

CORPOREALITY AND DANCE IN THE MUSIC OF IGOR STRAVINSKY

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ТЕЛЕСНОСТ И ПЛЕС У МУЗИЦИ ИГОРА СТРАВИНСКОГ

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Received: 1 March 2023

Accepted: 17 April 2023

Original scientific paper

ABSTRACT

The high rank of Igor Stravinsky's works (especially for ballet) prompts a discussion about the meaning of corporeality and dance in his output, a meaning that goes beyond Stravinsky's historically-documented interest in ballet music. Thus, the encounter with Diaghilev and Nijinsky could be justified as immanently emanating from his own musical aesthetics and poetics. If dance seems for the composer to form an additional, immanent level of the music, the question of the aesthetic sense of reference to the body in Stravinsky's music remains unanswered. By attaining a "mediated immediacy" (Helmuth Plessner) in his works, his ballet music manages to maintain a certain distance – objectifying, alienating – from subjective expression, without becoming abstract, and at the same time without losing the subjective and intersubjective bonds in which it is immersed. Through dance, Stravinsky not only strengthens the aspect of mediation in his music, but in a reflective not primitive practice, he also looks for the origins of aesthetic expression.

KEYWORDS: Igor Stravinsky, aesthetics, ballet, body, Helmuth Plessner.

АПСТРАКТ

Значајно место које заузимају остварења Игора Стравинског (посебно балетска) подстиче дискусију о значењу телесности и плеса у његовом раду, које надилази историјски документовано интересовање Стравинског за балетску музику. Стога сусрет с Дјагиљевићем и Нижинским може бити сагледан као иманентно произлазећи из његове музичке естетике и поетике. Ако је плес за композитора додатни, иманентни слој музике, на питање естетичког смисла реферирања на тело у музици Стравинског још увек није дат одговор. Постижући „посредовану непосредност” (Хелмут Плеснер) у својим делима, његова музика за балете успева да задржи одређену дистанцу – објектификујућу, отуђујућу – у односу на субјективну експресију, без постајања апстрактним и истовремено не губећи субјективне и интерсубјективне везе у које је урођена. Кроз плес Стравински не само да ојачава аспекте посредованости у својој музици, него и путем рефлексивне, а не примитивне праксе, такође тражи и порекло естетског израза.

Кључне речи: Игор Стравински, естетика, балет, тело, Хелмут Плеснер.

Since the ancient theory of rhetoric of Quintilianus, it has been clear that the body and gestures are there to support the affect of the acoustic and language, and to lend them a material dimension, thus also persuasive power (Diehr 2000). The visual of body gestures follows the sound, which directly expresses the speaker's soul. This old body-soul problem – at least since Theodor W. Adorno's criticism of corporeality, even with Igor Stravinsky – also deserves a place in the musicological or music-aesthetic discourse. The high rank of Stravinsky's works (especially for ballet) prompts a discussion of the meaning of corporeality and dance in his output, a meaning that goes beyond his historically-documented interest in ballet music, such that the encounter with Sergei Diaghilev and Vaslav Nijinsky could be justified as emanating from his own musical aesthetics and poetics.

The fact that dance depends on music in order to achieve “rhythmic organization on a larger scale” (Dömling 1985, 205), in order to be able to produce more than just short “improvisations”, was what George Balanchine emphasized in Stravinsky's music. It is also known that Stravinsky had a concrete idea of the physical dance movement. A well-documented example is the ballet *Le Sacre du printemps*, for which Nijinsky created the world premiere choreography in 1913. A piano reduction has been preserved in which Stravinsky sketched the choreography in advance. The entries make it clear that Stravinsky had “dance accents and phrases” in mind, “which seldom match the accents and phrases of the music” (Stravinsky 1969, 35). In addition to the already highly complex rhythm of the *Sacre*, the composer thought

of a choreography that did not double these structures, but rather a simpler choreography that was often contrapuntal in itself and to the music. If dance seems for the composer to form an additional, immanent level of music, the question of the aesthetic sense of the body in Stravinsky's music remains unanswered. Are there perhaps other, aesthetic reasons for realizing this relationship between body and music? What is the inner need or necessity that urged Stravinsky to ballet?

