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Spiritual corporeality: towards embodied gnosis through a dancing language

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Citation

Tunca, S. A. (2023, October 31). *Spiritual corporeality: towards embodied gnosis through a dancing language*. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/3655503>

Version: Publisher's Version

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Note: To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

PART II

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CHAPTER 4

Into the Subtle Body: Esoteric Forms of Thought and Body-Based Practice

Through a dancing language towards embodied gnosis

In this chapter, speculative movements of thought that reach towards the metaphysical are counterbalanced in [*intermezzi**](#) where thought is anchored in physical dance experience.

In the next chapter (Attuning: orientations for corporeal consciousness in dance) this set up is reversed: first-person perspectives from a physical dance experience are counterbalanced in *intermezzi* where metaphysical vistas are unleashed by discourse that reaches beyond the physical body.

Chapter four and chapter five thus mirror each other. They keep each other in balance while conducting thought along a spectrum of movements towards the physical on the one hand, and towards the metaphysical on the other.

In both chapters, the body text and the *intermezzi* are not oriented exclusively towards only one end of the spectrum. Both contain aspects of each other: metaphysical resonances are included in the corporeally anchored dance experience while corporeal experience is included (where possible) in discourse about the metaphysical. In dialogue with each other, the body text and the *intermezzi* enact a [*dancing language**](#).

In this chapter, I will focus specifically on how the field of tension between the metaphysical and the physical unfolds in esoteric forms of thought and related body-based practices. The idea of subtle corporealities - subsumed under the concept of the [*subtle body**](#) - plays a key role.

First, I will explain a set of ideas that are central to this investigation. Then I will present a summary of the line of argument in this chapter. The three key concepts of my research have been introduced at the beginning of this dissertation and are gradually deepened in the chapters. A collection of the most relevant ideas and concepts is characterized in the [*glossary*](#). In the following, I revisit some of them for a better understanding of the psychophysical experiences I encounter in dance and their implications for the research.

Based on numinous experiences in dance, I posit that the dancing body can convey an intuition of spiritual dimensions of embodied experience. Enticed by these experiences, I investigate how dance can provide new perspectives on the relations between the metaphysical and the physical.

I discursively approach the psychophysical states related to numinous experiences in dance with the notions of [spiritual corporeality*](#), [altered states of knowing*](#) and [embodied gnosis*](#). In the following, I will elaborate on these three key concepts by analyzing them and returning to them from varying perspectives. Through an interaction between artistic experiential points of view and scholarly academic points of view I hope to arrive at a rich and layered meaning of these concepts. Therefore, in the text I will treat the concepts of *spiritual corporeality*, *altered states of knowing* and *embodied gnosis* alternately.

While dancing, I intuit that the human body is subliminally informed by relations between the physical and the metaphysical. With “physical” I refer for example to the materiality of the body, the planet, gravity, the concrete space of the performance and the physicality of sound. With “metaphysical” I refer for example to mind, consciousness, cosmic space, levity, invisible forces that traverse the body and suprasensorial experience of sound.

I argue that the [dancing body*](#) can engender an intuitive knowing of intrinsic relations between the human body and the metaphysical realm. These relations touch on ethical, ontological and epistemological facets of being.

Embodied gnosis in dance (and possibly elsewhere) describes a state of knowing-being that inclines towards the numinous. In this state, non-verbal and suprasensory qualities of experience, such as spatially realized [corporeal imagination*](#) and performative intuition, coincide with specific qualities of communicative motion. These qualities of experience permeate and transform the corporeality and performative state of the dancer. This state of intense presence can be materially effective by creating subtle yet profound changes in the psychophysical texture of the movements of the dance. This state can palpably change the perception of the space of the performance, by extending into the inner experiential landscape of the observers of the dance. To communicate this quality of presence is intended to trigger resonances with the experience of *embodied gnosis* in the observers of the dance as well as in the readers of this text.

With the notion of *altered states of knowing* I explore epistemological aspects of the experience of *embodied gnosis* in dance. The concept of *altered states of knowing* refers to specific states of consciousness where the metaphysical appears to intersect with and manifest itself within and through the physical. In dance, I associate the intuition of an intrinsic relation between physical and metaphysical to the beginnings of movement, to their causation. I speculatively explore movement causation by navigating the cutting edge between unconscious and conscious initiation of movement. I communicate the experience of navigating this edge through a non-verbal corporeal [*dance language*](#).*

The performative state of *embodied gnosis* is seen as an ideal psychophysical territory for exploring expressive and epistemological aspects of movement. When danced speculation about the origin of a movement turns into an experience of proximity with an ineffable creative source, the state of *embodied gnosis* is actualized. This experience causes a radical opening of my being towards the unknown. The target of experiencing *embodied gnosis* in dance is a forever unfinished endeavor, a forever movement of becoming.

Where the movements that I express through my dancing body and that express themselves through my dancing body come from, or who or what lies at the root of their causation remains to a large extent unknown to me. It might be unknowable by its very nature. That it is unknown, or unknowable contributes to the potentially mesmerizing magic of a performative event. I relate unknown sources of movement origination to meta-empirical realms of being and meaning. The speculative and progressive discovery of their nature is here delegated to the dancing body.

When a *numinous* experience of *embodied gnosis* occurs during a dance, I experience it as a unifying quality of life force that somehow mediates between the mind/body, psyche/physis, I/other or ideas/matter divide. I further associate this mediating quality with a subtle psychophysical materiality. Experiencing this subtle materiality seems to be linked with a performative state where inner spaces are created that enable the energy of movement to pass through the material resistance of the physical body. This state allows one to experience the dancing body as an interface for movements that draw together the metaphysical and the physical. This situation of mediation can be creatively enhanced through processes of [*linguaging*](#).* These processes are nurtured in an experiential space of creative friction between my conscious mind that interrogates the materiality of my body and a to a large degree yet unconscious logic of expression of my bodily being.

With dance, I allow my body to speak up, to spit out the pearls of knowing-being that are hidden deeply within its cellular intelligence. Dance then becomes a language – a communicative expression of an inner experience. Corporeal intelligence suggests to me that the entire body and inner being of a dancer moves within a mind (or soul/spirit/consciousness) that is infinitely larger than the singular entity of the human body. This larger mind (or soul/spirit/consciousness) appears to be conscious in its own ways inside of the body.

I intuit that the not yet fully conscious but nevertheless active layers of my bodily being are in touch with, or *know* something that permeates the body intimately, continuously, with or without me being consciously aware of it. Dancing can enable pathways of communication between conscious awareness and yet unconscious corporeal territories.

This communication appears to me to occur in co-creative dialogue with an ineffable transcendent as well as immanent force and source of life, meaning and purpose. Giving expression to the experience of contact between the physical and the metaphysical through a *dance language* can engender *altered states of knowing* which can create openings to experience something [*real**](#) and sacred.

Into the subtle body: exploring the context of the 'subtle body' and related body-based practices

In search of other practices and theoretical perspectives that could give argumentative substance and context to my intuitive hunch about a subtle materiality that mediates between mind and matter in dance, my attention has been drawn to the subtle body as described in religious and esoteric worldviews and practices.¹⁸¹

First questions are: How may subtle body concepts and practices in religious and esoteric contexts relate to the notions of *spiritual corporeality*, *altered states of knowing* and *embodied gnosis*? How can subtle types of corporeality that are intuitively sensed but for which there is not yet a technical vocabulary in contemporary dance practice and theory, be informed by and enter in dialogue with esoteric subtle body concepts and practices?

Some responses to these questions will unfold throughout this chapter.

Following a brief introduction to the notion of *subtle body*, two prominent examples of esoteric forms of thought-embodied-in-motion will be discussed: Rudolf Steiner (1861 -1925) on Eurythmy and George Ivanovich Gurdjieff (1866 -1949) on Movements. Body-based practices introduced by teachers of esoteric knowledge emerged in Europe during the early 20th century.¹⁸² This time frame also gave birth to modern dance, which was strongly imbued with spiritual impulses evident in the writings of modern dance pioneers such as Ruth St. Denis (1879 – 1968), Isadora Duncan (1877 -1927) and Martha Graham (1898 – 1991). Each of them wrote about transformative experiences engendered by dance. They integrated vocabularies, themes, narratives and symbols from religious contexts into their dance creations and written testimonies about the art of dance.¹⁸³

¹⁸¹ This text partially integrates and further develops previous research from unpublished papers and a thesis written in the context of a MA artistic research at the University of Amsterdam, 2013-2015, supervised by Associate Professor in History of Hermetic philosophy and related currents at the University of Amsterdam, Marco Pasi.

¹⁸² Cusack, "The Contemporary Context of Gurdjieff's Movements," 2017, 96-122.

¹⁸³ LaMothe, "Transformation: An ecokinetic approach to the study of ritual dance," 2014, 60.

Isadora Duncan wrote: “The dance of the future will have to become again a high religious art as it was with the Greeks. For art which is not religious is not art, is mere merchandise.”¹⁸⁴

Steiner and Gurdjieff are highlighted because the esoteric forms of thought that they brought into meaningful relation with the body in motion emerged in a relatively recent time frame, where a rational scientific knowledge paradigm had already been established in mainstream intellectual culture. In their teachings, they emphasize understanding (in addition to belief and faith) and embodiment as necessary conditions for the transposition of their spiritual worldviews towards everyday life. With these examples, esoteric forms of thought are embodied in carefully crafted movements. They made accessible (to a certain extent) what had been considered secret mysteries reserved for an exclusive elite of initiates during earlier time frames.¹⁸⁵ These examples give an orientation for how a movement practice can be meaningfully contextualized in a spiritually informed worldview.

Creating a bridge between body-based esoteric practices and the art of dance, I will briefly visit pioneer of expressionist modern dance Rudolf von Laban who translated and appropriated esoteric forms of thought in his practice and theory of dance.

Both Laban and Gurdjieff were inspired by the Sufi practice of the whirling dervishes.¹⁸⁶ The perspective of esoteric Islam, its views on the subtle body and the embodied practice of the Sema ceremony of the Mevlevi Order is brought into the discussion as well. This practice is rooted in the 8th- 9th centuries in Baghdad and is still vibrantly alive today in both eastern and western areas of the globe.

The perspective of esoteric Islam is included to widen the scope of this excursion beyond the cultural boundaries of esoteric Christianity, here represented by Rudolf Steiner. Although ideas about the subtle body in religious and esoteric contexts can be found in a wide range of spiritual and cultural formations including Buddhism, I will focus here mainly on perspectives from esoteric Christianity and esoteric Islam.

¹⁸⁴ Duncan, *Der Tanz der Zukunft*, trans, 1903, 24.

¹⁸⁵ Lucian, “The Dance,” 1936/1955, 229.

¹⁸⁶ Cusack, “The Contemporary Context of Gurdjieff’s Movements,” 2017, 99-100.

This focus has to do with the aim of initiating a dialogue between a contemporary dance practice and a selection of embodied practices of esoteric forms of thought, rather than striving towards a global mapping of the notion of the subtle body.¹⁸⁷

To focus on esoteric Christianity and esoteric Islam aligns with my ancestral lineage which includes both Muslims and Christians. It is my conviction that a dialogue between Christian and Islamic worldviews and value systems is relevant and is needed in the heterogeneous global political and cultural situation of today. This situation is marked by severe incompatibilities between secular and religious worldviews, by radicalization, repression and alienation resulting from culturally and religiously polarized worldviews, ideas about life, afterlife and the human body. In the following, we will encounter similarities between Christian and Islamic ideas about the spiritual physiology of the subtle body. Evidently, there are also major differences, and I am not embarking on a comparative analysis or on an impossible mission to reconcile these major Abrahamic religions. But an artistically informed rendering of these influences might contribute in one way or the other, modestly, to a constructive dialogue between them.

Occasionally, I will include points of view from other perspectives when appropriate and supportive for the main argument: to consider the dancing body as a creative interface between the physical and the metaphysical; to consider the dancing body as an instrument of perception that can learn to perceive ineffable and sacred dimensions of embodied experience and to investigate and to communicate this experience through a [dancing language*](#).

Jung's ideas are important to the history of psychology as well as to the history of esotericism.¹⁸⁸ His vision on the subtle body is relevant for this research because his ideas about the somatic unconscious, the spiritual unconscious and the subtle body can meaningfully contextualize my search for deep sources of movement origination in dance.

His vision of the active imagination embedded within a symbolic logic of inner alchemy and transformation is integrated with the contemporary somatic practice of Authentic

¹⁸⁷ For a global mapping of the subtle body see for example Samuel and Johnston, *Religion and the Subtle Body in Asia and the West: Between Mind and Body*, 2013.

¹⁸⁸ On Jung's contribution to the "psychologization of religion and sacralization of psychology" see Hanegraaff, *New Age Religion and Western Culture. Esotericism in the Mirror of Secular Thought*, 1998, 224 -255 and 482 ff.

