

## The Metaphor in movement

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**Abstract:** In a world where the right to opinion and freedom of expression endure, freedom, subjectivity, universality, and transdisciplinarity merge and create the particular and specific meanings of metaphors, beyond semantics. But how much freedom does a metaphor actually have? Who gives meaning to metaphors? What is their purpose, and who gives meaning to their purposes? And why can't we abandon metaphorical thinking and speaking in any aspect of our lives? Is there total freedom, or is it just an illusion? If it didn't exist, then there would be no action, no choice, no "doing"; therefore, there would be no free will and no creation. Although the freedom of metaphor is limited not only by the imagination of the person who creates it but also by other factors of human, social, and academic nature, metaphors find their meanings in the fields of activity in which the brain that conceives them operates. In other words, people associate what they hear and perceive with what they know and are interested in; always! In dance, the body of a dancer, through the unarticulated expression of his thoughts and emotions, becomes the metaphor of his language. For it is the mind that creates personality, and personality defines the style of movement and creates the *body-metaphor*.

**Keywords:** freedom, *body-metaphor*, dance, metaphorical thinking.

## The Metaphor in movement

“People see only what they are prepared to see” (Ralph Waldo Emerson)

Perception, as always, in any field, plays an essential role in delineating the freedom of metaphor, whether consciously or not, in both everyday life and academic expression. The reality of perception is largely based on the intrinsic coherence of external representations and presupposes an individualization of the matter around us, both living and lifeless alike. To a small extent, truth can be relative and different, depending on the perspective from which it is viewed, representing what can be called *phenomenological reduction* – a transcendental consciousness in which the world unfolds in

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complete transparency and is animated by a series of apperceptions that the thinker should reconstruct based on their result. The only way we can still, as Maurice Merleau-Ponty said, realize the truth in the world we live in, where the concrete and the abstract (literally and figuratively, in the case of metaphors) play a balanced role, is to suspend its movement, to refuse our complicity, detaching ourselves from it and abandoning the details that blind us, in order to view it from a distance, weakening the threads that bind us to it, precisely to make them visible. And yet, what is the truth? Who gives meaning to the world? Who gives meaning to metaphors? What is their purpose and who gives meaning to their purposes? And how much freedom does a metaphor have? Is there total freedom or is it just an illusion? If it did not exist, then there would be no action, no choice, no "doing"; as such, there would be no free will and no creation. Conditioned freedom strangles the creative spirit and reduces the potential of the artist, in the same way it does to the words with multiple metaphorical meanings.<sup>1</sup>

In a world where the right to opinion and free expression persists, freedom, subjectivity, universality, and transdisciplinarity merge and create the particular and specific meanings of metaphors, beyond semantics.

According to the hypothesis of the American philosopher John R. Searle, the human brain processes a metaphorical expression in three steps: first, it constructs a literal interpretation of the proposition; if it makes sense, it accepts it and moves on; but if the literal interpretation is inadequate, senseless, or incomplete, the brain seeks a metaphorical one. In advanced psychology, the study of cognitivism demonstrates that "there is no linguistic precision, in fact, there is only rational strategies to avoid referential ambiguity, which do not reflect the laws of linguistic usage"<sup>2</sup>. Nevertheless, metaphors possess flexibility and have the freedom to fulfill distinct functions – at the lexical level, the metaphor holds a denominative function, thus representing the fundamental element of terminological creation, intervening to fill the free spaces in the denominative terminological list; at the textual

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<sup>1</sup> Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, translated by Ilieș Câmpeanu and Georgiana Vătăjelu, Oradea, Aion Publishing House, 1999, pp. 9-13

<sup>2</sup> <https://limbaromana.md/index.php?go=articole&n=2470> – Alexandra Gherasim, 2014, Conceptual Metaphors Derived from Anatomical Terms. Teaching Perspectives for Foreign Students, Website-ul Limba română. Revista de știință și cultură, Date of Access: 19.03.2024

