

Expressiveness of gestural communication through body actions

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Abstract: *Throughout history, interest in the aesthetic and spiritual side of the body has been a constant concern. One of the features of corporal movement essential expression is the driving body defined by the movement and determined by aesthetic principles. A reminder in this regard are the sports with a pronounced artistic character that aim, above all the education of body aesthetics by using specific means of gestural communication like rhythmic and sports gymnastics, sportive dance, figure skating, figure swimming, etc. All these body movements are defined by the “motors gesture” common point. As an aesthetic attitude of the body dynamics, dance concretely defines its ability to manifest through harmonious, expressive, supple, light and precise movements, expressing certain states resulting from the body-psychic relationship. In conclusion, the motor gesture system can represent a form of gestural communication by loading the submitted message, causing different levels of body body’s expressiveness as a whole.*

Key-words: *motors gesture; dance; expressiveness; communication*

1. Introduction

The human body is, through its structure and mobility, a mirror of the infinite psychics hue that animate the individual.

Receptive to everything that happens inside and outside, the dancer/athlete conveys and transposed his psychic and infinite fluctuations, into a multitude of possibilities and expressions to those around him or her. His body becomes a micro-universe in which the muscular tensions, his own breathing and his sensory channels instruments, the nonverbal communication individual instruments, representing a present reality, of which the performer is not always aware of. The gesture is, most often, a voluntarily controlled movement that carries the semantic load of the message.

The instrument with which the dancer/athlete expresses himself is his body. He must master the expressions technique means so as to instantly respond to the imposed commands of the choreographer/coach conceptions. In order to achieve the impulse and action simultaneity, it is necessary for the performer to develop the parallel development of both thinking and self-control, as well as the body’s physical qualities that will act. In order to obtain a special artistic effect, the dancer/athlete becomes conditioned by the movement plasticity and expressiveness. Dance, in a privileged and equidistant way, is on the border of two worlds: spiritual, from which the other physical was born and cultivated over time, continuously enriching it through new ways of gestural communication.

At the same time, the embodied cognition theory reports that the action representations develops with the help of action experiences. Researches shows that the related action gained experiences can influence the language perception and understandings, as well the process of the perceived actions way. A magnetic resonance image conducted study indicates “increased

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activity in certain areas of the dancers` brains is discovered while watching a known dance moment”². These studies suggest that “the involved neural systems in the actions of the dancer, influence previous experiences that activate the sensory-motor brain area when the previous action is observed”³.

In Cicero`s conception, “gesture is a language that barbarians also understand”⁴ and, therefore when we present ourselves in front of an audience, regardless of the exhibition space – on the theatre`s stage, the gym mat or on the ice rink, *absolutely all body movements must express the inner movements of the thought, compared to a complex and expressive as possible painting, enriched by the shade of the expressed gesturally story.*

2. Objectives

In this paper we started from the certainty that in dance and some sports discipline, the body`s expressions education require special attention because expression means requires a priori. Capitalizing on the expressive individual forms and their rendering in a variety of decodable gestures so that the result is enciphered in the compositional structure of the exercise, is closely related to the motor skills baggage available with their degree of development and the psycho-intellectual qualities with which the performer is endowed.

The paper aims at the overall comparative study of training used in dance and rhythmic gymnastics, making a symbolic incursion on the axis – body expressiveness – motors gesture – gestural communication.

3. Material and Methods

In conducting this study, the analysis of the literature and the comparative method were used as research methods. The following aspects were analyzed comparatively: motor gesture, choreography of movements, execution technique, principles of learning in two categories of activities that take place on music: dance and several sports (figure gymnastics, rhythmic gymnastics, figure skating). This analysis was performed by comparing the opinions, regarding the aspects listed above, of several categories of authors in the specified fields.

4. Results and Discussions

Understanding the gesture in terms of its expressiveness, represents an outside projected expression essentiality that reflects a pre-existing psychic content through the body which can be transmitted to a present audience. “The gesture can become body`s expression when we want to convey the emotional nature of a situation by capitalizing the original function which consists in the artistic act beauty”⁵. Thus, the gesture can be the intermediary of two distinct planes: the mental (inner) and the physical body (outer). The viewer/spectator can be guided towards the

² Calvo-Merino B., Glaser D. E., Grezes J., Passingham R. R., Haggard P., 2005: *Action observation and acquired motor skills: An fMRI study with expert dancers, Cereb. Cortex.*, Vol.15, Pub: PubMed, CrossRef, pp.1243-1249.