Movement. Esoteric Islam emphasizes active imagination and alchemical psychophysical processes related to spiritual types of corporeality.

By visiting the dance practice of Authentic Movement developed during the 1950s in the United States by Mary Starks Whitehouse (1911-1979), a movement art that is still evolving in the contemporary dance landscape is included in the discussion. Authentic Movement incorporates an esoterically inclined worldview in both performative and dance therapeutic contexts.¹⁸⁹ Although this lineup of esoteric and esoterically inclined forms of thought and related body-based practices invites a comparative analysis of the subtle body in diverging contexts, I will do so only occasionally. Instead, I will sieve through the huge corpus of knowledge with the focusing lenses of the key concepts that are relevant for this study: *spiritual corporeality*, *altered states of knowing* and *embodied gnosis*. The above-mentioned questions will be addressed in the *intermezzi* where I develop perspectives from my dance experience - situated in a contemporary dance context - in relation to the visited perspectives and worldviews. Through the dialogue between the body text and the *intermezzi*, I reflect on how the different perspectives on *spiritual corporeality* and *altered states of knowing* gained during this excursion inform the idea and experience of *embodied gnosis*.

The subtle body

Practices and ideas related to the notion of the subtle body can be found in a wide range of religious and esoteric contexts across different cultures and ages. They are commonly associated with practices oriented towards spiritual development in Indian, East Asian and Indo-Tibetan societies. They also exist in Western contexts including Judaism, Neoplatonism and Islam, yet they have been largely marginalized in the academic writing of the history of Western culture, as they are generally associated with esoteric, occult and mystical

¹⁸⁹ See for example Stromsted, "The Alchemy of Authentic Movement: Awakening Spirit in the Body," 2014, 37 -59.

traditions.¹⁹⁰ Subtle-body ideas and practices appear for example in Tibetan Buddhism, Yoga, Sufism, Theosophy, Anthroposophy and New Age popular literature.¹⁹¹

Whereas mainstream Western thought based on the Cartesian distinction between *res cogitans* and *res extensa* treats mind and matter as different in nature, subtle-body schemes consider them as *continuous* and generally assume a *common basis* for both mind and matter. This common basis is often described in terms of intermediate levels *between* mind (or spirit or consciousness) and matter. Consciousness is here attributed with materiality, yet a more subtle kind of materiality than ordinary physical matter.¹⁹²

Ideas about the subtle body and related practices thus challenge conventional Western dualisms such as the mind/ body, matter/spirit, I/the other and reason/emotion divides.¹⁹³

Sanskrit origins

The term “subtle body” was introduced in the English language by the Theosophical Society (founded in the USA in 1875) whose members integrated an adaptation of Hindu and Buddhist esoteric knowledge into their syncretic worldview. The term “subtle body” was used as a translation of the Vedantic term *sūkṣmaśarīra*. In the context of the philosophical work of for example the Indian philosopher Śaṅkara (ca. 800 CE) and even before his time, Indians considered the human body as constituted of three levels of existence (bodies). The subtle body (*sūkṣmaśarīra*) is one of these three bodies, the other two being the material or the physical body (*sthūlaśarīra*) and the causal body (*kāraṇaśarīra*). The ultimate Self (*ātman*) is here identified with the non-dual principle Brahman and lies beyond these three bodies.¹⁹⁴ The three bodies or levels of existence are related to states of consciousness and are described as being enclosed within each other like Russian dolls. The physical body corresponds to waking consciousness, the subtle body to dream consciousness and the causal body to the state of dreamless sleep. In Śaṅkara’s school of thought, ultimate truth

¹⁹⁰ Samuel and Johnston, *Religion and the Subtle Body*, xiii- xiv. For an extensive account on how esotericism has been saved from the “trashbin” and found its way into Academia see Wouter J. Hanegraaff, *Esotericism and the Academy. Rejected Knowledge in Western Culture* (Cambridge University Press, 2012).

¹⁹¹ Samuel and Johnston, *Religion and the Subtle Body*, 2013, 1-9.

¹⁹² Ibid, xiii.

¹⁹³ Ibid, 1-9.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid, 2.

(*paramārtha-satya*) is that Brahman (or non-dual and non-intentional consciousness) alone is real, and that the world of experience is only a delusory appearance. The subtle, physical and causal bodies are seen as unreal superimpositions on the ultimate Self (*ātman*). The physical body is seen as a perishable receptacle containing the subtle body, which animates the physical body. The subtle body is related to the mental, vital and sensory functions and is made up of an extremely fine and imperceptible kind of matter. Vital energy (*prāna*) is given shape into the higher mind (*vijñāna* or *buddhi*) and the lower mind (*manas*). The lower mind is linked to the five inner senses (*tanmātras*) that are associated with sound, taste, smell, sight and touch and correspond in the external world to elements of ether (or space), water, earth, fire and air. The subtle body is understood to be more real and durable than the physical body and it withdraws from the physical body at the moment of its death.¹⁹⁵

The founding mother of Theosophy, Helena Blavatsky (1831-91) incorporated these ideas about the different bodies and levels of existence into her worldview and teaching. She developed a “septenary structure” (*saptaparṇa*) that describes the human being as composed of seven distinct yet connected principles. This structure can be seen as an attempt to understand and to describe how human corporeality and consciousness are related to the bigger context of the universe.¹⁹⁶ These ideas were then further developed by other Theosophical writers such as C.W. Leadbeater (1854-1934), Annie Besant (1847-1933) and by Rudolf Steiner (1861-1925), who eventually left the Theosophical society and founded his own esoteric movement with the Anthroposophical Society in 1912. With some variations, all of these thinkers assume a series of ‘higher bodies’ (etheric, astral, mental and causal) that coexist with the physical body and that correspond to “higher planes of existence” related to progressively subtler levels of materiality. Although the initial conceptual skeleton of the subtle body schemes developed in the Western cultural context is founded on Indian thought, the Theosophists and Steiner developed the scheme further based on insights derived from psychic and clairvoyant experiences. They developed their own terminologies, which eventually differed quite substantially from the meanings of the original Sanskrit terms in the Indian context.¹⁹⁷

¹⁹⁵ Cross, “Metaphysical Factors behind the Empirical World: Advaita Vedānta,” 2013, 132- 135.

¹⁹⁶ Hall, “The Saptaparṇa: The Meaning and Origins of the Theosophical Constitution of Man,” 2007, 5.

¹⁹⁷ Samuel, G. and Johnston, *Religion and the Subtle Body*, 2.

Rudolf Steiner and Eurythmy

In the context of the Theosophical Society, Rudolf Steiner (1861, Kraljevec, Croatia - 1925, Dornach, Switzerland) focused on the Western Christian-Rosicrucian spiritual path. This in contrast to other key figures in the Society such as Annie Besant, who inclined more towards Eastern Oriental wisdom traditions.¹⁹⁸ Differences between the Western and the Eastern orientation,¹⁹⁹ and Steiner's preference for artistic approaches to the spiritual life over rational and intellectual approaches, were the main reasons for Steiner's separation from the Theosophical Society.²⁰⁰

In "The Story of my Life" Steiner wrote: "the artistic image is more spirit-like than the rationalistic concept. It is also alive and does not kill the spiritual in the soul as does intellectualism."²⁰¹ Steiner mentioned that the intolerance of some members of the theosophical movement towards an innovative inclusion of an artistic element in the program of their congress (a reconstruction of the Eleusinian drama by Schuré), lay at the root of the separation of the anthroposophical movement from the theosophical movement.²⁰² The "Anthroposofische Gesellschaft" was founded on 28.12.1912.²⁰³

Spiritual corporeality

Steiner's worldview is based on the spiritual evolution of the human being. He highlighted artistic sensibility as central to spiritual life and developed a view on art that endows it with the ability to realize and to manifest [verwirklichen] what lives in the spiritual world through sensory-suprasensory [sinnlich - übersinnlich] modes of cognition.²⁰⁴

¹⁹⁸ Leijenhorst, "Steiner, Rudolf," in *Dictionary of Gnosis & Western Esotericism*, 2006, 1089.

¹⁹⁹ See also Pasi, "Oriental Kabbalah and the Parting of East and West in the Early Theosophical Society," 2010, 151-166.

²⁰⁰ Steiner, "The Story of my Life, chapter XXXVIII", Rudolf Steiner Archive, accessed 27.11.2022 https://rsarchive.org/Books/GA028/English/APC1928/GA028_c38.html .

²⁰¹ Ibid.

²⁰² Ibid.

²⁰³ Leijenhorst, "Steiner, Rudolf," 2006, 1090.

²⁰⁴ Steiner, "Das Sinnlich Übersinnliche in seiner Verwirklichung durch die Kunst. Zwei Vorträge, Berlin, 15. Und 17. Februar 1918," 1941, 81-124. See also Steiner, *Art and Theory of Art. Foundations of a New Aesthetics*, 2021.

In Steiner's aesthetic worldview, the spiritual inhabits each body or object but is depending on individual ensouled participation in this spiritual aspect [das Geistige] for it to be able to share itself. About his movement art Eurythmy, he stated that "Eurythmy beseelt das Geistige" [Eurythmy ensouls the spiritual], meaning that the practice of Eurythmy enacts the ensoulment of the spiritual life hidden in bodies or objects.

According to Steiner, Eurythmy has a transformative effect on the human organism. He considered this practice to be incomplete when the human being is struggling with something in the body that has not yet become soul or ensouled. In eurythmic performance, the entire body must become ensouled.²⁰⁵

Intermezzo

Altered states of knowing

Steiner's emphasis on the artistic and creative element in spiritual life in contrast to rational and intellectual approaches to spirituality relates to my own aims. I endeavor to reorient conceptual and intellectual modes of understanding (the making as well as the reception of) dance towards its spiritual dimensions.

The reason for re-orienting the understanding of dance towards its spiritual dimensions is based on an intuition that the epistemological potential of dance is able to transcend the boundaries of rational intellection by means of a spiritually corporeal intelligence. I intuit this potential, but I don't understand it rationally. This type of intelligence can convey an experience of intimate proximity with an ineffable creative source. This experience stubbornly evades verbalization, but it can be communicated through dance. Dance can generate altered states of knowing that convey an awareness of a meaningful relation between the human body, planet earth and cosmic forces of unfathomable origin. For Steiner, eurythmy, which in his view is not to be identified with dance per se, can generate a sense of participation in an "ensouled" cosmic context. I embrace this view. A major difference between most contemporary dance practices and Steiner's approach to eurythmy is that Steiner is explicit

²⁰⁵ Loosely translated from German in Wagenmann, *Inmitten der teilhabende Mensch. Zur Gesellschaftlichen Wirksamkeit Eurythmischer Bewegung und Methodik*, 2015, 44-45.

about an intuitive sense of the spiritual within the physical. To him, a cosmic context that evolves according to a logic of spiritual evolution is crucial and presupposes a corresponding physical evolution. In contemporary dance and its discourse, the presence of the spiritual within the physical is rarely addressed. On my part, however, I associate a logic of spiritual evolution with complex processes of incarnating consciousness. I posit that dance practice can give a specific perspective - other than biological, scientific, psychological or theological perspectives - on this process of incarnation of consciousness.

Altered states of knowing

Steiner delved deeply into the mystery of incarnation and the creation of his movement art Eurythmy developed in parallel with the development of his Christology. Professor in Religious studies Carole M. Cusack considers Eurythmy to be the first “esoteric movement art directed towards spiritual advancement” that emerged in the context of Western culture during the early 20th century.²⁰⁶ In *Die Mystik im Aufgang des neuzeitlichen Geisteslebens* (*Mysticism at the Dawn of the Modern Age*, 1901) Steiner argues, that inner mystical experiences and external knowledge of nature should be understood as complementary²⁰⁷. Modern science, therefore, should be connected to knowledge gained through an inner mystical path.²⁰⁸

In Steiner’s view of art, the artist becomes a “tool for the creative powers of the world”, whereby impulses from higher invisible worlds are received and brought into material

²⁰⁶ Cusack, “The Contemporary Context of Gurdjieff’s Movements,” 2017, 98-99.

²⁰⁷ I am not aware of what kind of definition of complementarity Steiner worked with in 1901. In a colloquial understanding of complementarity in contemporary physics “two descriptions of a situation are complementary if they are both necessary for a complete description of that situation and at the same time incompatible with each other.” Atmanspacher and Primas, *Recasting Reality*, 2008, 4. In line with Pauli’s observation of a kinship between “consciousness” and the “unconscious” as epistemological coordinates in psychology and the principle of “complementarity” in physics, the inner mystical experiences Steiner refers to could be mapped with the “unconscious” and the external knowledge of nature with “consciousness”. Steiner’s anthroposophical approach then brings together consciousness and the unconscious in a specific approach to knowledge through spiritual science.