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level, lacking a conventional and stable value, it has a designative function, transforming into one of the characteristics that condition textual interpretation. Within a sentence, the metaphor plays a heuristic role, and due to the efficiency of analogies, coupled with argumentative power, it favors a clearer understanding of theoretical concepts. *The purpose* of the metaphor is to inform (creating a didactic character), to explain (by analogy with a familiar context), and to convince (supplementing with arguments and concrete evidence). Throughout lexical evolution, the figurative meaning within many metaphors is no longer perceived; it becomes encoded, in the form of phrases with autonomous meaning compared to contextual meaning. These are called *linguistic metaphors* and are opposed to *poetic metaphors*.<sup>3</sup>

*Metaphorical thinking*, on the other hand, defines the way of thinking, communication, interhuman connection, learning, discovery, and creation, personalizing first the mode of thinking and perception, and then the mode of expression. Starting with Aristotle, who defined metaphor as the process by which we attribute to one thing a name that belongs to another, *metaphorical speech* began to be used not only by philosophers but by everyone, in any field, place, moment, and circumstance. And when we do this, we build an entire network of analogies, comparing and blending everything we know about the "source" information and the "target", thus offering an amplified image of the idea itself, attempting to describe through articulated language what we believe or what we feel. The imagery described through a metaphor is always more vivid and appealing, with a stronger impact than if we were to simply describe in words what is evident. This happens because of the stages that succeed at the subconscious level, namely, the detection and recognition of patterns, prototypes, paradigms, and fundamental ideas underlying the metaphor, as well as the creation of future analogies that construct the respective metaphors. In the conception of metaphors, synesthesia plays an important role; people who "hear colors", meaning those who possess a unique ability that allows them to see colors mentally when they hear certain sounds or words, are the ones who use metaphors in everyday speech: silence is sweet, the rest is holy, unattractive people leave us cold, or passion, which is attributed the color red. This happens because they use not only their imagination but also their senses in creating metaphorical discourse – the

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<sup>3</sup> Ibidem

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roundness or sharpness of sounds being compared to a certain sensation or emotion that a color can evoke. In the context of metaphors, synesthesia is conceptual in nature, where we can understand one concept in the context of another.<sup>4</sup>

So practically, the freedom of metaphor is limited by the imagination of the person creating it. But with or without imagination, there is still an instinct to use the figurative meaning of terms, because the human brain has inevitably evolved to a stage where analogies sometimes materialize without the slightest effort, but also from the need to build another existential dimension, one in which our lives acquire a different or deeper meaning, where multiple possibilities can open new horizons, infiltrating our subconscious with new beginnings, with a simple "what if...".

But why can't we abandon metaphorical speech in any aspect of our lives? Perhaps because the figurative meaning of words sometimes offers us greater clarity of the idea or concept we are talking about, which effectively cannot be ignored or eliminated, but even distinguished between them, consciously. This anomaly is called *cognitive dissonance* and has been proven using *Stroop* tests.<sup>5</sup>

Although metaphorical expression has numerous advantages, it can also create false expectations that can mislead judgment and affect the decisions we make. However, all meanings of a term have a cognitive basis, even when some seem absurd, and metaphors thus pave the way for discovery; and every time we do this, we involuntarily make comparisons between what we know and what we still deduce we do not know. For to discover new things, we must investigate the unknown and imagine how it could be similar to what we already know but still, be something other than what exists. Thus, by associating what we know with what we do not know, metaphorical thinking can lead to the greatest discoveries and inventions, as recognized by Albert Einstein, describing his scientific method as a "combinatorial play".<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>[https://www.ted.com/talks/james\\_geary\\_metaphorically\\_speaking/transcript?embed=true&language=ro](https://www.ted.com/talks/james_geary_metaphorically_speaking/transcript?embed=true&language=ro) –James Geary, 2009, *Methaphorically Speaking*, Ted Website. Ideas worth spreading, Date of Access: 20.03.2024

<sup>5</sup> Ibidem, minute 04:07, Date of Access: 20.03.2024

<sup>6</sup> Ibidem, from minute 05:20, Date of Access: 20.03.2024

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This is how a hypothetical matter, such as metaphorical thinking, can achieve a real victory in practice, proving how necessary and beneficial it is to eliminate barriers to thought, to find the courage to explore what is new, and to constantly nurture curiosity, creativity, innocence, and the youthful spirit thirsty for culture, truth, quality, and consistency.

