He influenced the intellectuals in that period. He was the student of the French philosopher Jules LAGNAU.

² Jean Brun, epicure and the epicureans, chosen texts, PUF, 1975, p: 100

³ Spinoza, Ethic the 2nd part, flammarion, 1973, p: 69.

⁴ Leibntz, the monadology , Delagrave, 1982, p: 64.

judgments it is still relatively ambiguous¹. How Alain does understand dancing? He discussed it in his book system of fine arts and considered it one of the fine arts manifesting the theory of innovative imagination and everything that is beautiful. He was cruel to the talent of the imagination, he saw in it a source for committing mistakes and make mess and at the same time he saw in it the ability to show absent things. In this category he wrote “there is a huge gap in the talent of beauty, it is one of the forms of madness². He pointed to the harmony between imagination and principles through the control of the hallucinations of the imagination, that is why the artist (dancer more particularly) must find a product to domesticate. He must work on the pure fantasia alone, and in this matter we find him saying “the inspiration doesn’t build anything without the product, and the artist dancer must start from a primary subject where he practices his perception first: like rocks for the architect and a scream for the musician³. In this field, we discover that Alain has organized the arts in those in movement and those in calm and peace. We find the dancing and music in the work and movement arts, as for sculpture, painting and architecture they belong to the other section i.e. the calm arts. Dancing is considered as one of the ancient activities which one of its primary functions is to organize the first mess⁴. And the first principle here is the activity of the moving body. Alain connected between dancing and the costume since the costume changes the movement through its organization and alleviation⁵ keeping in mind that the dancing has developed and that fashion participates in its beauty in an infinite way. He also studied dancing by connecting it to music: it is according to its rules; it has to find the harmony with the body. But the dancer must know exactly every musical piece of his dance’s music and move on it his body. In this matter he wrote: “the music expresses what any other language is unable to say, it is an expression of human life’s history through time. It gives a meaning and a definition to the dancer’s dance; it is like an epic in which the expression’s will is revealed, the will of showing and hiding and that of existence. Finally, it is the expression through the reformulation⁶.

Alain’s dancing is the control of the body’s madness by controlling the imagination’s talent which makes us worried and gets us to make mistakes. He considered dancing superior to all professions. His idea of art in general is careful for all the artistic inventions governing the crazy imagination talent: it is the source of many tragedies. He also related the beauty idea to the idea of good, and because of this he was one of those who witnessed the evolution of art and classic dancing which used to call for the refinement of the soul and the education of the spirit.

2. HISTORICAL STUDY OF THE BODY IN THE ARAB CONTEXT

It is uncontested that the body’s value and long tradition of attempts to liberate it from marginalization and inferiority restrictions. Was a result of the social theories, the civil society and social-economical choices the roots of which are traced to the Age of the Renaissance? The change in attitude towards the body began with the bourgeoisie and then with others who had been under the feudal system, specifically under the authority of the feudal lords⁷. The rights of a person to be the sole proprietor of his own body used to need legal authorization. On the contrary, beginning in the Renaissance Age, men began to defend individualism and the rights of human beings to self-ownership. . The body was rediscovered in the context of corrosion of “the unsaid” and it shakes off the forgotten and suppressed and unveils the contempt and cancellation, so that it becomes an arranged essence in the universe⁸ from which the humanitarian practices practices obtain their substance⁹.

¹ Under the direction of Michel Blay, the big dictionary of philosophy, Larousse, CNRS editions 2005, p: 243.

² Emile CHARTIER Alain, System of fine arts, Gallimard 1979, p: 222.

³ Ibid p: 237

⁴ Ibid p: 259

⁵ Ibid p: 203

⁶ Ibid p: 312

⁷ : Al Chounoufi (Ali), The body’s dressing – in the Al-Hayat cultural magazine – number 66, 1993.

⁸ It is an idea defended by MARLEAU-PONTY in most of his books, where he tried to build a “Cojeto” of a body, as a basis of knowledge and intentions, and to create a relation with the world based on “I can” instead of “I think” of DESCARTES. This way the body can not be arranged in the universe according to two mechanisms: “the projection” (which is the search of the inside in the outside world) then “the introjections”: the search of the outside in the inside, and in both cases there is a perception. Based on all the members and parts of the body which constitutes in MERLEAU-PONTY’s point of view, natural minds.

⁹ Hicham EL ALAWI, in the grip of culture, points of view and opinions about the body, Rabat, first edition, page 50.