²⁰⁸ Leijenhorst, “Steiner, Rudolf,” 2006, 1087.

expression.²⁰⁹ Practicing art therefore needs to be in touch with the realms of the physical, the soul and the spiritual.²¹⁰ The anthroposophical²¹¹ movement worked on finding ways to express and manifest a spiritual impulse that Steiner perceived to be given in the early 20th century. The new art form that Steiner saw as especially suited to receive and embody this spiritual impulse was Eurythmy,²¹² which emerged organically from the anthroposophical worldview.²¹³

By investigating the “inner force of the word” (in reference to the Logos in the Gospel of John), Eurythmy started out as a body language where inner experiences of vowels are impressed into bodily movement. The esoteric philosophy underlying this approach to bodily movement was based on the idea that the sound of vocals (in a later development also consonants) expresses the original feeling modalities of the soul, which dwell in the body.²¹⁴ Eurythmic invention of movement is based on sensory-suprasensory observation [*sinnlich-übersinnliche Beobachtung*] of the airy movements of letters formed through the throat center, and the imitation thereof with the arms and the hands.

The movements of the etheric body (see below) are thus harmonized with the expression of the physical body.²¹⁵ This form of Eurythmy, Steiner called “speech eurythmy, the visible word.”²¹⁶

²⁰⁹ Steiner, “Eurythmie, was sie ist und wie sie entstanden ist. Penmaenmawr, 26. August 1923,” 2, Rudolf Steiner Online Archive, accessed 25.04.2015, <http://anthroposophie.byu.edu/vortraege/279a.pdf>.

²¹⁰ Steiner, “Eurythmie, was sie ist und wie sie entstanden ist,” 1923, 4.

²¹¹ The term anthroposophy has been introduced already before Steiner by for example the English alchemists Thomas Vaughan (1622 – 1666). It was used later also by the philosopher Immanuel Hermann Fichte (1797-1879) (son of Johann Gottlob Fichte) and by the professor of philosophy Robert Zimmermann (1824-1898) with whom Steiner studied in Vienna. Leijenhorst, “Anthroposophy,” in *Dictionary of Gnosis & Western Esotericism*, 2006, 82.

²¹² Steiner, “Eurythmie, was sie ist und wie sie entstanden ist,” 1923, 4.

²¹³ Ibid, 2.

²¹⁴ For a contemporary application of the eurythmic alphabet see also “Applied Eurythmy – Dean Pollard – Ambidextrousness,” uploaded April 21, 2009, YouTube, accessed 05.05.2015 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7Gk6oJhT028>.

²¹⁵ Steiner, “Eurythmie, was sie ist und wie sie entstanden ist,” 1923, 8.

²¹⁶ Steiner, “Eurythmy as Visible Singing,” Rudolf Steiner Archive, accessed 3.6.23, http://wn.rsarchive.org/Lectures/GA278/English/AMTRP1996/EuViSg_tone.html.

Another form of Eurythmy is “tone eurythmy, visible singing,” described as making “visible that which is invisible, but lives audibly, in music.”²¹⁷ A distinctly subtle and occult physiology lies at the basis of Eurythmy and working with the so called “etheric body” in relation to the physical body plays a central role.

Spiritual corporeality

The subtle body scheme developed by Steiner is subdivided into seven components based on a three-fold division between the physical realm, the realm of the soul and the realm of the spirit:

1. Physical body
2. Etheric Body or Vital body
3. Astral body
4. I as core of the soul [*Ich als Seelenkern*]
5. Spiritual self [*Geistselbst*] as transformed astral body
6. Lifespirit [*Lebensgeist*] as transformed vital body
7. Spiritual man [*Geistesmensch*] as transformed physical body²¹⁸

Eurythmy works with the idea of a sensory-suprasensory human corporeality comprised of several layers of inner and outer “members of being” [*Wesensglieder*].²¹⁹ Anthroposophists and Eurythmy practitioners neither assume the psychologically-spiritual [*das Seelisch-Geistige*] as materialistically given properties of the body - as is usually the case in Western psychology and medicine - nor do they follow the Eastern view of the body as Maja, as an illusion that needs to be overcome.²²⁰

²¹⁷ Ibid. For an impression of “tone eurythmy” see also “Symphonie / Eurythmie Mendelssohn (Eurythmeum Stuttgart mit Goetheanumbühne Dornach”, published 30.03.2011, YouTube, accessed 3.6.2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AfQnnyuLCs>.

²¹⁸ Steiner, *Theosophie*, 1955, 59.

²¹⁹ For an extensive overview on Steiner’s “Wesensglieder”, see “Wesensglieder,” AnthroWiki, accessed 3.6.2023, <https://anthrowiki.at/Wesensglieder>.

²²⁰ Fors, *Geschichte der Eurythmie im tanzhistorischen Kontext 1912-1930*, 2015, 49.

Instead, the so-called “carrier of the I” [*der Ich-Träger*] is seen as the spiritual center of the incarnated human being as well as the focal point of the immortal I [*das unsterbliche Ich*]. This “I” works through the incarnation into the physical body and evolves further by working on the transformation of the physical, etheric and astral body.²²¹

Altered states of knowing

Anthroposophy is based on the idea that the human being is equipped with two fundamentally different modes of perception: an externally oriented mode via the senses (*I sit on the chair*) and an internally oriented mode that is related to the consciousness of the self (*I sit on the chair*). The path of perception from the inner self-conscious human being is not leading directly towards the outside that is perceivable via the senses. Instead, it loses itself in the unconscious. In this view, there is an abyss between the perception of the outside via the senses and the inner experience of that perception.

According to Steiner, the etheric body is the missing bridge between these two modes of perception. The etheric body is seen as the missing link between the body (external orientation via the senses) and the soul (internally oriented consciousness of the self). The etheric body is supposed to be of a suprasensory nature. It is not psychological [*seelisch*] but physical and belongs to the exterior nature of the human being. The etheric body can be experienced in metamorphoses, in transitions and in movement itself as a temporal process. Steiner calls the etheric body also “*Lebensleib*”, “*Bildekräfteleib*”, or “*Zeitleib*”.²²²

The etheric body is seen as the lowest suprasensory layer of the spiritual physiology of the human being, and all living beings including animals and plants are supposed to have an etheric body.²²³

According to Steiner, Eurythmy only works with those movement impulses that are encompassed with full consciousness. This stands in his view in contradistinction to dance, where the human being supposedly loses him or herself in the movement by working merely from the limbs. In Eurythmy, the soul is supposed to be fully in control of the body while in

²²¹ “Wesensglieder,” AnthroWiki, accessed 3.6.2023, <https://anthrowiki.at/Wesensglieder>.

²²² Fors, *Geschichte der Eurythmie im tanzhistorischen Kontext 1912-1930*, 2015, 50.

²²³ “Ätherleib,” AnthroWiki, accessed 2.8.2022, <https://anthrowiki.at/%C3%84therleib>.

dance the soul would let herself go, spilling into the body in an uncontrolled way.²²⁴ The question of technique in Eurythmy is based on soulful-spiritual [*seelisch-geistig*] mastery of the etheric body in motion. It is the etheric body that is dancing in Eurythmy in the first place, not the physical body.²²⁵

With Steiner, the human being stands in between two polar forces: whereas the physical body is ruled by the laws of gravity, the etheric body carries oppositional forces to gravity that tend towards lightness. Whereas the physical body tends to contract towards a central point, the etheric body tends towards extending itself peripherally into all directions.

In Eurythmy, an “etheric” quality of motion is related to an experience of being in the lightness, as if being pulled upwards and outwards by a peripheral force.²²⁶

Contemporary Eurythmist Gail Langstroth describes Eurythmy as an instrument for perception²²⁷. Eurythmy is understood as a practice that enables to perceive suprasensory impulses from the spiritual realm and that gives expression to these impulses through movement. The physical body is here developed as a vehicle to make the movements of the etheric body visible.²²⁸ In Eurythmy, what counts is not the swinging lines of dance or the rhythms of the movements but “[...] was uns durch den Menschen als kosmische Wesenheit gesagt werden soll, weil er ein geistbeseelter Mensch ist [...]”.²²⁹

²²⁴ Fors, *Geschichte der Eurythmie*, 2015, 83.

²²⁵ Ibid, 79.

²²⁶ Loosely translated from German in ibid, 49-51.

²²⁷ Based on a conversation with Gail Langstroth at MIMAGES Eurythmy Festival The Hague September 2019. For an impression of her art see for example “‘Halleluiah’, performed by Gail Langstroth, YouTube, accessed 4.6.2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S1y0omZjAco>.

²²⁸ Marti, *The Four Ethers*, 1984, 9.

²²⁹ “[...] what should be communicated to us through the human being as a cosmic being, because he is a spirit-ensouled human being [...]” Translated from Steiner quoted in Fors, *Geschichte der Eurythmie*, 2015, 82.

Intermezzo

Altered states of knowing

Contemporary dancers primarily work with the physical body. The idea of an etheric body is not (yet?) part of the vocabulary of contemporary dance. A relatable discourse around energies, fields and transformative forces that are performatively explored is just about to emerge in the globally networked Western European dance circuit.²³⁰ I am curious about how a spiritually oriented contemporary dance practice can be informed by and enter in dialogue with esoterically informed ideas about human corporeality and related practices. Through a dancing language in body and words, I explore how the dancing body can function as a creative interface through which I can investigate and communicate possible relationships between the physical and the metaphysical.

The polarity between gravity and the force of lightness (or levity) can be seen as one of the main conditions for determining the logic of expression of the human dancing body. It is an abstract and timeless - metaphysical - condition. At the same time, this polarity is concrete, physical and always anchored in the present moment. The way in which a dance relates to the opposing forces of gravity and levity determines its aesthetic signature. In classical ballet for example, training the body upwards, towards lightness is paramount. The ability to maintain the body in a state of elevation against, yet in dialogue with gravity - conquered through many years of intense physical labor - can deliver the romantic and ethereal enchantment a classical ballet performance may trigger. Very generally speaking, modern dance as it developed during the 20th century responded to this tendency towards otherworldly ephemeral lightness in classical ballet with a much more grounded aesthetic.

²³⁰ See for example Huschka and Gronau, *Energy and Forces as Aesthetic Interventions. Politics of Bodily Scenarios*, 2019.

Spiritual corporeality

One major difference with Steiner's treatment of the upward and downward forces in Eurythmy is, that he interprets them from an esoteric perspective embedded in a cosmic history of spiritual evolution of the human being. Steiner provides a metaphysical framework for the nature of these forces. He anchors their manifestation in concretely described but esoterically conceived layers of the spiritual physiology of the human body: the physical body is related to gravity and the etheric body is working in polar opposition against gravity, towards lightness (levity). With Steiner, levity is attributed to an etheric force that exerts itself in polar opposition to gravitational forces from the earth. He states that it stems from a cosmic dimension related to the spiritual anatomy of the sun. It is also associated with the forces of resurrection.²³¹

What then can be perceived in secular artistic terms as an other-worldly, romantic and dream like aesthetic ideal in for example Classical Ballet, becomes with Eurythmy and Steiner's view on art and cosmic life a realization of spiritual forces in the physical realm.

Intermezzo

Altered states of knowing

In the secular discursive context of contemporary dance, levity can be described as an aesthetic force. It can be generated by a combination of intentional aspiration and muscular effort that together create a movement quality of being pulled upwards. Physically and anatomically speaking, the elevation of the torso against gravity enables more freedom and nuance of leg articulation. For this research, I have experimented with the expressive potential of the polar opposition between gravity and levity by modulating a dance phrase in relation to this force field.²³² In an earlier research "A dance phrase articulated in the force field between gravity and levity", levity was imagined as an upward pulling force from outside of

²³¹ See for example Whicher, *Projective Geometry. Creative Polarities in Space and* 2013, 92 and 262-274.

²³² See Research Catalogue entry "A dance phrase articulated between gravity and levity"
<https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/520371/520372>.

the body that acts on the body in dialogue with the downward pull of gravity. Dance became the expression of an experience of active and conscious participation with an imagined counterforce to gravity.

Through his anthroposophical epistemology, Steiner attempted to transform modern scientific rationality. He constructed his epistemology in contrast to among others Descartes, whose thought he considered to be a “symptom” of modern scientific thought.²³³

Steiner defended the necessity of spiritual science as opposed to natural materialistic science, to prepare the human being to be able to receive the Christ-impulse from the etheric plane, in the physical plane. The locus of perception that can receive this Christ-impulse is for Steiner the “I” consciousness,²³⁴ and Eurythmy is understood as enabling a practitioner to perceive this impulse. The “I” consciousness is related to the “I” sense [*Ichsinn*]. This sense implies being able to perceive the “I” of another human being, to perceive oneself as one, to perceive the other as a part of oneself.²³⁵

Towards embodied gnosis

*In dance, it is possible to carry the body through space in a way that it seems literally pulled up against gravity. This way of carrying the body can be enacted by blending **corporeal imagination*** with will power and muscular force. An active pushing of the legs down into the ground results in an immediate opposite elevation of the body. When the space of awareness above the top of the head is opened vertically upwards, it can allow the body to shoot up in length even further. Occasionally, I have experienced something like a force from outside of the body that seemed to support this upwards thrust, as if I were literally being pulled up by*

²³³ Clement, “Das Ich in der Erkenntnis – Rudolf Steiner und René Descartes,” 2001, 262.