However, valuable discoveries are not only made in the world, in the spatial universes of matter that surrounds us, but they are first triggered internally, consciously, and personally. True power does not lie in the inevitability of weapons, in physical brutality, or in the tumult of the crowd, but in the message that words and the human body can conceal, give birth to, and transmit; and metaphors are the tools with which man constructs his assets. Metaphors exist in literature, even in mathematics, physics, astronomy, or medicine, and especially in philosophy, just as they can exist in the free expression of everyday life, but also in art, everywhere – in paintings and sculptures, in theater, music, and dance alike – because the source of all these creations is the same: man; and man is subjective and develops attachments according to the particularities of his life. Therefore, even metaphors find their meanings in the fields of activity in which the brain that conceives them operates – a doctor can associate one of the meanings of a word with an anatomical content, a musician can interpret figuratively an intermingling of linguistic sounds through his art, and a dancer can make concrete analogies between movement, word, and action, exemplifying theory through the practical physicality of his movements. In other words, people associate what they hear and perceive with what they know and are interested in; always!

In dance, a dancer's body, through the unarticulated expression of his thoughts and emotions, becomes the very metaphor of his language. At the same time, a dancer can incorporate an infinity of metaphors into his movements, giving rise in his choreographic creations to a multitude of ideas, concepts, visions, and affective reactions. For the mind creates personality, and personality defines the style of movement and creates the *body-metaphor*.

Such expressive bodies have remained and will remain in history, constituting the milestones of dance art – Vaslav Nijinski, Loïe Fuller, Isadora Duncan, Ruth Saint Denis, Ted Shawn, Mary Wigman, Jurt Jooss, Doris Humphrey, Jose Limón, Martha Graham, Alvin Ailey, Trisha Brown, Pina Bausch, Maurice Béjart, George Balanchine, William Forsythe, and many others. On the one hand, they were the dancers (later choreographers,

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educators, masters) who created metaphor from their bodies before making history, and on the other hand, there were others who made history, but those who created metaphor on other bodies, theoreticians and visionaries, pioneers of this art – Jean-Georges Noverre, Marius Petipa, Serghei Diaghilev, August Bournonville, François Delsarte, Émile Jaques-Dalcroze, Rudolf von Laban, and last, but not least, Merce Cunningham.

If Noverre<sup>7</sup> reformed ballet and laid the foundations of modern dance, without rejecting technique, but reintroducing bodily expressiveness and naturalness in exchange for "gratuitous virtuosity and numerous artifices that paralyze the dancer"<sup>8</sup>, Cunningham literally divided the history of modern dance into two eras: the *pre-* and *post-*Cunningham era. He opted for the *adventure of creation* over the rigidity of fixed rules, his greatest lesson being that of freedom of expression, being particularly concerned with constant bodily exploration, renewal, and "the artist's return to the origins of the act of creation, in the idea of freeing it from the constraints inherited from old traditions"<sup>9</sup>. Both Noverre and Cunningham alike (alongside many others) were endowed with the gift of metaphorical vision, a perspective that founded and revolutionized not only the world of dance but also the world of art at the same time.