This question could perhaps be answered on the basis of aspects of his musical language that explain or underline the affinity for bodily movement. Can, therefore, as Helmut Plessner claims about the language of the actor, one also imagine in the case of music, that it needs to be supplemented by the "proportioning shaping" (2003a, 214) of the body of the performer or dancer in order to generate "drive and resonance" (Ibid.)? According to Plessner, rhythm, tones and tone sequences have a direct effect on the human body. Because it acts as a resonance body, receptive to every kind of vibration, they give it the possibility of resonance with its own volume.² Does therefore music, like an actor's speech, require a body in order to unfold its original and full meaning, to make the "atmosphere around the whole person tangible" (Ibid.)? Is the existence of the dancing bodily gestures the condition for music to regain its anthropologically-founded, actual meaning, to be able to fully correspond to the uniqueness of the human form of existence between corporeality and consciousness? From a philosophical point of view, what is the main point of such an encounter?

Clarity, transparency, and discipline are aesthetic categories that can be recognized in Stravinsky's musical poetics. In an explicit antithesis to the romantic ideal of overloaded expression represented by Richard Wagner, exemplified in the idea of the infinite melody, Stravinsky proposes the criterion of an anthropologically-determined measure in expression, which is defined by the "limitations of the organ" (Stravinsky 1947, 63) of perception. "It is the perpetual becoming of a music that never had any reason for starting, and more than it has any reason for ending. Endless melody thus appears as an insult to the dignity and to the very function of melody which, as we have said, is the musical intonation of a cadenced phrase" (Stravinsky 1947, 62). The dignity and physical condition of melody within the confines of the human voice should be a stumbling block in the conception of abstract music ascribed to sublime emotion.

Stravinsky recognizes features of an effusive emotion not only in Romanticism but also in the music of the twentieth century, which apparently conceal the appearance of actual emotional content. Commenting on *Wozzeck* he writes: "But 'passionate emotion' can be conveyed by very different means than these, and within the

2 "Sounds are always full, broad, hollow, sharp, pointed, thin, flat. The spatial appearing (not spatial!) Characters of voluminosity show up in the timbres of the vocal and instrumental areas, in the chordal miscibility of several tones into 'spacious' sound formations and in the height or depth of the tone. Irrespective of how they are produced, i.e. regardless of their vocal or instrumental origin, sounds are able to have a profound or moving effect on the posture and motor skills of the body due to their volume. They conform to man's lively position. The volume of sound 'matches' the volume of our body and being in the body" (Plessner 2003b, 189).

most ‘limiting conventions’” (Stravinsky and Craft 1963, 24–25). With an example from the miniature representation of Timurid art, a style of art originating during the rule of the Turko-Mongol Timurid Empire (1370–1507), he makes no secret of the fact that the – similar to early medieval art in Europe – stenciled bodies and faces of these simplified, ornamentally graphic, schematized imagery as more able to convey the power of the truthful. “In another favorite miniature, two lovers confront each other with stony looks, but the man unconsciously touches his finger to his lips, and this packs the picture with, for me, as much passion as the *crescendo molto* in *Wozzeck*” (Stravinsky and Craft 1963, 25). The body gesture of the non-realistic miniature is for Stravinsky a more honest and more subtle representation of spiritual strength and expression, which is limited to the essentials. Contrary to the romantic ideal, the composer does not seem to prefer the incorporeal music striving for the absolute, at least not that of his contemporary Alban Berg, but rather moderate corporeal representation. The awareness of historical and stylistic distance and of the sense of limit appears as a guarantee of the aesthetic of objectivity, logic and depersonalization.