²³⁴ Steiner, “Der Christus-Impuls und die Entwicklung des Ich-Bewusstseins,” Rudolf Steiner Archive, accessed 4.6.2023, <http://anthroposophie.byu.edu/vortraege/116.pdf>.

²³⁵ “Und ein noch intimeres Verhältnis zur Außenwelt als der Denksinn gibt uns derjenige Sinn, der es uns möglich macht, mit einem anderen Wesen so zu fühlen, sich eins zu wissen, dass man es wie sich selbst empfindet. Das ist, wenn man durch das Denken, durch das lebendige Denken, das einem das Wesen zuwendet, das Ich dieses Wesens wahrnimmt – der Ichsinn.” In Steiner, *Das Rätsel des Menschen. Die geistigen Hintergründe der menschlichen Geschichte. Kosmische und menschliche Geschichte*, 1992, 110. Accessed 4.6.23, Internet Archive, <https://archive.org/details/rudolf-steiner-ga-170>.

something outside of me. This “as if” could possibly be due to an increased strength in the upward pulling capacity of the psoas muscle which connects the legs to the torso, or to an increased intelligent orchestration of a variety of muscles, nerves, cells etc. that seem to be able to respond immediately to the inner directives given by upwards thriving [corporeal imagination*](#) and by the will. I associate the sense of being pulled upwards “for real” to being able to experience the peripheral forces exerted on the physical body by the etheric body that Steiner describes and that Eurythmists work with. This implies that a dancing body can potentially know or understand by intuitive experience what Steiner wrote about. It also implies that the realm of experience referred to by Steiner as “the etheric” body is not exclusive to Eurythmy and might be relevant for contemporary dancers as well. Exploring the idea of the “etheric body” experientially can thus open new perspectives on the multilayered psychophysical matters a dance practice can engage with. I don’t verify the existence of the etheric body. Instead, I explore the creative potentials of my dancing body as a vehicle for perception, in dialogue with esoterically informed ideas and practices.

Through this process, an amplified human corporeality that is not limited to the physical body comes into sight. This corporeality includes subtle materialities that are connected to the perception of the body in motion. Although this understanding of human corporeality does not (yet) fit within a materialistic and rationalist scientific knowledge paradigm, it can be explored through an artistic practice as a territory for knowledge generation.

Altered states of knowing

In his epistemology, Steiner disagrees with Kant that our ability to know is limited to how we perceive through our senses and that only perceptions from the physical world can be knowable to us. In Steiner’s view, human beings already participate in the spiritual world through the concepts that we are thinking. He claims that concepts do not derive from sense experience but live within human beings as non-physical spiritual entities. Concepts come through a form of “inner seeing” into the spiritual world. Steiner calls this kind of perception intuition which is distinct from sense perception. Through conscious development of a quality of thinking that is independent from the physical senses, it would be possible to attain

knowledge of suprasensory reality. In the act of knowing suprasensory reality, concept and percept are understood to become one and thinking itself becomes a suprasensory object.²³⁶ In *Knowledge of the Higher Worlds and Its Attainment* [Wie erlangt man Erkenntnisse der höheren Welten?] (1904/05) Steiner introduced a path towards the development of spiritual insights into higher realms of existence, traversed by the perceptual faculties of imagination, inspiration and intuition.²³⁷

Intermezzo

Towards embodied gnosis

Steiner connects imagination, intuition and inspiration with supra-sensory and spiritual dimensions of being which can be perceived through an expanded array of inner and outer senses²³⁸. In contemporary dance, imagination and intuition are constitutive to any kind of creative process. If and how they are related to a sense of spirituality often remains a private concern. I see Steiner's theoretical, cosmological and epistemological framework, into which Eurythmy is embedded, as a counterpoint to secularized contemporary dance practice and a rationalized dance discourse. In contemporary dance art, intuition and inspiration might be privately experienced as "spiritual", but there are to my knowledge barely any theoretical or epistemological frameworks that allow for a critical discussion of these faculties in relation to spiritually informed points of view.²³⁹ There are probably as many perspectives on spirituality in dance art as there are different aesthetic paradigms.

²³⁶ Hindes, "Rudolf Steiner's Epistemology," Rudolf Steiner Web, accessed 4.6.23, https://www.rudolfsteinerweb.com/Rudolf_Steiner%27s_Epistemology.php.

²³⁷ Leijenhorst, "Anthroposophy," in *Dictionary of Gnosis & Western Esotericism*, 2006, 88.

²³⁸ See for example Steiner, *Themen aus dem Gesamtwerk. Zur Sinneslehre*, 2014, 143.

²³⁹ In the field of the visual arts, Museum de Lakenhal in Leiden recently thematized intuition with the exhibition *Imagine Intuition* (14.10.22 – 15.1.23). "Tentoonstelling Imagine Intuition", Museum de Lakenhal, accessed 21.1.23, <https://www.lakenhal.nl/nl/verhaal/tentoonstelling-imagine-intuition>. The opening was preceded by a workshop hosted by the Lorentz Center titled "Beyond science and art: The role of intuition" (11-13.10.2022). "Beyond science and art: The role of Intuition", Lorentzcenter.nl, accessed 21.1.23, <https://www.lorentzcenter.nl/beyond-science-and-art-the-role-of-intuition.html>. As a participant of the workshop, it became evident that a

Steiner's epistemology, that he presented as a spiritual-scientific method to penetrate the essential nature of things rather than to create representational models of reality, could function as a point of reference for a dance epistemology. A first step in that direction is my proposition of a new perspective on knowledge that is based on dance experience. Here the dancing body becomes a creative interface, a vehicle for perceiving and speculatively exploring relationships between the physical and the metaphysical.

Steiner states that what counts in Eurythmy is "what should be communicated to us through the human being as a cosmic being, because he is a spirit-ensouled [geistbeseelter] human being [Mensch]"²⁴⁰. For me, this statement is a stimulating provocation because I am not yet sufficiently conscious about what wants to be communicated through me as a human being through my non-verbal dance language. Dance practice ignites in me an intuition about a relation between the human body and cosmic dimensions of existence and I investigate this intuition speculatively through dance. I imagine that the art of dance needs a more expansive idea of human corporeality to move sure footed towards the future. The self-diagnosis of not yet being conscious enough is implied in the "towards" embodied gnosis that I am exploring here through a dancing language in body and words.

comprehensive understanding of intuition benefits from combining both artistic and scientific points of view.

²⁴⁰ Translated from Steiner quoted in Fors, *Geschichte der Eurythmie im tanzhistorischen Kontext 1920-30*, 2015, 82.

George Ivanovich Gurdjieff (1866-77? - 1949) and Movements

G.I. Gurdjieff belongs next to Rudolf Steiner (1861 – 1925) and Helena Blavatsky (1831-1891) to the most influential representatives of esoteric forms of thought in modern esotericism. He began to disseminate his knowledge from 1912 onwards, first in Russia, and then later in the United States and in France. Sacred dances are central to his teachings.²⁴¹

Altered states of knowing

Characteristic of Gurdjieff's thought and practice is his wake-up call to self-consciousness. Gurdjieff classifies consciousness in four states: sleeping, waking consciousness, self-remembering and the attainment of an objective consciousness. With Gurdjieff, it is through a state of objective consciousness that the mind can become aware of the true nature of reality.²⁴² To strengthen this objective consciousness, intensive work on the alignment of the intellectual, sensory and emotional centers in the human body is required, in harmony with cosmic laws.²⁴³ This work would finally result in the acquirement of a finer body, a subtle body within the body, a soul,²⁴⁴ or a *kesdjan* body.²⁴⁵ For Gurdjieff, it is necessary to enter a state of objective consciousness to be able to perceive the unity between the human being, the universe and God. Knowledge of this unity is understood as objective knowledge which he considered to be problematic to be expressed through words or ordinary language.²⁴⁶

With Gurdjieff, human beings are composed of three bodies: a physical body corresponding to the planetary sphere, an emotional body corresponding to the astral sphere and a mental body corresponding to the spiritual sphere. Gurdjieff distinguishes three different approaches to spiritual practice whereby asceticism is associated with the physical body and the way of the fakir, religious feeling and sentiment is associated with the way of the monk and the way of reason is associated with the yogi. Gurdjieff's teaching is called The Fourth Way, the way

²⁴¹ Cusack, "The Contemporary Context of Gurdjieff's Movements," 2017, 96.

²⁴² Rosenthal, *The Occult in Russian and Soviet Culture*, 1997, 360.

²⁴³ Cusack, "An Enlightened Life in Text and Image: G. I. Gurdjieff's *Meetings with Remarkable Men* (1963) and Peter Brook's *Meetings with Remarkable Men* (1979)," 2011, 75.

²⁴⁴ Cusack, *ibid*, 76.

²⁴⁵ Cusack, "The Contemporary Context of Gurdjieff's Movements," 2017, 104.

²⁴⁶ Bennett, "Gurdjieff's all and everything", *Riders Review* 1950, Gurdjieff-Bibliography, accessed 13.11.19, <https://gurdjieff-bibliography.com/Current/index.html>.

of the divine body. It stands for the synthesis of the three different approaches to spiritual practice leading to self-perfection and the ability to become aware of true reality.²⁴⁷

Gurdjieff's Movements²⁴⁸ are the essence of his teachings. Learning to conduct the body in complexly coordinated motion is central to his school of thought and practice. Two vital functions are attributed to the Movements: the harmonious evolution of the dancers and the transmission of esoteric knowledge.²⁴⁹ The purpose of the Movements is the alignment of the human centers with the cosmos and with cosmic laws of evolution.²⁵⁰

The Movements are inspired by traditional folkloric dances and sacred rituals, which he claimed to have encountered in various Sufi Orders, Buddhist centers and ancient hidden monasteries.²⁵¹ The strictly codified movements are seen as sacred dances that represent cosmic and metaphysical laws through embodiment by the dancers. These laws are supposedly only intelligible to those who are acquainted with these laws.²⁵²

An instructor-dancer and a musician typically conduct a movement class.

Participants explain their experience:

For participants, movements are essentially interior – where the conjunction of attention, thoughts, feelings, sensory impressions, rhythmic response to music, and attempts at increasingly complex multifaceted physical movement meet and are often countered by predictable patterns of mechanical association. A special opportunity and challenge exists during Gurdjieff's movements exercises – not simply to memorise and repeat the complex sequences in an automatic way, but to recognise moments of opportunity when the ordinary mind cannot control

²⁴⁷ Rosenthal, *The Occult in Russian and Soviet Culture*, 1997, 361.

²⁴⁸ See for example "Gurdjieff Movements," accessed 1.5.23, <http://gurdjieff-movements.net/>.

²⁴⁹ Driscoll, J. Walter. "The Art of G.I. Gurdjieff," 25, Gurdjieff-Bibliography, accessed 4.6.23, <https://gurdjieff-bibliography.com/Current/index.html>.

²⁵⁰ Cusack, "An Enlightened Life," 2011, 75.

²⁵¹ see also Pittman, *Classical Spirituality in Contemporary America. The Confluence and Contribution of G.I. Gurdjieff and Sufism*, 2012, 43.

²⁵² Ouspensky, *In Search of the Miraculous. Fragments of an Unknown Teaching*, date unknown, 23. Archive.org, accessed September 2015, <https://archive.org/details/pdfy-AHobOEfHR4B4PBsm/page/n21/mode/2up>.

movement and the mechanical side of the moving center has not yet taken over.”²⁵³

Jeanne de Salzmänn, dance teacher and pupil of Gurdjieff describes this experience as: “In that moment a feeling of urgency may arise that creates a new energy and attention. The movement can then be taken over by the moving center while remaining connected with this energy that is able to control it and yet leave it free.”²⁵⁴

Intermezzo

Towards embodied gnosis

In my approach to dance, I enable an intermediary zone of corporeal consciousness where two types of movement origination blend into each other. One type of movement is an intuitive movement that emerges in the moment. The other is movement based on conscious choice making that is based on already known movement materials. Both types of movement origination relate in different ways to the control of motion. Intuitively emerging movement requires a performative state where consciousness releases the urge to control and surrenders choice making to the body. Conscious choice making, on the other hand, happens from a performative state where movement patterns that are already inscribed in the body are re-actualized. I describe the somewhat suspended quality of consciousness that blends these two performative states as a knowing-being zone. Here choice making is intentionally delegated to unknown sources of movement origination deep inside of the body whilst simultaneously reflecting on the emerging movement with conscious awareness. There is an intricate play between allowing the body to initiate movement and a trained reflex to control it, especially when re-actualizing movements that have already been inscribed into the body.

