

REVIEW

Of the dissertation by Iliana Salazar on the subject:

European Choreographers Oriented to Dance-therapy and its Application in the 20th and 21st Century

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The dissertation grabs our attention with its title intertwining three areas, which in themselves provide material for one dissertation. The first of them is the personalist field of the European choreographers, who have chosen to dedicate their activity to dance-therapy, the second is the dance therapy itself, and the third is its application nowadays. I will emphasize at once: it is not only the last area that is relevant, which is the key point of everything that is happening in our time. The very way of intertwining and mutual penetration between the three is relevant, allowing each of them to look at the others and to enrich themselves through them.

The dissertation covers 278 pages, of which the main text is 234 pages, Appendix - 8 pages, followed by Bibliography and the required description of the contributions and publications on the topic. The first section is a historical introduction, tracing the ideas about the healing properties of dance starting from European Antiquity and from various parts of the planet, where such ideas have been preserved through tradition to this day. At the same time, this introductory first section will turn the knowledge it contains into a context for addressing the issues of the following. Thus, the transition to the second section, dealing with dance-therapy in the twentieth century, is as wide as possible in terms of time, as well as well prepared; so the interest in the earliest epochs, testifying through various traces of the awareness of the therapeutic properties of dance, is not only historical, but comes from the core of the research object, from its specifics. Because dance was conceived as a therapy long before it became an independent artistic practice. It can be said that in ancient cultures it was the therapeutic abilities of dance that were the basis that brought it forward and upward in the whole culture: it assigned to it expectations no less than those of sound in general, to musical sound with all its forms. It was from these expectations that the ancient Greek theory of ethos was created, which saw in music the "main food" (Plato) for the human soul. In this context, dance is the food for the bodily part of the soul - when body and soul are not separated, but exist in unity: the bodily-soul unity of man.

The doctoral student follows with extreme precision and sensitivity the historical destiny of dance, in which it gradually becomes autonomous, then becomes an art, and finally rediscovers its therapeutic resources - not always with equal success,

because the "new" therapists in their professional aspiration tend to "fragment" dance, abandoning its very dancing: "In this "fragmentation" of dance, however, the focus changes - the impact of body-oriented psychotherapy and motor therapy increases, "forgetting" the techniques and instruments of dance, although they should be the basis of dance-therapy " (p. 7).

In the second section, dedicated to the personalist field of "European choreographers", dance is already manifested in the capacity of a modern direction, realized precisely as "dance-therapy". And this is something completely different from understanding it as a dance, or as a dance practice that hides a therapeutic charge. However, such a transformation has taken the necessary historical time, passed through the art forms, taken them into itself and reached the new form of "dance-therapy", whose two elements must be in synthesis in order for the form itself to be meaningful and effective. But such a synthesis can be achieved only through creativity: that is why the personalist form of research is the most adequate. That is why Iliana Salazar focuses on some remarkable figures who not only create manners and techniques, but in the process of creation bring out the idea of dance-therapy. The names she singles out are the Europeans Hedwig Kallmeyer, Elsa Gindler, Lily Ehrenfried, Charlotte Selver (late nineteenth - mid twentieth century), the "non-Europeans who created in Europe" such as Isadora Duncan, Dr. Bess Mensendieck, Catherine Dunham, Ernst Duplan, Frans Scott-Billmann, Frederick Matthias Alexander, Francois Delsarte, Emile Jacques-Dalcroze, Dorothea Günther, Rudolf von Laban, Mary Wigman, Gertrud Bodenwieser, as well as leaders of European spiritual therapy schools Beinsa Douno, Rudolf Steiner, Georgi Ivanovich Gurdjieff, and later (20th – 21st century) Liljan Espenak, Elizabeth Polk, Irmgard Bartenieff, Trudy Shuup, Gertrude Falke-Heller, Gerda Alexander, Elsa Lindenberg, Hilde Holger, Feld Holger, Veronica Sherborn, Dennis Duck, Margaret Morris, Maria Teresa Leon-Fritch, Annemari Autere.