³ Calvo-Merino B., Glaser D. E. Grezes J., Passingham R. R., Haggard P., 2006: *Seeing of doing? Influence of visual and motor familiarity in action observation, Curr. Biol.*, Vol.16, Pub: PubMed, pp. 1905-1910.

⁴ Hall J., 2004: *Cicero and Quintilian on the Oratorical Use of Hand Gestures*, Vol.54, Nr. 1., Pub: Cambridge University Press, pp. 143-160.

⁵ Lerio-Gourhan A., 1983: *Gestul și cuvântul*, Vol. I, Trad. Maria Berza, București, Pub: Editura Meridiane, pp. 77-113.

inner message understanding through gestures with expressive value *developed in the outer space by the body's dancer/athlete*.

“In this context, the gesture acquires a value of *production*, not just autonomous body *expression*. The gesture becomes, in the finished product of the effort made by the dancer/athlete, source and purpose at the same time”⁶.

Furthermore, “these disciplines determine the individual to reconsider his body from a new perspective in which he/she is not a simple performer of purely technical movements, but becomes a *tool for creative intentions and ideas experiments*”⁷.

Thus, the motor gesture / physical exercise passes in the artistic creative plane through the aesthetic image that exceeds the threshold of technicality or remains embedded in the individual's body as a ‘technical gesture’. To achieve this, the dancer/athlete has to train both mind and body every day through a series of specific exercises which can go beyond the area of technicality and can borrow skills from other disciplines such as choreography, music and eurhythm. In its training, from this perspective it is important for both the dancer and athlete, to focus on the artistic and suggestive plastic movement for the implementation in which is required to consciously use the understandings and developed possibilities one's own working tool represented by its body. Thus, by loading the transmitted message, the physical exercise can be framed in the canonical gestural communication form, can determine the different body expressiveness levels as a whole.

Since not only the boundaries between sport and art have merged and between stage expression forms (especially in theatre and dance), our analysis equally considers the applicable training principles for dancers, actors and athletes in all three stated directions. As Adrian Dragnea, affirms, we note the expressed statement: “in precision and expressive sports (figure skating, rhythmic and figure gymnastics) technical training must be very demanding because of the established accuracy of the competitions priority (movement amplitude, expressiveness, fluency), which can be achieved from the correlation between technical and artistic training”⁸.

In human history, the mind and body have been studied as separate entities, resulting from the independent domains of knowledge and action. Theories obtained from studies on human knowledge suggest that “the mind is integrated as a sensory-motor component of the body and that our objects and events representations are related to our experiences of acting on the world”⁹. This approach emphasizes the idea of our environments mental representations, coming from our interaction with physical experiences. Our own experiences are related to our mental representations so that they can influence our thinking about relevant objects, events and actions. With the kinaesthetic experience help we are able to identify actions that we have not actually visualized. For example, Antonio Casile and Martin A. Giese, performed an experiment in which “the participants had the eyes covered, then they received instructions consisting in swinging their arms while moving with an atypical gait. The result of the experiment is in the favour of the experienced kinaesthetic people, by improving the ability to visually recognize a particular action”¹⁰. Previous experiences can also influence the specific language of each field and how it is understood and processed. With the help of MRI, Sian L.

⁶ Lecoq J., 2009: *Corpul poetic - o pedagogie a creației teatrale*, Oradea, Pub: Editura ARTSPECT, pp. 79-116.

⁷ Moldoveanu M., 2001: *Mentalitatea creativă*, București, Pub: Editura Coresi, pp. 44-65,

⁸ Dragnea A., 1990: *Antrenamentul sportiv - Teorie și metodică*, Vol. I, București, Pub: Școala Națională de Antrenori, pp. 99-167.

⁹ Barsalou L.W. 1999: *Perceptual symbol systems*, *Behav. Brain. Sci.*, Vol. 22, Pub: PubMed, pp. 557-660.