I relate these observations to the de-automised and energizing center of movement as described by Salzmänn with reference to Gurdjieff's Movements. This center balances on the edge between controlling the movement and allowing it to pass through the body freely. To

²⁵³ Driscoll, “The Art of G.I. Gurdjieff,” 2004, 26.

²⁵⁴ Salzmänn quoted in Driscoll, *ibid*, 26.

create movement from this state of being, suspended between two states, can give a sense of an immediate and somehow completely reliable creativity. A sense of communion with a creative source that engages with the body in motion from within its corporeal depths as well as from outside of the body.

Negotiating the dynamic and constantly moving thin line between an urge to control the movement and the will to surrender its origination to another, unknown source plays a key role in entering the zone of consciousness in motion that I allude to with the notion of embodied gnosis.

Spiritual corporeality:

Gurdjieff taught about the work of building a new inner body. Conditions required for this work relate to inner and outer objective cosmological laws of evolution. These laws are structured according to the numerical values of sevens, threes and octaves and are understood to affect the involution and evolution of subtle and dense matter. According to Gurdjieff, “this special matter ... cannot come into being unconsciously ... to build this body inside man is the aim of all religions and all schools; every religion has its own special way, but the aim is always the same.”²⁵⁵

Comparable to Steiner’s scheme of a transforming physiology in line with a logic of spiritual evolution, Gurdjieff speaks about the creation of a subtle form of matter (a soul) through body principles that act on each other, leading to a transformed body. The physical body is described as the first body and as the negative principle. A second body, the active principle of the soul, works upon this body. A kind of inner magnetism is supposed to function as a neutralizing principle between the first and the second body. This magnetism is described as a necessary mediator for the second body to be able to master the physical body. A third body – the mental body - would then be formed within the second body.

With the development of a fourth body, the farthest possible development of a human being would be achieved. This fourth body is associated with the real “I”, the state of being of a completed soul. It is characterized by “real will”, an active principle that governs all the other bodies and that is immortal.²⁵⁶

²⁵⁵ Gurdjieff, *Views from the Real World. Eearly Talks of G.I. Gurdjieff*, 1984, 202-203.

²⁵⁶ Gurdjieff, *Views from the Real World*, 1984, 217.

Intermezzo

Towards embodied gnosis

Gurdjieff's description of the various bodies and how they interact presents a good example for a technical vocabulary of an esoteric movement practice that explains subtle psychophysical mechanisms. He clarifies how the various bodies interact with one another and the transformative and evolutionary purpose for their interaction. I assert that this explicit inclusion of subtle psychophysical dimensions of human corporeality is an important additional dimension to strictly anatomical and physiological approaches to contemporary dance techniques. Another meaningful dimension of Gurdjieff's teaching is that he explicitly aligns the ontology of human corporeality with cosmic laws. Like Steiner, Gurdjieff includes the bigger picture of spiritual evolution as one of the main purposes of his movement practice. When movement has no purpose outside itself - a characteristic of the emancipation of postmodern dance from meaning and narrative -, the experience of the inner universe of the dancer can become magnified. The bigger picture of explicit association of the inner and the outer universe is what attracts my curiosity in esoteric approaches to movement practice. Over time and through experience, the dancer may learn to take distance from the body and to enter fully into dialogue, on a more existential level, with movement as it is. Movement can then be experienced as an impersonal, somewhat neutral but all-encompassing force that does not belong to the dancer but that passes through the corporeal being. It can be infused with different qualities and textures, with intentionalities and corporeal articulation. To conceptualize the dancing body as a creative interface is derived from this experience. The inner act of consciously willed and partial disidentification from the physical body, to let movement pass through and act on it freely, eventually allows more mobility and a wider space of expression for different textures of corporeality.

With partial disidentification I mean loosening the grip of control over the body in motion and surrendering the personal will to align with another order of an impersonal unknown will. This inner act of disidentification creates a space where it becomes possible to listen to how the deeper layers of life and movement interact within the physical body; to listen to how the body

receives and produces energies and signals which do not only come from the inside but also from outside of the body. In this wordless inner space, communication between the individual consciousness (the "I") and the life of the materiality of the physical body can come alive. Dance then becomes a dialogue between different qualities of consciousness, different degrees of inhabiting the body by the conscious self. Through this dynamic exchange the life that inhabits the physical body starts to speak. A dance language comes into being through a dialogue between different degrees of control and freedom in movement, conducted by different degrees of filtering impersonal through personal will.

I do not consider the autonomous movements that happen inside of the body and that keep it alive irrespective of my conscious choice. These movements are beyond my ability to access consciously. Yet, this autonomous life intelligence of the body is what I am searching for when digging into deeper layers of yet unconscious movement origination inside of the body. It is always an "I", that actively guides and directs the motions of the body in space. Whether this "I" is a perishable subject, a materially generated epiphenomenon in the brain and nervous system, or whether this "I" is seen as the immortal core of the soul that is incarnated in a body of flesh and bones, is one of the main differences between a secular scientific understanding of a human being and a religious, spiritual and esoteric understanding. Consequently, which perspective is taken also determines the worldview into which a dance language is embedded or that it seeks to create and enter in dialogue with. The perspective taken eventually also influences the intentional dispositions (see chapter five) and the potential interpretative scope of the dance.

So far, we have been looking at movement practices that embody esoteric forms of thought. We now move on to the art of dance and its evolution into a modern art form.

Rudolf von Laban and esoterically inclined modern dance

To my knowledge, among the pioneers of modern dance only Rudolf von Laban (1879-1958) is known to have actively engaged with esoteric discourse and practice: he integrated Kabbalah, Gnosticism, Freemasonry and Hermetic philosophy into his vision of dance and art. He was also responsible for the Ordo Templi Orientis (OTO) lodge at Monte Verità in 1917.²⁵⁷ Laban is well known in scholarship on esotericism, yet his esoteric affiliations are still largely neglected in contemporary dance scholarship. Laban scholars refer to his 'Rosicrucian period' but comprehensive approaches to how Laban's spiritual philosophy manifests in his theories and dance creations are still very scarce.²⁵⁸

It is not my intention to fill this gap here. Laban is brought forward as an example for how a modern dance practice and theory that is still vibrantly alive in the context of contemporary dance is related to esotericism.

Spiritual corporeality:

For Laban, it was not through prayer or intellectual contemplation, but through the body in motion striving towards the spiritual world, that corporeality understood in a materialistic sense was supposed to be overcome.²⁵⁹ A subtle body scheme is to my knowledge not explicitly addressed in Laban's theoretical and practical work. Instead, Laban proposed principles for orientation in space, notions of the body and its kinesphere, explorations into what he called "dynamosphere," movement scales in space, the division of space through the moving body and the notion of space harmony in his *Choreutics*.²⁶⁰ In the practice of "space

²⁵⁷ Cusack, "The Contemporary Context of Gurdjieff's Movements," 2017, 110.

²⁵⁸ One of the very few artist scholars that are currently working on this is Juliet Chambers-Coe, actress and PhD candidate at University of Surrey. She presented a paper and practical workshop at the August 2019 conference "Cultural, Intercultural and Transnational Dialogues in Dance and Spirituality" at the Centre for Embodiment & Somatic Movement Education and Therapy, Cheltenham. She is investigating how Laban's Rosicrucian philosophy is translated in his dance practice methodology. See also Chambers-Coe, "Rudolf Laban," in *The Routledge Companion to Performance Philosophy*, 2020, 351-61.

²⁵⁹ Kant, "Mittel zur Transzendenz: Marion Kant über Rudolf von Labans Geheimorden und seine 'Religion der Tat'," 2003, 16-17.

²⁶⁰ Laban, *Choreutics*, 2011 [1966], v.

harmony,” elements of the spiritual philosophies of Plato and Pythagoras are integrated in the architectural design of the dynamic kinesphere of the dancer by mapping the body along the axes and vertices of geometric forms such as the cube, the octahedron and the icosahedron.²⁶¹ Laban’s philosophical and theoretical reflections on dance became the foundation for a notation system, which was intended to become universally applicable,²⁶² comparable to the notation system used in music. Laban notation is still used and further developed today and has found many applications also in other disciplines such as for example in acting.

Altered states of knowing:

From 1918 onwards, Laban started to focus on the “psychophysical organization of the body in movement”²⁶³ grounded in the concepts of harmony, rhythm and space. In his first theoretical work *Die Welt des Tänzers*,²⁶⁴ he integrated interpretations of occult freemasonry, Rosicrucian symbolism, eastern philosophy and western rituals with a proposal for a new dance culture.²⁶⁵ For Laban, dance was a means for communicating and expressing other dimensions of reality. He saw ecstatic dances and cultic rituals as means to penetrate these interior domains.²⁶⁶ He termed dance “Ursprache der Phantasognosis,” implying that “neither artistic science nor scientific art (...) but practical religion that strives to eradicate with its symbols experiential disturbances and inhibitions of mostly intuitively sensed harmonic laws, can further the development of wisdom.”²⁶⁷

Laban defines “Phantasognosis” as an elevating wisdom that culminates through the combination of art and knowledge. It should be “free from mysticism” and “free from overestimation of sensuous perception.” Working procedures to induce “phantasognostic” states should experiment with the liminal space between intuition and consciousness and aim

²⁶¹ Documentary: Living Architecture. Rudolf Laban and the Geometry of Dance, Anna Carlisle and Valerie Preston-Dunlop, 2007.

²⁶² Manning, “Reinterpreting Laban,” 1988, 317.

²⁶³ Preston-Dunlop, *Rudolf Laban. An Extraordinary Life*, 2008, 14.

²⁶⁴ Laban, *Die Welt des Tänzers*, 1920.

²⁶⁵ Kant, “Mittel zur Transzendenz”, 15.

²⁶⁶ Ibid, 16.

²⁶⁷ Laban, *Die Welt des Tänzers*, 1920, 244.

at unifying gross and subtle aspects of sense perception. They should bring to consciousness and develop those senses that have not yet been strong enough to be established and understood as “consciousness.” These ideas should not be understood as a new form of metaphysics but as a “physics of the not yet comprehensible.”²⁶⁸

Experiencing the body in the flow of a dynamic space was connected with the idea of a “sixth sense,” which Laban called the “sense of movement” (or “sense of vibration” or “sense of fluidity”).²⁶⁹ He stated that by overtly cultivating the sense of time (“causal knowledge”), the human being had lost his/her natural sense of the nature of space (“instinctive knowledge”), which would need to be unearthed from the deep memory of the body.²⁷⁰

In contrast with processes of disintegration and fragmentation, which he and many of his contemporary artists had diagnosed in the cultural climate of their time,²⁷¹ Laban sought to reestablish a sense of unity between the corporeal, the spiritual and the natural:

It becomes possible to grasp with our intellect, this old premonitory dream of the human species, the unity of body and spirit. As both are constituted in one single and same movement, with a few variations, we can establish a parallel between this universal phenomenon and the dance. The hostile dualism between spirit and matter cannot anymore be considered as something established and the study of their unity in dance acquires an unsuspected reality.²⁷²

In the process of integrating spiritual philosophies with artistic working principles, Laban gradually paralleled a conception of spirit with the nature of space. For Laban, “Space is a hidden feature of movement and movement is a visible aspect of space.”²⁷³ By theoretically unifying space with movement in one singular entity, he arrived at the theory of unity of body

²⁶⁸ Ibid.

²⁶⁹ Laban, *Espace Dynamique, Textes inédits, Choreutique, Vision de l'espace Dynamique*, 2003, 21.

²⁷⁰ Ibid, 237.

²⁷¹ Laban, *Choreutics*, 2011 [1966], 8.

²⁷² Laban, *Espace Dynamique*, 2003, 257.

²⁷³ Ibid, 4.

and spirit in spatially experienced movement. Movement becomes the basic experience of existence²⁷⁴ and space a “fluid reality.”²⁷⁵

Spiritual Corporeality

Although Laban does not explicitly address the subtle body in his theory and practice, it is possible to relate his notions of the kinesphere and his view on the unity of body and spirit in spatially experienced motion to how Rudolf Steiner works with the relations between the physical and the etheric body as key aspects of the practice of Eurythmy.

With Steiner, the physical body tends towards centric forces of motion and the etheric body tends towards peripheral forces of motion. The centric forces are supposed to be explainable from the point of view of science, yet the peripheral forces – which are ascribed to the celestial, spiritual and cosmic spheres – would need a supra-sensory and spiritual scientific approach to be understood and explained.²⁷⁶ This also relates to Laban’s experience of “phantasognosis” as a “physics of the not yet comprehensible.” Both Steiner’s spiritual science [Geisteswissenschaft] and Laban’s theory of unification of spirit and matter that may be experienced via a supra-sensory perception of the human body in motion outline a worldview that approaches the nature of reality as constituted by an interpenetration of spiritual and material aspects of being and the human body in danced motion as an instrument for perceiving and actualizing this reality.

Intermezzo

Altered States of Knowing

Laban understood phantasognosis as emerging from a liminal space between intuition and consciousness. This ties in with my research on embodied gnosis and with the focus on an intermediary zone of awareness where the physical and the metaphysical appear to intersect.