Probably, its full presence (especially the feminine body) is manifested mostly in fashion, mass culture, health, therapeutic and nutritive rituals which embrace it, in passion of rhapsodizing, elegance, masculinity, femininity, in different forms of body care, regimes and the related sacrifice rituals and in the pleasure legend which enfolds it. Today, after it replaced it in all these moral and ideological functions¹, it is proven that the body became the main subject instead instead of the spirit.

We notice that the emphasis on the body can be understood in the huge number of synonyms as indicated in the dictionary of the Hellenian period, and in the diversity of its aspects in the different fields that reflect a clear complete consciousness of “the corporality” of all things, morals and general characteristics, first of which is the spirit.²

This image managed to resist the Christians’ propagation, since the idolatry habits penetrated the western sacred image of the body, and the church was unable to destroy it³. This coexistence led to the return of “embodiment” by the Churches of the body through the statutes of the crucified Christ, the Virgin Mary, the Prophet’s and Saint icons which filled their walls and domes.

It is also necessary to recall the courageous effort of the scholar philosopher the bishop, Thomas Aquinas, who upheld the strong principles⁴ of the Church as well as the Aristotelian heritage bearing the flame of change and enlightenment that united the body and the soul of human⁵ faith.

And since what is in the mind used to exist before in the senses, the source of its enlightenment used to be clear for the outside world⁶: the word has become a body, came between us, and we saw his glory as he is our only father filled with grace and rights⁷.

But for Islam, it is revealed by many Koranic verses that both Adam and Eve were victims of the devil’s temptation: “and we said Adam live with your wife in the paradise and eat from it as you please and do not come close of this tree or you will be one of the oppressors (35) and the devil stumbled them and took them out of where they were.”⁸

We notice that they were both banned because they approached the prohibited tree, and he laid on both of them the responsibility for their action. For this reason, we should deny the evocative idea of Eve’s sin and that all her daughters are devils and mates of the evil forces.

The divine banning from eating from the tree formed the first taboo in man’s history; in fact, that is how the first taboo came about to make man’s history. Before this, man had no history; the existence was a mist with no time. When Adam ate from the prohibited tree, they broke the taboo and broke the ignorance barrier⁹, discovered their bodies and their nudity and saw that they were two bodies. From this ‘wonderful’ discovery there was Man, and he started to discover the body. The body discovery was not arbitrary or by coincidence but happened because Adam and Eve ate from a special tree: the tree of knowledge¹⁰.

They ate and knew, and the first thing they knew was the body. By this interpretation, of the original sin, its relation with sexuality and woman is denied, and the original sin which caused Adam and Eve to leave Paradise is the sin of

¹ Bordiar (Jean) “the body: “subject for consumption” translated and prepared by: Mohammad Sbila and Abdulsalam Ben Abed El Ali, in the nature and culture, philosophical books series, Tokal Publishing House, 1991, page 47.

² Lippe (Rudolf) “A problematic unity: elements for a history of Zurs.

³ Louis John, Introduction to Philosophy, page: 59.

⁴ The scholars is a philosophic school founded in the twelfth century A.J-C, by a group of bishops. Their purpose was to purify the Christians from the metaphysical (the Platonism and the Plutonism) and to harmonize between its teachings and the education and logic necessities. (Aristotle). Louis (john), Introduction to Philosophy, page: 61, 62, 66, 68.

⁵ An idea resulting from the view of Aristotle to the material and the image.

⁶ Louis John, Introduction to Philosophy, page: 68.

⁷ John (the Saint), the Evangile, number:14 from the first Chapter, page: 4.

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⁹ They ate because when facing a taboo there is always the human mind tempted by the originality of discovery and questioning. Adam and Eve might have questioned themselves why don’t we eat from this tree? Why don’t we? And questions only lead to answers.

¹⁰ As called by the Torah and regarding the Christians, look: Le Goff (J), Truong (N), A story of the body in the Middle Age, Liana Levyin, The interdisciplinary body reviewed, B. Andrew (Dir), n°1, 2003, p.p 51, 52.

knowledge's¹ Desire. "Life obliges Man to look into his body day after day", as the French philosopher Michel Bernard says. The body, and in this body, Man feels, passes, works, invents, dreams and imagines... and from this body it oversees the others' corporal reality and adheres to the world's events and order.