¹⁰ Yang S., Gallo D., Beilock S. L., 2009: *Embodied memory judgments: A case of motor fluency*, *Journal of Exp. Psychol. Learn. Mem. Cogn.*, Vol.35, Pub: PubMed, CrossRef, pp.1359-1365.

Beilock and collab. Were able to “measure language processing in actions with sport-specific and everyday movements, as well as understanding it”¹¹. The authors of this study found that both groups and those with and without movement experience, showed a similar language understanding and processing related to common actions. Thus, “the relationship between experience and understanding was mediated by neural activation in the cortex responsible for the selection and planning of the motor sequences (dorsal premotor)”¹². This ascertainment proves that the movement language previously performed activates the brain areas that involve action planning, which helps them in the processing and rapid interpretation of the precise meaning. These also support previous studies, “the importance of the left dorsal premotor cortex in auditory of language understanding from familiar actions”¹³. Taken together, the presented studies proves that “perception, the understanding of actions and related languages are associated with the sensory-motor system of the cortex”¹⁴.

Dance is a complex motor activity which involves the intellect, emotions, effective participation of the body and affective through the peculiarities of human personality: “Each dance perimeter (volume, vector, point), whether spatial, corporal or temporal, every force in action and dance movement has its own privileged personality, just as each person and each BDS (Body in Dance State) has its specific and unique characteristics that do not belong to another person”¹⁵.

During its existence dance has *branched out* developing various and varied forms through classical dance, modern dance, contemporary dance, character dance, thematic dance, society dance, sports dance, folk dance, etc. The used body technique in rendering the aesthetics, specific to dance, was enriched by the increasingly varied language through which the dancers expressed their own feeling on the stage. The dance is represented by a harmonious body movement combination with gesture and expressiveness. In the course of body and movement investigation we can affirm that the gesture has a special importance in performing a choreographic exercise. Through gesture, the dancer supports an entire score by creating live painting on stage, which can *translate* the expressiveness of physical exercise in a getura communication with specific feature. By appealing to the visual element dance takes into account its specific character defined by the artist`s plasticity and body expressiveness.

Corporeal movement studies aim to research and redefine specific means, which can lead to control the conscious possibilities developed by the individual`s body. They tend towards the perfect coordination of *intention with possibilities*. From this perspective, through the physical education means, ensures the development and improvement of motor skills (mobility, flexibility, strength – especially support, balance and rhythmic coordination), necessary for the dancers. The specific dance exercises positively influence the aesthetic line of the body and at the same time the expressiveness through a gestural communication in which the movement technique is completed in the quality and depth of the released emotions by the dancers.

¹¹ Casile A., Giese M. A., 2006: *Nonvisual motor training influences biological motion perception*, *Current Biology.*, Vol.16, Pub: PubMed, CrossRef, pp. 69-74.

¹² Beilock S. L., Lyons I. M., Mattarella-Micke A., Nusbaum H. C., Small S. L., 2008: *Sports experience changes the neural processing of action language*, *PNAS.*, Vol.105, Nr.36, Pub: PubMed, pp. 269-273.

¹³ Grafton S., Fagg A., Arbib M., 1998: *Dorsal premotor cortex and conditional movement selection: A PET functional mapping study*, *Journal of Neurophysiology*, Vol.79, Nr.2, Pub: PubMed;

¹⁴ Rushworth M., Johansen-Berg H., Gobel S., Devlin J., 2003: *The left parietal and premotor cortices: Motor attention and selection*, *Neuroimage.*, Vol.20, Pub: PubMed, pp. 89-100,

¹⁵ Căciuleanu G., 2008: *Vânt, Volume, Vectori - Eseu de cromo-analiză aplicată corpului în stare de dans*, București, Pub: Editura Curtea Veche, Colecția Urban, p. 38.

In terms of competitive activities, compared to dance as artistic expression, sports branch – rhythmic gymnastics – highlights the grace expressed in performed movements on a musical background chosen especially by coaches / choreographers. “As a sport, rhythmic gymnastics has a well-defined objective which consists in the mastery of the performed exercises, thus aiming to obtain sports performance in both individual and team events. Rhythmic gymnastics carries out its entire activity according to the laws and principles of contemporary sports training”¹⁶.