²⁷⁴ Ibid, 6-7.

²⁷⁵ Ibid, 8.

²⁷⁶ Marti, *The Four Ethers*, 1984, 32.

I experiment with a state of knowing-being in between conscious movement and spontaneous movement that emerges from not yet conscious, intuitive but not sensation-based strata of my body in danced motion. Working with already known/choreographed movement patterns requires the activation of kinesthetic memory and imagination to re-actualize the intentions that are inscribed into the choreographed patterns. Spontaneously emerging movement from the deeper, yet unconscious strata of the body in motion happens through responding to barely perceivable movement impulses. Here it is not clearly discernible where the impulses to move come from.

Towards embodied gnosis

The previously visited examples converge with what I perceive as a progressively shifting cutting edge between conscious awareness and yet unconscious awareness of a larger source of life. With the idea of embodied gnosis, I explore this source of life inside and outside of the body. The intense and complex experience of the body in motion in dance seems to me to be conducive to the experience of such a state and from the accounts visited so far it looks like I am not the only one.

Both Laban and Gurdjieff were inspired and influenced by the Sufi practice of the whirling dervishes.²⁷⁷ We will now focus on how the concepts of *spiritual corporeality*, *altered states of knowing* and *embodied gnosis* are relatable to the Sufi ceremony of the whirling prayer, the most widely known practice of embodiment of esoteric form of thought in the context of Islam.

²⁷⁷ Cusack, "The Contemporary Context of Gurdjieff's Movements," 2017, 99-100.

The Sema Ceremony and the subtle body in esoteric Islam

In Arabic, the terms *ẓāhir* and *bāṭin* correspond to the “exoteric” and the “esoteric”. In Islam, the esoteric [*bāṭin*] refers to the hidden meaning of the *Qur’ān*. It points towards that which is unseen [*ghayb*], including angels, demons [*malā’ika, jinn*] and the future. In Islamic Theosophy, the esoteric also refers to “the inner [wo]²⁷⁸man”, to the esoteric nature of a human being. This inner being is related to alchemical psycho-spiritual processes including the transformation and metamorphosis of the matters of the human body during the afterlife and on the day of the resurrection.²⁷⁹ To distinguish between esoteric and exoteric dimensions of religion is shared by Islam, Christianity and Judaism. The similarity of ideas about the unseen among these monotheistic cultures of faith is related to their shared descent from Abrahamic religion. They have common ideas about a creator God, the Day of Judgment, angels and demons and heaven and hell.²⁸⁰

Islam scholar Henri Corbin (1903 – 1978) relates nature and history to the visible and exoteric realm. He describes this realm as imitating, corresponding and “symbolizing with”²⁸¹ the spiritual world, which is given a status of being “truly real” [*ḥaqīqat*]. Corbin describes the gradual revelation of truth and the hidden meaning of history and nature as “spiritual hermeneutics” [*ta’wīl*]. “Spiritual hermeneutics” is a process whereby everything, every event is brought back to its truth, to its archetype [*aṣl*], by uncovering the hidden and concealing the appearance.”²⁸² An active effort to balance between exoteric and esoteric approaches to Islam is characteristic to the Sufi tradition. According to Sufi Master and advocate of interfaith dialogue Sheikh Khaled Bentounès (1946), it is necessary to establish and to maintain harmony between letter and spirit. An overemphasis on the spirit would lead to too much distance from the earthly world, whereas an overemphasis on the [literal meaning of the] word would lead to a severe impoverishment and flattening of life.

²⁷⁸ [wo] inserted by author.

²⁷⁹ Corbin, “IX. The Shaikhī School: Shaikh Aḥmad Aḥsāi,” 1989 [1977], 219 and Corbin, *Swedenborg and Esoteric Islam*, 1995, 43.

²⁸⁰ Sedgwick, “Is there such a thing as Islamic esotericism?” 2019, 217 – 242.

²⁸¹ Corbin, *Swedenborg and Esoteric Islam*, 1995, 41.

²⁸² Ibid, 37.

Bentounès sees the transformation of matter as the task of spirit. The goal of the human being who follows the mystical path [*tasavvuf*], is to achieve an active balance between the vertical and the horizontal axes of being, with the feet firmly rooted in the ground and the head reaching highly upwards.²⁸³ *Tasavvuf* designates the profession to Sufism in distinction to *tashayyu* as the profession to Shiism and *tasannun* to Sunnism.²⁸⁴ In Turkish language, the term *tasavvuf* translates as “mysticism.” The mystical way [*tariqah*] traced by the Sufi path is described by Corbin as navigating between the “literal fact of the Revelation” [*shari'ah*] and “spiritual truth as personal realization” [*haqiqah*]. He attributes the triadic dynamic between these elements to the essence of Sufism as a doctrine and as a way of life.²⁸⁵

Altered states of knowing:

Sema is the “Whirling Prayer Ceremony”²⁸⁶ practiced by members of the Sufi Mevlevi Order. The practice is dedicated to the remembrance of God. The origins of the *sema* ceremony can be traced back to the Sufi practice of “audition” [*samâ'*]. Early developments of collective Sufi practices emerged during the 8th and 9th centuries C.E. in the area of Baghdad. The name of the Mevlevi Order comes from Sufi mystic Jalal ad-Din Rumi (1207, Balkh – 1273, Konya), also known as the Mevlana. Rumi's son Sultan Veled, his disciple Chalabi Husameddin, and his grandson Ulu Arif Chalabi established the Mevlevi order.²⁸⁷ Following the traditional Islamic Sufi way [*tariqah*], descendants and disciples of Rumi preserved his spiritual practices until today. The *Sema* as it is known today, is based on the ritual ceremony developed by Rumi's great-grandson Pir 'Adil Chelebi (15th century).²⁸⁸

Samâ' is a form of “mystical hearing,” through which the Sufi can feel inspired to move by entering another level of spiritual consciousness.²⁸⁹ This faculty of hearing is oriented towards hearing the voice of God in all sounds, in recited verses of the *Qur'ân* and in mystical music

²⁸³ Solt, *Sjeik Khaled Bentounès. Sufisme, Hart van de Islam*, 2006, 68.

²⁸⁴ Corbin, *History of Islamic Philosophy*, 1993, 187.

²⁸⁵ Ibid, 188.

²⁸⁶ Gamard, “In Defense of the Whirling Prayer Ceremony (Sema),” Dar-al-Masnavi.org, accessed 21.03.2015, <http://www.dar-al-masnavi.org/defense-of-sema.html>,

²⁸⁷ Mevlanafoundation.com, “Mevlevi Order & Sema,” accessed 25.03.2015, http://mevlanafoundation.com/mevlevi_order_en.html.

²⁸⁸ Ibrahim Gamard, “In Defense of the Whirling Prayer Ceremony (Sema).”

²⁸⁹ Ibid.

and poetry. One of the aims of Sufism is to surrender to the will of God. The preparatory path leading towards a meeting with God is paved by learning to control the *nafs*, which stand for the lower self of the human being.²⁹⁰ As the seeker learns to subdue the *nafs*, a space in the heart is created where God can enter, leading ultimately to *irfan*, which can be translated as a form of gnosis.²⁹¹ Gnosis in Sufism is understood as experience based knowledge that is available to everybody who seeks a personal and direct knowledge of God.²⁹² Sufism as a distinct spiritual practice aims towards an illuminating quality of knowledge. The path towards illumination is described as consisting of three attainments: the knowledge of certainty, the eye of certainty and the truth of certainty. These stages are represented symbolically by the circumambulations performed by the Dervishes during the Sema ceremony: the first rhythmically stepping circumambulation refers to the knowledge of God (the knowledge of certainty), the second to the seeing of God (the eye of certainty) and the third circumambulation stands for that state of being described as truth of Unity²⁹³ [*Wahdat al-Wujud*].

The whirling movements function as a vehicle for entering an ever-deepening state of immersion into the Divine Will.²⁹⁴ They are not intended to provide physical pleasure, nor should they respond to impulses of self-will or “whims of the imagination.”²⁹⁵ The efforts of the physical movement are supposed to become detached from inhibitions of conscious thought. In the approach towards an ecstatic state, it is necessary to suspend both thought and will.²⁹⁶ Member of the Mevlevi order and Rumi scholar Ibrahim Gamard explains the purpose of the ecstatic state [*wajd*] to be the “temporary obliteration of one’s ordinary state of ego-entered thoughts and desires and entering into a state of ‘annihilation’ ... in which there is pure awareness of ‘except (only) God’²⁹⁷ [*‘illâ ‘Ilâh – Qur’ân 47:17*].”²⁹⁸

²⁹⁰ Bakhtiar, *Sufi. Expressions of the Mystic Quest*, 1976, 7.

²⁹¹ Sedgwick, *Sufism. The Essentials*, 2003, 11.

²⁹² Milani, “Classic Sufism and Gnosis,” 2019, 329.

²⁹³ And, “The Mevlana Ceremony [Turkey],” 177, 94.

²⁹⁴ Gamard, “In Defense of the Whirling Prayer Ceremony (Sema).”

²⁹⁵ Ibid.

²⁹⁶ And, “The Mevlana Ceremony [Turkey],” 1977, 84.

²⁹⁷ An alternative translation of the Islamic creed shahada is proposed by Rumi as: “there is no god but God” in Lewis, *Rumi, Past and Present, East and West*, 2000, 133.

²⁹⁸ Gamard, “In Defense of the Whirling Prayer Ceremony (Sema).”

Sufis of the ecstatic traditions underline the need to attain a state that reaches beyond the level of thought, even if the thought is pious towards God, such as practiced in the rather sober traditions. More specifically, what is aimed at is a state of sobriety after ecstasy. In the words of Shams-i Tabrîzî:

The man who reaches this perfection is drowned in the light of God and drunk in the pleasure of the Real [Haqq] ... Beyond this drunkenness ... there is another sobriety [hoshyârî] ... The drunkenness of God's Road [râh-i khodâ] is the third level. It is an immense drunkenness, but it is linked with stillness [sikûn], for God has brought him out of what he had fancied it to be. After that is the fourth level - drunkenness in God. That is perfection. After that is sobriety.²⁹⁹

Gamard describes the simple rhythmical bodily movements as experiential pathways to continuously deepen a "god centered state of consciousness." He insists on clearly distinguishing the terminology used to describe the Mevlevis in their ceremony from dance: "They are immersed in concentrated worship - not dancing. A whirler is supposed to be called a 'rememberer of God' not a 'dancer'."³⁰⁰

Spiritual corporeality:

Seeking to penetrate the inner realms of meaning of their faith, Sufi mystics developed systems of spiritual hierarchies where they synthesized influences from Greek, Persian, Hermetic and Indian philosophies with accounts of experiences of the Prophet Mohammed as described in the *Qur'ân*.³⁰¹ "Subtle centers" are understood as psycho-spiritual bodies that mediate between the physical and the transcendental realms. The idea of "subtle centers" became more explicit in the Sufi doctrine during the early Middle Ages and their unique view on the subtle body has proliferated during the 20th century in parallel with its increasing presence as a spiritual practice also in the West.

²⁹⁹ Tabrizi, *Me & Rumi: The Autobiography of Shems-i Tabrizi*, 2004, 117-119.

³⁰⁰ Ibrahim Gamard, "In Defense of the Whirling Prayer Ceremony (Sema)."

³⁰¹ Milani, "The Subtle Body in Sufism," 2013, 168.

Spiritual or subtle centers [*latâ'if*] are linked in Sufism to theories and practices related to self-transformation. The Sufi term *latîfa* stems from the Arabic word *latîf* and translates as “subtle”, “gentle” or “sensitive”. In Sufi terminology it refers to non-material aspects of a person, which can be activated through spiritual practice and under the guidance of a Sufi master.³⁰²

Towards embodied gnosis

According to Adam Hussain, independent dance artist working on a dialogue between dance and Sufism, the goal for a whirling dervish is that the entire body becomes a spiritual heart.³⁰³ Also modern Sufism still emphasizes the experience of God consciousness and the immanence of the divine presence as a goal of their practice.³⁰⁴ The three transformative stages of the soul (from physical/sensible, to psychic, to spiritual) were developed by Sufis into a system of self-transformation and purification: from the commanding soul [*nafs ammara*] to the blaming soul [*nafs lawwama*] to the soul at peace [*nafs mutma 'inna*]. The idea of the subtle body is structurally embedded in this process of purification by consciously working on transforming the *nafs*, which eventually allows access to the heart [*qalb*] and spirit [*ruh*].³⁰⁵

Sufism strives towards a balance between worldly and transcendent aspects of reality. Sufis are generally rather involved in mundane activities than living in meditative seclusion or prayer. The notions of “dying to the self” and “living in God” have remained throughout time the indicators of a practice that is oriented to selfless service, worldly and otherworldly.³⁰⁶

During the eleventh, twelfth and thirteenth centuries the subtle body as a spiritual organ of perception and its intimate connection with the human physical body gradually became more articulated. By the fourteenth century, a sevenfold scheme of the subtle body correlated with

³⁰² Ibid, 169.