Viewed as a metaphor, the dancer's body can alter reality, can build a new world, or can *tell* any story, real or not, interfering with both the conscious and subconscious mind, through the involvement of comparisons, similarities, analogies, implications, or multiple meanings. But *why* does a dancer choose to transform their body into a metaphor? Because a human being needs to construct a symbolic universe that serves their alternative reality, thus nourishing their soul. The human psyche finds in its art, whatever form it materializes in, an oasis of tranquility, relaxation, tension release, liberation, and energetic recharge, with dance also having the astonishing ability to heal,

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<sup>7</sup> <https://www.agerpres.ro/documentare/2023/04/29/29-aprilie-ziua-internationala-a-dansului-unesco--1099635> – Horia Plugaru, 2020, The Agerpres Website - Today we celebrate International Dance Day in his memory, honoring his birth date, April 29, 1727, at the initiative of the Dance Committee of the International Theatre Institute (ITI) within UNESCO, since 1982, Date of Access: 30.03.2024

<sup>8</sup> Isabelle Ginot, Marcelle Michel, *Dance in the Twentieth Century*, translated by Vivia Săndulescu, Art Publishing House, National Dance Center, Bucharest, 2011, p. 21

<sup>9</sup> *Idem*, p. 151

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both physically and mentally, emotionally, and spiritually. *The purpose* of using metaphors is to produce changes in the organism, so powerful that the dancer feels the difference on multiple levels – therapeutically and academically, both professionally and personally. *The functions* of "metaphorical movement" encompass psycho-behavioral components of both physical, intellectual, and emotional nature, consisting in highlighting hidden meanings that are often inaccessible to reason due to their forbidden nature, in expressing psychological reality that breaks down the barriers imposed by society, and in understanding an abstract reality, thus forming a flexible and open mentality, and also in restructuring the way of perceiving and interpreting the world. Therefore, metaphor represents one of the access paths of the subconscious, as well as the use of our unconscious thinking, which influences our behavior and experience, both ours and those around us. Metaphors represent the tools we use to build our reality, be it artistic or human, and can be considered "symbols towards and from our subconscious", to which we can *transmit* messages through therapeutic practice, but at the same time, we could learn to listen and interpret the messages it tries to convey to us, through dreams, visions, and our artistic creations.<sup>10</sup>

Metaphorical movement can thus access the ability to resonate with the psychological substrates of the human mind, creating a solid bridge between the mental vulnerability of the dancer and the viewer. It can incorporate visual metaphors and auditory metaphors alike, intertwining and separating, thus giving rise to states and emotions that do not need explanations or arguments; they are felt, simply, deep in the soul, to the marrow of the bones, and those who experience this need only to let themselves be absorbed and savor the moment. This represents *the effect* of metaphors, used not only in dance and art, but everywhere.

A dancer uses their corporeality to express what words sometimes are unnecessary for, because often an image or even a sound has the power to express a thousand words... that's why metaphors are used predominantly in dance. Corporeality creates images with countless meanings and substrates; and the more expressive the body, the more metaphors are born, which can be

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<sup>10</sup> <https://ro.scribd.com/document/366873073/Metoda-Metaforei-Psihoterapeutice> – Adonaida2658, 2017, *The Method of Psychotherapeutic Metaphor. Components of Metaphor and the Field of Metaphor Use*, Scribd Website, Date of Access: 21.03.2024

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incorporated into its movements. Thus, although a choreographic moment is not composed through articulated language, it *tells* a story, conveys a message, a state, an intention, and the audience understands without using words themselves; because it is precisely the absence of words that gives meaning and significance to bodily movement, as if, paradoxically, their absence would give them value.

Metaphorical movement can alter the viewer's perception, even the dancer's own perception, of shape, size, or color, of a situation, or of a mental or emotional state, but also of temporality and the defined space in which the dancer operates. This happens because transmission and reception occur through the senses, which stimulate metaphorical thinking and activate the memory center, from where, intentionally or unconsciously, certain life experiences are extracted that can correlate and associate with the intention pursued by the dancer and the entire choreographic, scenographic, or directorial concept.