In the Arab societies, the body is disciplined according to certain standards that integrate it within the societies and exalt it. We find that the body is actually incredible: we, however, hide it, but it is the visible part of our existence; we keep it out of sight, but it is through it that we see and feel existence². As a result, the body becomes a symbol representing defined concepts. Its movements can be considered culturally productive, except that it submits to the nature of the civilization and to the culture's system. It actually differs from one civilization to another. The body has a language, preceding the spoken language. In fact, every use of the body is an expression, and the activity and personal behavior of the body indicate a general perception for the concepts that are drawn from the external environment which we perceive from the different corporal expressions. The person creates by his corporality, a semantic textile since the body is the container of the social concepts of which it is part. Thus, the body, as a theme or a study, has become a theoretical and essential pole for contemporary concerns and an important and inevitable reference concerning the individual and society in all dimensions. This symbolic dimension is a method by which the group finds its relation with the other person and represents actions and relations between the individual and the environment

3. THE BODY IN THE SUFI DANCING:

The rhythm in the body dancing is the relation between the psychological state or the situation describing it and the stability in the infinite world, that of the inner peace. As a result, in Sufi dancing, the individual expression is subject to the rhythm, and each is defined by the other as an expression of the 'small' universe (the human), in a way that the total individual expression rhythms defined by the general collective rhythm becomes as the sacrifice made by the dancers for the large universe rhythm. A touch of sadness, regret and depression accompany it, and this is shown by forgiveness representing the prayer of the first rosary. And the universe's rhythm expressed by the dance rhythm represents the prayer of the second rosary which is the prayer for the prophet symbolizing for the existing dancer, the complete person around whom existence turns. Therefore, as long as the identification in the collective dancing and the harmony with the universe's rhythm expressed by the form of the person praising the god, this person is free from his ego and individuality in a nostalgia and longing for the whole (or the universe).

This fact is explained by Abou El Kasem El Jounayd when he mentioned the evanescence saying: the slave must be as he was before; he is represented by the final dance by stopping the rhythmic expression and entering in internal peace as an expression for the infinite revelation of unity in existence, through the absence or evanescence to reach orgasm and to be truthfully present after the body's bursting and burning from longing and desire³. The orgasm, not described in the Sufi as a sexual pleasure, is what Bechlar considered in a poetic expression "...when the light holds you and shines on the thing's surface, but only the heat enters, and the inside that we imagine being warm but not bursting... in heat everything becomes deep since the heat is the sign of depth"⁴.

Sufi dancing, further, is a celebration of feelings by the release of existence from its place to occupy its original place or the "inner violence" in the concept of "Bataille" made by the existence in expelling itself in the collapse experience "without reaching the full collapse"⁵. The universal rhythm, governing expression, in Sufi dancing, is swaying between existence and nonexistence; the inhalation represents the names seen to be divine, and the exhalation represents its return to divine nature. As for the last breath, it is an expression of a new creation; the Sufi considers the world, including human life in continuous creation where change faces stability and imagination faces In the intermittent or continuous pauses with the dance rhythms, or the final stop in calming the body, there is an expression of

¹ "the wish of knowledge" as says Truong, le Goff, p: 52, le Goff (J), Truong (N), A story of the body in the Middle Age, opinions and citations.

² Farid El Zahi, The body, the image and the divine in the Islam, East Africa, 1999, Morocco/Beirut.

³ The Alawi Cheikh, from the answers of the Alawi professor, *Adamim Al Mad Al Sari*, to the Algerian declaration magazine, reporting and presenting: Al zouhri ALAL, first volume, Wrapping, Printing, Publishing and Distributing Company for the North, Morocco 1986 page 156.

⁴ Bechlar, Psychoanalysis of the fire, page 179.

⁵ *Dominique Frizoni*, the experience with Georges Bataille, translated by: Abd El Aziz Ben Arfa page 81.

calm and inner peace, exactly as the calm that hits the person after the body's scream in the sexual experience. This desire is in the liberation of nature's barriers contradictory to the person in experiencing death through its pathways full of pains and struggles which are transformed into a source and an incentive for pleasure and orgasm. So, isn't the body considered like a game with the imagined same person who represents the example of a divine person's game with himself in sublimity and beauty?¹

“Bataille” states: *it is a scene including an unbarred torturing scene from one side, and a state of extraversion, tranquility, comfort and orgasm...*

4. NIETZSCHE AND PATHWAYS OF THE BODY:

Nietzsche treats in *That is Thus Spoke Zarathoustra* the importance of the body's experience in what he calls the ability to insure life indicating the capable man; the text states: “... *I am a body and a soul says a baby, then why don't they all talk like babies?*” As for the intelligent “Alex”, he says:

“I am only a body and nothing more, and the soul is just a name given to a part of the body...”. The body is a big mind with only one meaning, war and peace. And what is your mind that you call “a mind” my brother, except a small tool used by your body and a small game for your big mind (...). In your body there is mind more than in your optimal wisdom, and who knows what for your body needs the optimal wisdom? (...) The creative person gave respect and contempt for itself, it created the mind as a mean for its will that you will be yourselves, contemptuous people with your madness and contempt is that I don't follow your paths body contemptuous people, I do not consider you as bridges leading to the superior man. That is how Zaradacht spoke...²

In the text, there is an important emphasis on the fact that the body is a founder, first and foremost for all the purposes of capability and efficiency. Can you imagine instead of the philosophic tradition since Plato, the body is the cause of every act and every imaginary thing. It seems that Nietzsche found for a culture and a philosophy and especially for the body's efficiency in his interpretation of the monism concept of Nietzsche (the union of the soul and the body). Eric Blondel considers the belief that the body is the start of everything does not mean Nietzsche's interpretation that the mental efficiency is limited to the body and returns to it, but that the body is an expression that defines an invisible plurality of the body³.

The body's experience has three levels making it space defining the “life's will” and directing it to weakness or power:

- a. By describing a group of active disputes, it represents the means of expression of potential capacity such as the fundamental instincts and transforms them to indications (conceptions).
- b. The invention and creation principle in the concept that leads to the proof or denial of life, finds its roots in the body's experience.
- c. The superior man, the man of the power's will assuring life's will, is the one listening in profundity and with delicacy to its body disputes.

The body is the pathway or bridge as Nietzsche says about the superior man. He thinks that he is the aesthetical person (the artist) and that the capacity in the body's experience is an aesthetical experience in overcoming the pain and tension of existence. With this experience, Nietzsche started his interpretation of tragedy of birth, which is more mature in Zaradacht's adventure and his symbolic changes between the affirmation's will and that of nihilism's refusal. These changes are governed by the eternity like a circle continuously renewed. Perhaps in this renewal, continuity and growth,

¹ Dominique Frizoni page 83.

² F. Nietzsche: Perfect Zarathoustra, philosophic works, translated by H. Albert - Laffont, edition 2005, p: 308 – 309.

³ Elic BLONDEL: Nietzsche, le body and the culture, page 284 and page 293.

invention, becomes an experience of the meaning with its real definition. He says: “...hadn't the truth become a mortal enemy of life?”¹

According to this, , life's experience is placed against knowledge as an expression of balance and happiness. Nietzsche criticizes this vision saying that: “to be forced to resist the instincts is the basis of falling, and as long as life is taking a growing direction then happiness is the instinct”².

5. CONCLUSION

This study has revealed that the understanding of knowledge and truth as equivalent to experience, bodily experience, is a sin and that there is much controversy about whether dance in life defines mankind's weaknesses or strengths. However, dancing is the talent that the body has through its ability to move inside the group in a limited space, in certain continuity and in the special individuality having a meaning and an implication through the expression of a personal excitement, an actual personal emotion and much more. It is the rationed execution of a social or spiritual ritual. Dancing constitutes an attachment between the society's members; it is in its mirror that reflects the position of art and the aesthetics and beauty in a certain culture.

Based on this, we have to question ourselves: what is the body and what is dancing? What is the concept of dancing concerning its relation with the body specifically in Alain's opinion, and what is its basis, aims and legacy? This study is an attempt in that direction – a direction which uplifts the body and soul in unison and cries out to mankind to dance in order not to die but to live. Yes, we have the right to claim that the body is not a sin and to stop all forces against it. Yes, we have the right to go back to our origins, to the truth of our ancestors, Tb zgan and Ttgliia, who were closer to reality and Christ and to those in mythology all of whom broke free of the body and saw it as part of a wider universe.

Is it not appalling that we, as we move forward in history, are ignorant of our existence and exercise more authoritarian control over our existence? We have become physiological objects with our potential controlled and our humanity crushed not able to express its presence and forbidden from disclosing its true identity.

The body in the Arab mind is suppressed trying to call out for 'freedom'; the body is decaying as if a malignant tumor is eating it away. Yes, we have other problems, but the problem of the body is like the head of a snake; it will continue to exist and 'think' of its relation to life if it is not cut off. The body is only under morphine of desires, and unless we come to terms with our body, it will remain a strong force that needs to be integrated in its own right as part of a reality in the existence of the universe's creation.

¹ F. Nietzsche: human very human, translated by Rovini. Gallimard 1981, p:60

² F. Nietzsche: the idol's crepuscule, in the philosophical works, opinions and citations. P: 960