³⁰³ Based on a conversation with Adam Hussain, independent dance artist. Hussain works on a dialogue between Sufism and dance by means of an integrative approach to embodied spirituality.

³⁰⁴ Milani, “The Subtle Body in Sufism,” 2013, 178.

³⁰⁵ Ibid, 175.

³⁰⁶ Ibid, 178-179.

seven levels of the cosmos, seven prophets, and seven spiritual types emerged. This scheme was complemented with a sevenfold color scheme during the nineteenth century.³⁰⁷

Spiritual corporeality

Shaikh Ahmad Ahsā'i (1241/1826) writes about an intricate scheme that encompasses "the physiology of the resurrection body." Here *form* is described as "accident" that disappears forever after the moment of death, while *matter* knows corruptible and incorruptible states. The incorruptible state is based on "incorruptible spiritual matter" and can return to life after having gone through postmortem processes of purification and transmutation.³⁰⁸

In Ahsā'i's account the event of the resurrection is related to spiritual alchemy where processes of metamorphosis of physical substance are symbolically equated with psychospiritual processes.³⁰⁹

Corbin's translations of the texts by Shaikh Aḥmad Aḥsā'ī that bear the titles "Physiology of the Resurrection Body", "Alchemy and the Resurrection Body" and "The Active Imagination and the Resurrection Body" provide a technical vocabulary and a spiritual logic that underlies the alchemical processes of transformation that according to Aḥsā'ī are inherent to the spiritual physiology of the human being. These processes are related to the notion of transmutation and are situated within an esoteric cosmology comprised of three major realms of being: the pure intellectual world, i.e., the world of pure cherubic Intelligences [*'ālam 'aqlī, Jabarūt*]; the *imaginal* world [*'ālam mithālī, Malakūt, Hūrqalyā*], i.e. the world of the Soul and of souls and the *mundus imaginalis* and the sensible world [*'ālam hissī*], i.e. the world of the material things.³¹⁰

Shaikh Aḥmad Aḥsā'ī explains the dynamics of spiritual and psychophysiological transmutation by making analogies between the physiology of the resurrection body and the various phases of alchemical work related to the transmutation of the substances of glass and tin into diamond and *lapis philosophorum*.³¹¹

³⁰⁷ Ibid, 171.

³⁰⁸ Corbin, "IX. The Shaikhī School: Shaikh Aḥmad Aḥsā'i," 1989, 218.

³⁰⁹ Ibid, 180-221.

³¹⁰ Corbin, *Spiritual Body and Celestial Earth*, 1989, ix and Corbin, "Mundus Imaginalis or the Imaginary and the Imaginal," 1964, 3-26.

³¹¹ Corbin, "IX. The Shaikhī School: Shaikh Aḥmad Aḥsā'i," 1989, 202-203.

Comparable to Rudolf Steiner's (and Gurdijeff's) scheme of spiritual physiology, Aḥsā'ī also includes the "I-spirit" into his scheme. It is considered to be imperishable and incorruptible.³¹² At the moment of death, the Angel of Death is gathering the "I-spirit" from the material body. It preserves its "preterrestrial structure" and survives in the intermediary realm of the *barzakh* "in waking state and in full consciousness."³¹³

Aḥsā'ī's scheme of human corporealities includes an eschatology of the soul after death, in the afterlife. This eschatology is embedded in a much larger scale of an eschatology of the totality of being, of humanity and the cosmos.³¹⁴

According to Anthroposophist Lorenzo Ravagli, the different states of corporeality that Aḥsā'ī describes are almost identical with the scheme of spiritual physiology of Rudolf Steiner. But a theory on reincarnation (as R. Steiner developed) is absent from the resurrection eschatology of the Iranian Shaikhs as presented by Henry Corbin in *Spiritual Body and Celestial Earth*.³¹⁵

Towards embodied gnosis

Here we encountered another perspective on relations between the metaphysical and the physical. With the example of esoteric Islam, the scope of meaning of ***spiritual corporeality*** expands to eschatological dimensions of a cosmic order. These dimensions of meaning reach beyond the realm of dance practice and theory as we know it. They also reach beyond what can be perceivable by a *dancing body*.

Correspondences between subtle body schemes in esoteric Islam and in esoteric Christianity according to Steiner are striking and potentially significant. They suggest an "objective reality" based on a spiritual physiology of the human being that is independent of boundaries drawn between different cultures of faith and religious dogma.

The difference between the emphasis on subtle body processes that occur in the afterlife in esoteric Islam, and the emphasis on subtle body processes during incarnation into this world

³¹² Ibid, 216 and 218.

³¹³ Ibid, 216-217.

³¹⁴ Ravagli, "Hurqalya, die Erde der Auferstehung" Anthroblog. Anthroposophie im 21. Jarhundert. 4.May 2012, accessed January 2018, <https://anthroblog.anthroweb.info/2012/hurgalya-die-erde-der-auferstehung/>.

³¹⁵ Ibid.

in esoteric Christianity is meaningful on many levels and invites more research. In the spiritual logic of esoteric Islam as brought forward by Corbin, the physical body lives simultaneously in the heavenly spheres and it is through the spiritual faculty of active imagination that a conscious relation can be established between the world of the here and the world of the hereafter.

Intermezzo

Altered states of knowing

In my approach to dance, I am interested in a state of knowing-being suspended between the physically sensible and the intuitively intelligible. In this state, it is not clearly perceivable whether movement origination is triggered by corporeal sensations, or whether it comes from an intuitively perceived metaphysical realm of being that inhabits my body while at the same time transcending it. With my dance language, I experiment with the communicative and epistemological potentials of creating movement from the field of tension between polarities of being. Such as for example gravity and levity, the immanent and the transcendent and concentric and peripheral forces of motion.

Spiritual corporeality

With the discussed examples so far, we encountered intellectual and corporeal efforts to reconcile the physical with the spiritual that have endured through time.

They engage with the spiritual evolution of the human being in and through the human body in motion, yet with different emphases in orientation, scope of meaning, this- or otherworldly perspectives and esthetic outcomes.

When looking at the embodied practices that accompany the worldviews of esoteric Islam in the Sema ceremony and esoteric Christianity in Eurythmy, there is one common direction of movement orientation: the peripheral movement. With Eurythmy, peripheral movement is directly linked with the etheric body and with cosmic and celestial realms of being that intersect with the physical reality. With the Sufis, one single peripheral movement is

reiterated again and again. It suggests infinity and relates to the celestial spheres of the cosmos.

Intermezzo

Towards embodied gnosis

Esoteric forms of thought and related body-based practices attribute a depth of meaning to movement forces such as the peripheral force and levity which in my view is very interesting. I dialogue with these points of views through discourse as well as through artistic experimentation. The visited examples give verbally discursive substance to unspeakable intuitions that I encounter in the dance. I artistically engage with these ideas by allowing my conscious awareness during the dance to be infiltrated by a larger scope of resonance and potential meaning. Dancing in dialogue with esoteric forms of thought becomes then a corporeally articulated questioning of numinous experiences. How these experiences can be meaningful with reference to the larger context of spirituality and metaphysics is one of the key concerns of this research.

Towards embodied gnosis

I question the onto-epistemological basis in the human body of the intermediate zone of knowing-being suspended between the physically sensible and the intuitively intelligible in dance. This questioning has led me towards the notions of the somatic and the spiritual unconscious of Jung. Many aspects of what Jung considers belonging to the realm of the unconscious, belong with Steiner to the spiritual world. With Steiner, intuition, imagination and inspiration are supra-sensory faculties of cognition that are mostly dormant in ordinary awareness³¹⁶ and that require conscious cultivation and schooling. With Jung, the faculty of

³¹⁶ Wehr, Jung & Steiner. *The Birth of a New Psychology*, 2002, 140.

intuition is not related to sense perception but to the unconscious.³¹⁷ The active imagination also plays a central role with Jung.

³¹⁷ See for example "Sensing vs. Intuition," Personality Hacker, accessed 19.09.2014, *YouTube* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W9Fw-YpHoU8>.

Carl Gustav Jung: the somatic and the spiritual unconscious

Spiritual corporeality:

In *Nietzsche's Zarathustra: Notes of the seminar given in 1934 -1939*, C.G. Jung speaks of the subtle body, or the body of breath³¹⁸ as one of the most important concepts of primitive psychology. It is an idea about the subtle body that enables union between the material body and spirit.³¹⁹ In the transcribed seminar about Nietzsche's Zarathustra, Jung explains that when he is speaking about the unconscious, he is referring to the psychological unconscious. Jung considers some aspects of the psychological unconscious to be discriminable and understandable. Yet that part of the unconscious that is referred to with the subtle body would be "exceedingly incomprehensible" as it blends with the functioning of the body, with the "darkness of matter" that is not accessible to our understanding. Jung introduces here the subtle body in relation to Nietzsche's concept of the self, which includes the body. Hence, he considers it necessary to not only include the psychological unconscious in the discussion (the shadow) "but also the physiological unconscious, the so-called somatic unconscious which is the subtle body."

Jung explains:

You see, somewhere our unconscious becomes material, because the body is the living unit, and our conscious and our unconscious are embedded in it: they contact the body. Somewhere there is a place where the two ends meet and become interlocked. And that is the place where one cannot say whether it is matter, or what one calls 'psyche'.³²⁰

³¹⁸ Jung, "Winter Term January/March 1935," *Nietzsche's Zarathustra: Notes of the seminar given in 1934 -1939*, 1988, 441.

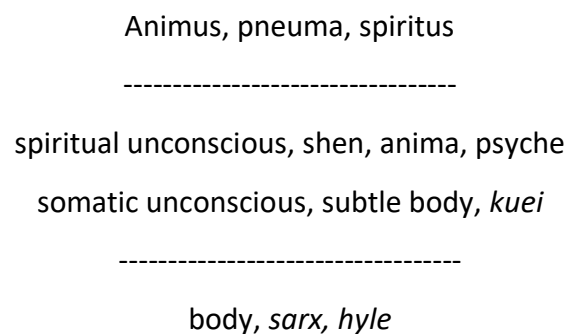
³¹⁹ Ibid, 432.

³²⁰ Ibid, 441.

In Jung's' view, what can be represented to the conscious mind is psychological³²¹, while what cannot become conscious and what can only be expressed by "vague analogies or hints", would be "so dark that one doesn't know whether it has to do with the top or the bottom of the system, whether it leads to the body or into the air."³²²

Jung refers here to the ancient Gnostic worldview where pneuma is situated on the very top of a scheme of being, which corresponds in Jung's view to the divine aspect of the unconscious. On the very bottom of this scheme there is situated the body, or hyle or sarx. In between these two layers he situates the human and psychological realm described as "spiritual unconscious, shen, anima, psyche, somatic unconscious, subtle body, kuei."

In the notes on Jung's seminar, this scheme is represented as³²³:



In the realm of the anima, Jung differentiates between a spiritual side (shen in China) of the unconscious and a somatic or corporeal side of the unconscious (in China kuei). This region of being "contains the psychology of the subtle body because it reaches into the sarx."³²⁴

Jung further explains that the idea of the subtle body plays a significant role in the New Testament and with the docetic doctrine of Christianity.

³²¹ On Jung's significant contribution to the "psychologization of religion and sacralization of psychology" see Hanegraaff, *New Age Religion and Western Culture. Esotericism in the Mirror of Secular Thought*, 1998, 224 -255 and 482 ff.

³²² Jung, *Nietzsche's Zarathustra*, 1988, 441.

³²³ Ibid, 442.

³²⁴ Ibid, 442.

He refers to apostle Paul speaking about the “sarx”, the corruptible biological body and about an incorruptible body “which we put on with Christ, because Christ is in a way the soul or the *pneuma*, the incorruptible body that is beyond space and time.”³²⁵

Intermezzo

Altered states of knowing:

It is interesting to note that Jung - who had to justify his theories in a secular scientific context - stated that the subtle body is “beyond our grasp” by definition. It is a transcendental concept that “cannot be expressed in terms of our language or our philosophical views, because they are all inside the categories of time and space.”³²⁶

Steiner and Gurdjieff on the contrary explicitly situated themselves in a lineage of an esoteric knowledge tradition. They did not shy away from systematically integrating the subtle body including its transcendental dimensions beyond time and space into their worldviews and practices. Triangulating these two perspectives (the secular scientific and esoteric) with an artistic perspective, outlines a larger frame of reference for unveiling new relations between the physical and the metaphysical.

Postmodern choreographer Merce Cunningham stated for example: “The dance is an object in space and time. The object of the dance is to obliterate that.”³²⁷ Such a statement accommodates Jung’s dilemma about the impossibility of scientifically approaching the subtle body as well the time transcending properties of the subtle body according to esoteric lore.