Artistic training in rhythmic gymnastics involves a series of difficult tasks such as: increasing body amplitude and expressiveness, developing musical sense, rhythmicity and possibilities for expressing inner feeling, etc. The essence of rhythmic gymnastics consists in the artistic and acrobatic technique elements that blend harmoniously with the music in a virtuous, expressive and plastic execution. The objectives of this sport are achieved through the forms of motor gesture manifestations. The specific means are formed by groups of exercises which distinguish it from the other branches of gymnastics. These body technique exercises consist along with exercises which contain portable objects. In addition to specific means, rhythmic gymnastics uses many elements that belong to other gymnastics or dance branches. These are non-specific means that are necessary for developing the athletes training at all levels.

This area of gymnastics tends not only towards harmonious physical development but also to the development of aesthetic elements, the beauty of performed movements in perfect accordance with musical accompaniment, which can act on both development and improvement of motor rhythmicity and musicality, and in the direction of improving aesthetic education. A particular attention is granted for expressiveness and gestural communication of sportive training, “an important component of artistic training emphasizes the expressive movement dimension, the formation and conscious education of body expression, communication of states, attitudes, feelings and different messages through suggestive plastic and expressive body language”¹⁷.

In dance as in gymnastics, practitioners must constantly prove the art of mixing in their exercises the technique with the movement expressiveness. Both claim a harmonious development of the body, a proper controlled outfit with great precision in execution, safety and expressiveness from the simplest gestures to the process of gymnastics, leads to education on movement expressiveness that restore harmony, dynamics and amplitude of the movement. Mixed with rhythm and emotional message they form a homogeneous unitary whole. The artistic training represents, in Adrian Dragnea’s theory, “the choreographic and musical means totality of expressiveness stimulating creativity, whose finality materializes in motor skills performed with a high degree of expressiveness able to send a message to the spectator or the referees”¹⁸. Thus, women’s artistic gymnastics is characterized by their beauty, grace, rhythm and musicality, and development of the artistic standards perfection, guides us to the body’s expressiveness in motion. Added to this the facial expressiveness must reflect the inner feeling synchronization range with those related to movement experiencing.

5. Conclusions

The choreography / gymnastic exercise presented in competition with a high degree of difficulty, complexity and technical by the dancer / athlete defines the compositional conditions of musical accompaniment and plastic education and can be classified within the artistic sphere

¹⁶ Moraru, C., 2010: *Pregătirea fizică în gimnastica ritmică*, Iasi, Pub: Editura CERMI, p.5.

¹⁷ Grigore V., 2002: *Pregătirea artistică în gimnastica de performanță*, București, Pub: Editura ANEFS, p. 43.

¹⁸ Grigore V., 2003: *Gimnastica. Manual pentru cursul de bază*, București, Pub: Editura Bren, p.16.

of representation. Along with other factors from sports training (physical, technical, tactical, theoretical, mental training), the artistic training has a particularly important role in the preparation of athletes contributing in the achieving of high performance. The means of physical education through the artistic gymnast uses can go beyond the sphere of technicality and reach the level of expressiveness and gestural communication.

The individual's motor skills baggage can be capitalized so that his gestures can overcome the technicality line passing in the communicating meanings plan with symbolic value.

Thus, physical exercise can be framed in the gestural communication language by loading the transmitted message can determine different body expression levels as a whole.

Following the comparative analysis we can highlight some conclusions and recommendations:

- The motor gesture can acquire a high degree of expressiveness that exceeds the sphere of technical execution;
- Capitalizing on the knowledge and practice of sports training contributes to the education of body expression of both dancers and athletes;
- The improvement of the corporal expressiveness of the dancer/athlete can lead to a better capitalization of the technical elements in conditions of competition;
- The improvement of motor skills leads to the ease of gestural expression and to the approach of a wide range of movements;
- For the nuance of some sports branches specific elements the artistic training must be done under the guidance of the specialized choreographer;
- The dancer/athlete needs not only general and physical training but must go into specific details from choreographic training principles and methodology in order to perform with maximum expressiveness the proposed movements.

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