With a further note, this time on one of the greatest poets of the Elizabethan period, namely Edmund Spenser, probably best known for his long, allegorical epic poem “The Faerie Queen”, and his allegory of the body in its second book, Stravinsky emphasizes the role of the body as a resistance to the danger of a sweet sentimentality of expression; he does so with reference to a work of his own, namely the ballet *Le Baiser de la fée* and its source of inspiration, the work of Tchaikovsky. “‘Soule is form’ Spenser says, ‘and doth the bodie make.’ (And I would apply that quotation to *Le Baiser de la fée* as well. Listening to a concert of the saccharine source material for that work the other day, I almost succumbed to diabetes)” (Ibid., 11).³ Spenser’s allegory attempts to draw borders to prevent the diffusion of undesired emotions. The worry here is that passions will turn the body into a monster. Stravinsky’s reference to Spenser is directed against an aesthetic of direct expression and appeals for the adherence to boundaries marked by the body, which constitute the artificiality of musical expression. “[T]o me art is arbitrary and must be artificial” (Ibid., 17).

The sense of corporeality in Stravinsky’s music can be seen in contrast to animals, which, as he says, “do not have to do, they just are” (Ibid., 219); the use of the body in music is the benchmark and guarantee that music does not degenerate into an

3 “In canto nine of book II of *The Faerie Queene*, Spenser portrays the body as an embattled fortress protecting the virtue of temperance. The questing knights Guyon and Arthur come to the House of Alma, which is described as the human body: ‘[...] The knights find this castle-body besieged by “[a] thousand villains” [...]. These villains are later revealed in canto eleven to be “strong affections” [...] that besiege “Sight” [...], “Hearing” [...], “Smell” [...], “Tast[e]” [...], and [...] the sense of touch. [...] Located outside and attempting to move into the body via the senses, these affections represent a threat because of the porosity of the body.’ [...] “Spenser’s allegory of the body in book II of *The Faerie Queene* expose[s] what it means for a body to be a source of knowledge about nature, the world, and the self” (Taylor 2018, 168, 154).

arbitrary play of affects, but takes on a real shape that is able to tame the imagination and pathos. Rhythm, the musical element that realizes the bond between sound and body, serves this purpose to musically “freeze” the dramatic flow, to establish an artificial distance to the soul. “The rhythms [in *Oedipus rex*] are the principal source of dramatic tension and a major element of the dramatic method. If I have succeeded in freezing the drama in the music, that was accomplished largely by rhythmic means” (Ibid., 12–13). The aspect of rhythm opens up an anthropological perspective on Stravinsky’s thinking. For the composer, the comparison of music with an organism forms the basis for an aesthetic conception in which the laws of attraction to a center characterize the musical phenomenon: “The articulations of musical discourse betray a hidden correlation between the *tempo* and the interplay of tones. All music being nothing but a succession of impulses and repose, it is easy to see that the drawing together and separation of poles of attraction in a way determine the respiration of music” (Stravinsky 1947, 36). The body is the starting point and at the same time the pole of attraction of musical movement, expressed among other things in the principle of tonality. Striving for a topography of music, Stravinsky is looking for a methodology that describes musical structures according to their spatial relationships to one another. A spatial idea of the music, which starts from the poles of one’s own body, should prevent states of indifference and adapt the music back to human proportions.

“Limit” and “artificiality” are two terms that make up the foundation of the philosophy of a contemporary of Stravinsky: Helmuth Plessner. As a paraphrase of Stravinsky’s sentence, Plessner emphasizes: “After all, the animal is also direct and genuine in expression; If expression were no longer important, then nature would remain with the elementary living beings and would avoid the brokenness of man” (1981, 106). Only the concentration of the animate thing at its ending, at its “border”, opens it in a characteristic way, inwards and at the same time outwards, allowing each specific environment to appear in this thing and it to appear in an environment. Plessner’s foundation of philosophical anthropology defines the human being as the living being that is embedded, “positioned” in the physical boundaries and a corresponding environment, drawing at the same time from an “eccentric” point, open to the world, boundaries that he embodies. Eccentrically positioned between mind and body, only man really “has” an environment and a body and is the subject of this “having”. Only he is aware of being a subject; only man is an I, namely, completely self-reflected, an eccentric being aware of the otherness-relationship to the world, of the objectivity of things. Man, although rooted in his existential center, transcends it, projects beyond it. He is beyond the opposition of subject and object, subject to the world and object to himself.