In my approach to dance, I explore the communicative and epistemological potentials of the non-verbal experience of my dancing body. New perspectives on the relation between the physical and the metaphysical come into being by setting up a dialogue between this practice, esoteric points of view and scientific/philosophical perspectives.

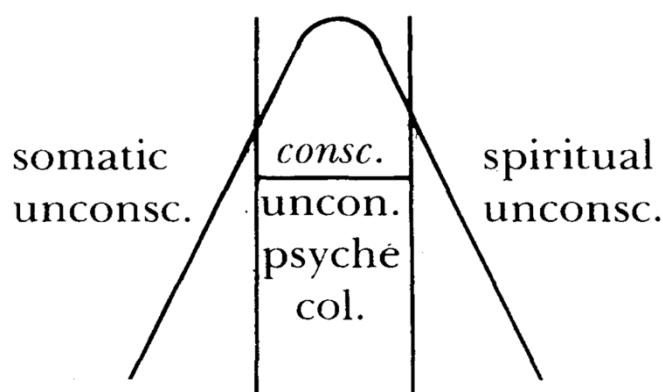
³²⁵ I Corinthians 15:53-54 referenced and interpreted by C.G. Jung in *ibid*, 443.

³²⁶ *Ibid*, 443.

³²⁷ Lepecki, “Introduction/ /Dance as Practice of Contemporaneity,” 2012, 4.

Towards embodied gnosis

Jung further explains the somatic and the spiritual unconscious: the psyche, or *anima*, is associated with the breath of life, with the living flame that warms the body. This *anima* is subdivided into a spiritual side and a somatic or corporeal side. Jung speculated that the somatic or corporeal region of the *anima* would contain the psychology of the subtle body as it reaches into the *sarx*.³²⁸



Drawing depicted in Jung and Jarrett, *Nietzsche's Zarathustra*, 442.

Jung explains this sketch:

The mountain would be the conscious and the unconscious, and the spiritual would be on the one side and the somatic on the other. The greater intensity of life is in the center and the darkness is on either side, on the spiritual side as well as on the side of matter.³²⁹

³²⁸ Jung, *Nietzsche's Zarathustra*, 1988, 442.

³²⁹ Jung, *Nietzsche's Zarathustra*, 1988, 442.

Intermezzo

Towards embodied gnosis:

*Jung's ideas about a somatic and a spiritual side of the unconscious are useful to specify the performative state suspended between the physically sensible and the intuitively intelligible that I am experimenting with. I don't attempt to develop a psychology of the subtle body though. Instead, I am developing a dance language that speaks about the experience of a hypothetical - or imagined - zone of creative convergence between the spiritual and the somatic unconscious. To be able to "locate" this hypothetical zone of creative convergence, I work with **corporeal imagination***. I imagine it while searching for movement. I experiment with what the act of imagining it triggers in my corporeal experience and in the movement expression. The notions of the spiritual and the somatic unconscious help me to focus the area of imagination on a specific idea. Consequently, I attempt to verbalize what I have experienced by writing about it retrospectively. I interrogate myself in how far the experience carried epistemological value, a knowing-being quality of consciousness, or not, and in how far this knowing-being quality might be intuitively legible in the dance language - for me as well as for the spectators of the dance.*

Jung did not develop a body-based practice, but his ideas and theories have been integrated into somatic practices such as for example "Authentic Movement."

Authentic Movement: esoteric influences in contemporary dance

Authentic Movement began in the 1950s as “movement in depth” by Mary Starks Whitehouse. She was a former student of modern dance pioneers Martha Graham and Mary Wigman³³⁰ and trained as well as a psychotherapist. She pioneered the integration of expressive dance practice with psychotherapeutic work, which then later developed into Authentic Movement (AM).³³¹ In the contemporary landscape of artistic and spiritually oriented body-based practices, Authentic Movement can be contextualized under the broad header of “Somatic Movement Dance Education”. This term encompasses somatic techniques such as Body-Mind Centering, Laban Bartenieff Movement Fundamentals, Ideokinesis, Skinner Releasing Technique, Alexander Technique, Feldenkrais and Authentic Movement. Authentic Movement applies Jungian and post-Jungian theories and concepts such as “active imagination” and “inner alchemy”³³² in combination with somatic movement principles (“sensing the environment,” “somatically conscious movement initiations,” “connection to breath,” “deep body listening” etc.) and integrates these within a broader context of the expressive arts, movement therapy and transpersonal psychologies in artistic and academic contexts.³³³

Altered states of knowing:

According to Janet Adler – leading artist and scholar in the field of dance and movement therapy - Authentic Movement has its foundation in the work of dancers, mystics and healers. The practice of Authentic Movement works with the phenomenon of presence understood as developing consciousness. This quality of consciousness emerges through the shared presence of a mover who sources his or her movement from an intentional interaction between active imagination and movement, an inner witness that observes the emerging movement and the compassionate witnessing presence of an outer witness (the observer). After the session, the mover speaks his or her inner experience by trying to remember what

³³⁰ Adler, *Offerings from the conscious body: The discipline of authentic movement*, 2002, xii.

³³¹ Foster, *Somatic Patterning: How to Improve Posture and Movement and Ease Pain*, 2004, 358.

³³² Stromsted, “The Alchemy of Authentic Movement: Awakening Spirit in the Body,” 2014, 37.

³³³ Williamson, Bateson and Whatley, *Dance, Somatics and Spiritualities*, 2014, xxvii-xxix.

he or she was doing in the presence of the outer witness. To verbally describe the inner experience is seen as a bridge between the body and consciousness. The witness equally engages in questioning how he or she was present during the session and how what has been seen can be described in words. In the dialogue between the mover and the witness, the awareness of movement patterns is heightened by naming them. Authentic Movement according to Adler is about “relationship between a mover and an outer witness, between the moving self and an inner witness, between the self and the collective, the self and the Divine.”³³⁴

In her latest book *Offering from the Conscious Body*³³⁵ Adler highlights three aspects of Authentic Movement: The Individual Body, The Collective Body, The Conscious Body. In all three realms she explores “the phenomena of being merged with experience, being in dialogic relationship with it, and being in a unitive state with it.”³³⁶

Spiritual corporeality:

Looking at how the notion of “spirit” has been dealt with among modern dancers whom Adler sees as precursors to Authentic Movement, she refers to Rudolf Laban who also wrote about an inner witness and about the body dancing its soul; to Mary Wigman, who wrote about a specific kind of presence in dance that made her experience a sense of “oneness with the cosmos”; to Isadora Duncan who wrote about her quest towards finding “the divine expression of the human spirit through the medium of the body’s movement and about a “great renaissance of religion through the Dance” and to Martha Graham who wrote about the utter truthfulness of movement and about being possessed by an inner flame that creates a rebirth of each moment in time through dance.³³⁷

Jungian analyst, psychotherapist and Dance/Movement Therapist Tina Stromsted emphasizes alchemical processes in the practice of Authentic Movement:

³³⁴ Adler, “American Dance Therapy Association 37th Annual Conference Keynote Address. From Autism to the Discipline of Authentic Movement,” 2003, 13.

³³⁵ Adler, *Offerings from the conscious body: The discipline of authentic movement*, 2002.

³³⁶ Adler, “American Dance Therapy,” 2003, 13.

³³⁷ Adler, “American Dance Therapy,” 2003, 10.

Familiarizing ourselves with alchemy's basic elements can illuminate our understanding of *embodied* transformative processes ... Both practices [Alchemy and Authentic Movement] bring awareness to what we least value: base matter, known as *prima materia* by the alchemists and as unconscious, 'shadow' qualities by Jung. In fact, some analysts equate the body with the unconscious.³³⁸

Intermezzo

Towards embodied gnosis:

*I don't know if or in which ways Authentic Movement explicitly or implicitly engages with Jung's differentiation between the spiritual and the somatic unconscious. This differentiation can support the idea of embodied gnosis as a state of knowing-being that can be activated in a zone of creative convergence in between these two sides of the unconscious. My practice of retrospective dance writing also resonates with the practice of verbalizing experience in dialogue with an inner and outer witness in Authentic Movement. With retrospective dance writing, I become more conscious of what is happening during the dance rather unconsciously. I articulate it verbally by annotating videos of rehearsals and performances. I communicate aspects of my inner experience and dialogue with peers, supervisors and colleagues to find out if, when and how embodied gnosis can be experienced by the dancer and by the observers. To understand language with Adler as a "bridge between body and consciousness" gives another layer of meaning to the **corporeal theory*** developed in this research. This corporeal theory includes non-verbal dance language, retrospective dance writing and attuning (see chapter five).*

Conclusion

This excursion into the subtle body staged an encounter between esoteric forms of thought, related body-based practices and an experiential perspective from my dance practice contextualized in a broader field of contemporary dance and discourse.

³³⁸ Stromsted, "The Alchemy of Authentic Movement," 2014, 37.

The key concepts *spiritual corporeality*, *altered states of knowing* and *embodied gnosis* allowed both fields of practice and discourse to communicate with each other.

In “Subtle-body processes, towards a non-reductionist understanding”, Geoffrey Samuel³³⁹ notes that although it is highly problematic to approximate a scientifically grounded understanding of subtle body ideas and practices, they contain in many ways “real value” and should not be labeled as “a relic of obsolete modes of thought, or as a marginal fantasy of occult and New Age writers.”³⁴⁰ In his attempt to pave the way towards a scientifically grounded understanding of the meaning of subtle body concepts, Samuel highlights the major limitations of “naïve materialism” (i.e. scientific reductionism that is incapable of accommodating religious and supernatural phenomena) and “naïve idealism” (an uncritical appropriation and acceptance of subtle body phenomena as “real”).³⁴¹ Samuel hints towards understanding subtle body concepts as “a kind of view of the brain and central nervous system from within,” as something “relational and constructed” but nevertheless “real”. He further states that ideas and hypotheses about the subtle body could eventually be grounded in latest neurophysiological research. He also highlights the ethical dimension that is generally implied in subtle body concepts and practices.³⁴²

Anatomical and physiological knowledge from the context of neurophysiology linked with somatic movement dance education could also help to ground hypothetical intuitions back into the physical body and its anatomy as we know it.³⁴³

As a researching dancer embedded in an academic context, I walk a middle path between both extremes of “naïve materialism” and “naïve idealism”.

I distribute observations and insights on the one hand towards the empirical domain of my dancing body, which acts as a creative interface and as a vehicle for sensory and intuitive supra-sensory/*imaginative** perception. On the other hand, I open the gaze of my curiosity towards the meta-empirical domain of metaphysical speculation and spiritual science.

To recapitulate: my main argument is that the intensified experience of dance can amplify an intuition of an intrinsic relation between the corporeality of the dancing body and a

³³⁹ Geoffrey Samuel is emeritus professor of religious studies at Cardiff University.

³⁴⁰ Samuel, “Subtle-body processes. Towards a non-reductionist understanding,” 2013, 249.

³⁴¹ Ibid, 53-57.

³⁴² Ibid, 262. On the ethics of gnosis see also for example Mahé, “Gnostic and Hermetic Ethics,” 1998, 22.

³⁴³ See also chapter five, 178-179.

metaphysical and spiritual realm. I approximate the state of knowing-being where this intuition appears with the notions of *spiritual corporeality*, *altered states of knowing* and *embodied gnosis*, and I question them from an artistic experiential point of view in dialogue with scholarly academic points of view.

Through this excursion into the subtle body, it has become evident that prominent esoteric teachers of the 20th century have developed body-based practices that anchor their esoteric forms of thought into the human body in motion. The discussed movement practices are embedded in complex worldviews where the human being is seen as a constitutive and participating agent in a cosmic and divine evolutionary plan. The corporeality of the human being is understood in spiritual terms, with an explicit focus on inner work and transformation. This transformation is aimed at spiritualizing the human being, in alignment with cosmic laws of involution and evolution.³⁴⁴

Through a *dancing language*, I speculate about the nature and creative potential of human corporeality in dialogue with esoteric forms of thought. I experiment with how an expanded view on human corporeality beyond the physical body can inform an [artistic truth*](#) of expression. I invest in this speculation based on the experiential insight that whenever I don't know or cannot know it is still possible that my body knows more than I do, and it speaks to me through intuition.

In the next chapter I will continue to explore experiential perspectives and contextualizing theories about possible relations between the physically sensible and the intuitively intelligible and how these can be related to a contemporary dance practice. This time, verbalized dance experience-based insights and speculation (*corporeal theory*), will take the lead and scientific/academic logic will respond during the *intermezzi (discursive practice)*.

³⁴⁴ I mentioned above (p.115) that in esoteric forms of thought also plants and animals are supposed to have an "etheric body". Without intending to enforce human exceptionalism, I focus in this study exclusively on subtle corporeality related to the human body. The human body is at the center of my artistic practice and the only perspective I can speak from through experience. I am investigating through a human body in motion, and I speak from the perspective of a human being.