The third section of the dissertation discusses issues related to the institutionalization and application of dance-therapy in the 21st century. The outlined situation - cultural, ideological, artistic and medical - is completely different and requires dance-therapy to undergo a complete rethinking. In this situation, in which "gentle, effective and holistic ways of therapy for healing the (mental and physical) state of man as a complex functioning organism are sought" (p. 182). The interest in dance-therapy as an alternative method is growing. The process of its institutionalization goes hand in hand with its incorporation into more general therapeutic systems - "*integrative therapy, gestalt therapy, all forms of art therapy, including dance-therapy, motor therapy, social therapy, psychotherapy, new forms of naturalistic therapy, innovative pedagogy*" (P. 188) - and hence with its subordination to the respective methodological guidelines. But institutionalization affects not only the object and method of a phenomenon, but also its subject. In this subjective sphere it manifests itself as professionalization. The profession of dance-therapist, multi-elemental in

composition, can become a profession in the true sense of the word, when those who practice it (re)think and apply it personally: in other words, when they rely on the creative element of this very multi-component. They are also the ones who leave their names: Marcia Leventhal, Marcia Plevin, Maria Fuchs, Marion Nord, Helen Payne, Janet McDonald's, Annelies Schrijnen-van Gastel, Elaine Siegel, Susanne Bender and many more. Iliana Salazar summarizes: "As a profession built on the foundations of dance art, the first choreographers in dance-therapy put in the forefront the need for experience and knowledge in the field of dance, choreographic pedagogy and composition, related to psychotherapeutic and physiological features" (p. 200). And like any creative phenomenon - when it really is such – dance-therapy will sound with the tone of the person who practices it. It will expand it radially, connecting it with dances and dance prototypes from ancient and new cultures: with forms of classical ballet, with Latin American and ballroom dances, with dances from the Orient, with traditional and folk dances, with ancient dance practices. In this context, the "Bulgarian trail", as Salazar calls it, deserves attention in dance-therapy not only because the dissertation is Bulgarian, but also because of the presence of a number of ancient healing ritual practices in our lands: *Russali dances, fire dances, Thracian mysteries and Thracian Orphism ... and the wolf mysteries*" (p. 230). That is why the Bulgarian names Dimitar Krastev, Rozmari De Meo, Plamen Ivanov, Denitsa Ilcheva, Sisi Georg and others should be given due credit.

Realizing the intensity and richness of the information that fills the three chapters and in turn related to the huge variety of phenomena, trends and forms of what is united under the name "dance-therapy", Salazar placed at the end of each of these chapters, and if necessary after certain subchapters, a micro-conclusion called "Accents". Its function is to summarize the particular moments, to collect the different trends, to classify and form a model. An example of the derivation of such accents in the first chapter are the dance classifications according to the purpose, expressiveness and structure of the dances (pp. 30 - 31). In the second chapter, the relevant micro-conclusion outlines the trends inherent in the first and second half of the twentieth century and highlights the methodological and technical highlights characterizing the various areas and schools (Marian Chase dance-therapy, Jung dance-therapy, developing dance-movement therapy, Gestalt-motor therapy, p. 176). Most contributive are the singled out by the author "three basic recesses on which the choreographic methods under consideration stand: psychotherapy, physical and motor therapy, integrative therapy" (p. 180). In the third chapter, the emphasis is clearly practical connected with the application of dance and choreographic structures "both in the field of alternative and palliative medicine, and in serious mental and physical illnesses" (p. 226).

As internal summaries and conclusions, the highlights of the three chapters prepare the overall Conclusion of the dissertation, allowing it to be raised to the next, higher level. Now the statements - representing the personal contribution of Iliana Salazar -

become as convincing as possible. The first of these concerns healing dance practices that continue to permeate European and world cultural history. Among them, there are two types: preventive, which are more expressive, and curative - which are more structured (p. 234). The second situation is related to the historical moment in which "dance becomes a spectacular and secular art with a purely aesthetic impact" (ibid.) And from which its healing possibilities naturally pass into the background. But this is only one side of a deeper process that led in the twentieth century to a complete rupture in the psychophysical unity of man. That the process is not irreversible is a position that Salazar has already seriously and consistently argued in the dissertation, and can now summarize: "Paradoxically, it is precisely the defeats of this disunity that push humanity to rethink the primordial principles of the relationship between body, psyche and spirit" (p. 235).

The dissertation is a result and evidence of hard work on a huge scale - from the study of rich information in various research fields and its systematization into a logical structure, through its creative thinking, which led to significant summaries and conclusions. Intelligently written, the text will be useful for people from different professions, who have sheltered dance-therapy in themselves, and for all who see in dance something more than a stage art.

Appreciating the dissertation, as well as the personal and professional qualities of its author, I confidently vote for awarding the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" to Iliana Salazar.

Prof. DSc Christina Yapova

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