If music occupies a central position in the system of Plessner’s philosophy, because it can communicate the spirit to the body most directly, and vice versa, the spirit-body relationship inherent in music is made thematically and artistically fruitful in ballet music. For Plessner, the attempt at dancing (a conversion of musical meaning into physical movements) testifies to an inner connection between sonorous lines and physical movements. He shows that it is possible to grasp the sonorous lines as gestures or to let be carried away by them in the direction of the gesture.

The most significant thing about the comparison between a gesture and a sounding movement is that it is not just a metaphorical connection. “But that we can understand musical movements ‘as a gesture [...]’ does not mean that we thereby only understand them metaphorically. As Plessner indicates, ‘both moments, the producibility and the distant proximity of the sound, clarify the peculiar relationship of the human subject to his body’, which reveals an ‘inner connection’, a structural affinity between sound and the phenomenal body that allows for a qualitatively different accordance or equivalence relationship between musical and bodily movements that is different from any mere metaphor” (cf. Tsetsos 2020, 155). Even more, the affinity of the sound to the body is the condition for being able to grasp music: “The accordance of the acoustic material to the posture sharply [...] specifies the aesthesiological condition of the possibility of gestures appropriate to the meaning of the music. In the strictest sense, it is therefore the general prerequisite for understanding and expressing musical content, it is actually the condition of the possibility of music par excellence” (Plessner 2003a, 236).

Taking Plessner’s idea a step further, dance in relation to music is for Stravinsky precisely what tools and art mean to people: they constitute an act of reflection. Man is by nature artificial. Knowledge of oneself leads man beyond nature. It is true that an animal can also use tools, for example. But it cannot invent. An animal, when using a tool, does not notice the process it has created. According to Plessner, the human urge to invent things is the longing for an equilibrium. Man does not behave safely towards his world, guided by instinct. He has no immediate home in this world, but has to make one for himself. The questionable nature of his position in the world leads to his essential, not merely accidental or even historically-arising “need for supplementation”. “An eccentric way of life and the need for supplements form one and the same fact”, explains Plessner. “In this neediness or nudity lies the impulse for all specifically human activity, i.e. activity directed towards the unreal and the artificial working, the ultimate reason for the tool and what it serves: culture” (Plessner 1975, 285).

If the history of music is to be understood as a history of the independence of sound from voice and corporeality, of a unity that, from an anthropological perspective, is laid out in the body, in that “every tone is equivalent to a certain posture of the body and with a concise positional relationship to him (head tone, chest tone, low tone)” (Plessner 2003a, 233), then this is how Stravinsky continues this development by restoring this unity as a conscious act. If one follows Plessner’s philosophy of the body as a condition for understanding and making music, Stravinsky’s reference to the body in his ballet music points to a further aesthetic level of his music. In search of a lost wholeness, of a collective (bodily) consciousness in which nature and culture, life and art still form an organic unity, Stravinsky turns to dance in order to “invent” a suitable instrument to shape, to give artistic form to the body as the condition of art, as well as the condition of the social and religious act. Because the dancing body also visually depicts the corporeal “striving for expression” (Ibid., 243), which is felt by the listener but cannot be lived out due to his passivity, it functions like a “speaker” for the viewer “in the medium of the gesture”, bringing him, the listener, the experience of the original presence of mind and music in the body.