In dance, metaphors can be attributed both to the dancer's body and to the matter in the surrounding space, respectively to the scenic elements, which are meant to complement the story that the dancer's body shapes and conveys. Included in choreography, they integrate like bodily extensions designed to bring details and complexity to the entire artistic concept.

Due to its presence, the dancer's body effortlessly incorporates meaning at such a profound level that only by its mere presence can it create a metaphor, without a precise intention. Although its body remains the same, it has the ability to metamorphose during the artistic performance into anything or anyone, outlining an image that hides many reflections and creates many reflections of human facets, but always fulfilling a moral function towards itself, towards truth, and the virtues that define it; thus, each interpretation reflects a part of its soul and personality. Metaphors arise so naturally in a dancer's body because it is at the crossroads between the individual and society, nature and culture, space and time, corporality, and spirituality, creating a subjective reality in which its energetic vibration stores an entire micro-cosmos and determines deep emotions. In a world where it becomes increasingly difficult for man to observe the obvious from everything around him, his authenticity comes precisely from his connection with



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himself, and his body will become both refuge and vehicle with cognition, projection of identity, instrument of expression, and conductor of emotion.<sup>11</sup>

Therefore, we can admit that metaphors are complex verbalizations of an articulated or unarticulated language, which use words or actions that give depth and quality to personal, social, and professional life. But how much freedom of expression can metaphors actually have?

Democratic regime has indeed given us a voice to "verbalize", the right to opinion, and freedom of expression, however, not only imagination limits expression, whether metaphorical or not; there are also ethical issues, reason, and the human aspect. Thus, the materialization of metaphorical thinking should also be shaped by moral integrity, logical sense, and compassion that education aims to instill in us. Any type of expression, in any context, at any age, and in any period of civilization, should take into account these extremely important factors, because we cannot use this right to opinion and freedom as long as our actions disturb, offend, or hurt another living being, or prejudice other rights. We cannot expect to achieve a state of well-being if we in turn alter someone else's; we cannot interact and socialize with those around us if we are not coherent and do not create meaning in what we say and do; just as we cannot create our attitude, personality, discourse, gestures, or creations without taking into account the code of ethics, human virtues, and simple common sense, which civilized man has acquired and developed over the centuries, along with the emancipation and evolution of the human race. With empathy, we are born, but unfortunately, throughout life, certain experiences sometimes make us forget that we can resonate with others and we learn to look away... out of fear, haste, or ignorance.

However, when common sense or empathy are lacking, deliberately or not, education and discipline come into play, incorporating ethics and academic integrity deep into our mentality, so that any other action, whether personal or professional, is not undertaken under different norms and values. And in the end, when beyond appreciation and prestige, we obtain dignity and respect, we realize how compensatory work is and how satisfying success can be, thus discovering the value of things, not just their price.

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<sup>11</sup> <https://iscoada.com/eseu/corpul-intre-harta-%E1%B9%A3i-teritoriu/> – Ana Lucreția Nedelcu, 2021, *The Body Between Map and Territory*, Iscoada Website, Date of Access: 24.03.2024

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Regarding freedom of expression, another type of respect that develops along with the acquisition of ethical qualities and that must exist regardless of the field of activity, whether scientific, literary, or artistic, is self-respect, which is paramount, even essential in the qualitative organization and experience of life, both human and artistic. We cannot create art if our art harms us or contains dishonorable, obscene, incriminating, or aggressive elements. We cannot gain the respect of others without first having respect for ourselves, just as we cannot evolve or reach our maximum potential without self-esteem. Thus, everything we build in our lives with moral value will be worthy, strong, and valuable. However, what may appear, for example, eccentric and obscene in other circumstances, in art everything can take on different meanings; the evident content is masked by the intention, concept, and artistic vision, partially or totally nullifying its vulgarity, thus gaining a completely different value and connotation<sup>12</sup>.