Stravinsky describes himself as an “inventor of music” (1947, 53), thereby emphasizing that the focus of his aesthetics is not primarily the “idea”, but rather the “realization” and “creation”. “Invention”, according to Plessner, “means implementation from possibility into reality. It was not the hammer that existed before it was invented, but what the hammer expresses. The gramophone was, so to speak, ripe for invention when it became clear that sound waves can be transformed mechanically, and no human being has created this fact. Nevertheless it had to be invented, i.e. the form for it had to be found” (Plessner 1975, 321). The meaning of dance in Stravinsky’s music can be interpreted in a similar sense. Stravinsky invents his ballet music in order to give expression to the element of corporeality that is immanent in music but only present as a possibility. Through dance he introduces an element into the musical composition that makes it possible to experience music in general, as well as reflect on mind and soul. “Only in the intertwining of aloofness and being there, distant and close, does the immanence of consciousness fulfill its reality-revealing meaning” (Plessner 1981, 247).

Stravinsky underscores the need to immerse into the objectivity of the musical phenomena in order to be able to estimate their impact in a cool and reasonable manner, instead of strengthening the power of music through uncontrolled emotions and indignation. The physical dance movement reinforces the moment of distance (by means of music’s objectification in dance) of a reflected experience through the body. Through means such as reference to older music, the stratification of rhythm, the montage character of his composing techniques, the return to ancient subjects and, more generally, by turning away from the expressive character of the music, the composer succeeds in looking for the origin of the constitution of the musical phenomenon in its relation to the act of consciousness. Through dance, specifically through the translation of musical movement into a physical one, the immediate feeling of the music is also indirectly experienced as objectively physical. Through dance, this objective component comes into consciousness more clearly than just through the perception of music, which already has the double character of the perception of something and at the same time the perception of one’s own perception. It is only because of this, as Plessner calls it, “mediated immediacy” (1975, 171), namely man’s ability not only for simple perception, but for the perception of his own perception, that dance shows such proximity to music, which is the condition for fruitful cooperation of the two arts. Often when Stravinsky composes for dance based on musical material from the distant past but which is, at the same time, emotionally very close, a situation can arise in which the transgression of the subjective in one’s own subject becomes most obvious and the music is placed beyond the opposition of subject and object. Through the distant closeness of his music, for example in works such as the ballet *Pulcinella*, through the relationship of direct, spontaneous devotion and distanced reverence towards the material (Pergolesi’s music), through the synthesis of the feelings of restrained respect and intimate love (Stravinsky 1957, 83), he can renew the hidden life of the past, he can make its perception possible in the present. By attaining a “mediated immediacy” in his works, without becoming abstract, and at the same time without losing the subjective and intersubjective bonds in which it is immersed, his music always manages to maintain

a certain distance – objectifying, alienating – from subjective expression. Through dance Stravinsky not only strengthens the aspect of mediation in his music but, in a reflective non-primitive practice, he also looks for the origins of aesthetic expression.

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ЈАКОВОС ШТАЈНХАУЕР

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(РЕЗИМЕ)

Значајно место које заузимају остварења Игора Стравинског (посебно балетска) подстиче дискусију о значењу телесности и плеса у његовом раду, значењу које надилази историјски документовано интересовање Стравинског за балетску музику. Стога сусрет с Дјагиљевим и Нижинским може бити сагледан као иманентно произлазећи из његове музичке естетике и поетике. Ако је плес за композитора додатни, иманентни слој музике, на питање естетичког смисла реферирања на тело у музици Стравинског још увек није дат одговор. Јасноћа, транспарентност и дисциплина естетске су категорије које се препознају у музичкој поетици Стравинског. У експлицитној антителиности романтичког идеала прекомерне експресије коју представља Вагнер, оличеној у идеји бескрајне мелодије, Стравински предлаже критеријум антрополошки одређене мере у изразу. Физички плесни покрет појачава моменат дистанце (у смислу музичке објективизације у плесу) искуства рефлектованог кроз тело. Постигући „посредовану непосредност” (Хелмут Плеснер) у својим делима, његова музика за балете успева да задржи одређену – објектификујућу, отуђујућу – дистанцу у односу на субјективну експресију, не постајући апстрактном и истовремено не губећи субјективне и интерсубјективне везе у које је уроњена. Кроз плес Стравински не само да ојачава аспекте посредованости у својој музици, већ и путем рефлексивне, а не примитивне праксе, такође тражи и порекло естетског израза.