However, when we talk about ethics, we should not only refer strictly to the set of moral values, principles, and virtues that the code of this set of rules regulates, but also as a discipline that gains the power to impose certain restrictions and rules, under a form of mass control, but in a diplomatic, civilized, and sustained manner, both morally, culturally, and socially. This affects or improves the rapport between psycho-emotional relationships, to the same extent as it does in physical encounters between people. Thus, in accordance with British cultural theorist Sara Ahmed, dance, representing a domain of physical-psycho-emotional activity, holds special interest in this ethical discipline, benefiting from studies that can guide dancers to become aware of and "polish" their individual character, ethically, before engaging in work with a partner and in a team, as well as in the dancer-choreographer/dancer-director relationship, avoiding any dilemma, misunderstanding, or confrontation. The code of ethics, applied in choreography, nullifies (or at least attempts to) the premise of German literary critic Wolfgang Iser, who believes that "human beings have become inaccessible to themselves; we exist, but we do not know what it means to

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<sup>12</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?rdid=dERqsvpQROpk9Tsp&v=911679242275965> – Petite Danse, Escola de Dança, 2016, Website-ul *Facebook*, data accesării: 30.03. 2024

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be"<sup>13</sup>. One of the stakes that a professional dancer aims for is to achieve clarity, discipline, and virtue, cultivating sensitivity and generosity through choreographic improvisation, but also through the study and application of specialized methodology, while also discovering their personality, freedom of movement, and human essence, thus understanding what it means *to be*, not just *to do* (to dance, in our case).<sup>14</sup> How? By accessing metaphorical thinking and applying metaphorical movement both in improvisation techniques and in predetermined choreography, aiming to show and convey to the audience not only what we dance but also incorporating into movement fragments of our personality and essence.

The research of the Jewish philosopher Baruch Spinoza regarding ethical relations in practical domains has demonstrated that humans identify both as singular entities and as social beings but constantly alternate between the two. Thus, the way each of us relates to others directly and irreversibly contributes to the evolution of ethical identity, changing others and ourselves in turn, due to the commitments (or lack thereof) we make to each other. Spinoza argues this point by stating that "each emotional and/or intellectual state is triggered and highlighted in the body, for the body is what we are, and our mind represents an ideology, a projection of our body"<sup>15</sup>. However, even though both situations – affecting and being affected – result from awareness and corporeality, we will never truly know anything about our body until we know what it is capable of doing.<sup>16</sup> This way, we deduce that in dance, freedom of expression is not a consequence of a dancer's body language but a starting point, an ideal, a necessity as a human being, and as an artist, which must be explored to the fullest, embracing uncertainty to discover both human and artistic identity but always in relation to others, through physical and emotional contact, both choreographically and socially.

And yet, in the end, who gives meaning to the world? Who gives meaning to metaphors? Who gives meaning to purposes, and what is the

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<sup>13</sup> Vida L. Midgelow, *The Oxford Handbook of Improvisation in Dance*, The Oxford University Press, New York, 2019, p. 40

<sup>14</sup> *Ibidem*

<sup>15</sup> *Idem*, p. 41

<sup>16</sup> *Idem*, pp. 41-42

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purpose of metaphors? And how much freedom does a metaphor really have? In reality, only one's own imagination and self-awareness, with their own moral values, principles, and virtues, truly constrain freedom of expression and limit articulated and bodily language, and metaphors of all kinds, in all fields of activity, at all ages, in all times and on all levels, are already incorporated into socio-cultural language, representing the essence of individual personality and aiming to improve the quality of life for those who give birth to them. Metaphors provide originality, creativity, and depth, denote truth and form diversity, offer answers, and raise further questions, nourish the body, intellect, and spirit, stimulate psycho-emotional activity, and provide more meaning than literal understanding of the words; metaphors combine science with ingenuity and endlessly create new possibilities that lead to discovery and the realization of human potential. Therefore, although the human mind invents limits, the freedom of the metaphor is, in reality, infinite.

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