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**Problem of communicating the lived experience of dance
in the perspective of phenomenology. On the example of contact
improvisation**

Abstract

The main subject of the paper is to examine selected problems regarding understanding the pre-eflexive experience of dance in the perspective of phenomenology. In the centre of our attention is the question if and if yes how an experience of dance can be communicated. What I am interested is in how in a different way than a simple description communicate the knowledge gained through dance. Therefore I will outline the problems I have with Maxine Sheet-Johnstone's take on phenomenology and cite the suggestions made by Sondra Horton Fraleigh and then I will cite contact improvisation as an example of practice embodying the ecological understanding of the self, considering at the same time the dilemmas of communicating knowledge gained through practice. By comparing several phenomenologically oriented theories of dance, I want to justify the advantages of the phenomenological approach in comparison to philosophies of art that are more inclined to defining the art object than its experience.

Keywords: phenomenology of dance, Sondra Horton Fraleigh, contact improvisation, interkinaesthetic knowledge, ecological self

To make the bodily and cognitive aspect of dance experience in phenomenology more meaningful

It has been a long-held belief, expressed in a particularly vocal way by an American researcher Francis Sparshott, that philosophy and aesthetics in all their history have never been able to properly approach dance, to explain either its carnal nature or its processual character¹. To back his position, Sparshott cites the classification of fine arts contained in *Preliminary Discourse to the Encyclopedia of Diderot* (1751), which failed to include dance, due to the fact that it favours genres constituting a kind of "reflective knowledge"². As

1 F. Sparshott, *Why Philosophy Neglects the Dance*, [in:] *What is Dance? Readings in Theory and Criticism*, ed. R. Copeland, M. Cohen, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1983, p. 94 and following.

2 J. Le R. D'Alembert, *Preliminary Discourse to the Encyclopedia of Diderot*, trans. R. Schwab, W. Rex, Indianapolis 1963, p. 37.

Aili Bresnahan points out, Hegelian system also reinforced the conviction that art should be “understood intellectually rather than responding to in bodily way”³. It is my belief that one more reason why dance is so difficult to discuss in the realm of aesthetics is the tendency to interpret it in terms of notional categories designed for non-performative arts such as painting or literature, while a dancer’s body can hardly be reduced to an existential foundation, such as stone or canvas, and neither can dance be reduced to a work of art seen as an object. From this perspective phenomenology seems considerably more suited to understand dance, since it focuses on the corporeal nature of live experience of dance rather than an object – work of art, and describes dance as it is actually experienced in live performance.

It must be noted, however, that some analytical aestheticians expressed serious reservations in regard to the phenomenological position, at least in the context of the reflection on dance, most notably Graham McFee, who argues that although this perspective is important for the general reflection on the body, it contributes little to understanding of dance⁴. Although McFee did not refer to any specific representatives of phenomenology, it can be inferred from his argumentation that his criticisms concentrated primarily on the existential stance of Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Martin Heidegger. His analytical position prevented him from appreciating the significance of these thinkers, as his main aim was to ensure that notions such as art or dance were used accurately and precisely, even at the expense of undervaluing other insignificant issues, like understanding artistic activities in connection with the question of “human being in the world”. Still Heidegger’s thought has proved exceptionally inspiring for dance scholars, who more and more readily apply cross- and interdisciplinary perspective, of which Sondra Horton Fraleigh is a prime example.

Phenomenology must indisputably be given credit in understanding dance for drawing attention to the fact that human experience is essentially corporeal and that dance is “art of embodied human in position in motion”⁵. Michael Levin, an American philosopher and dance theoretician, goes as far as to claim that it should be “absolutely fundamental to our philosophical understanding of the body”, since it emphasizes the importance of “sensuous human body as it is actually experienced in living”⁶.

It is not my aim to prove the significance and value of the phenomenological approach; in my opinion, however, one of the most important arguments weighing in its favour is the fact that it seems the most appealing and most inspiring one for dancers⁷. Fraleigh, Maxine Sheets-Johnstone and Jaana Parvianen all actively practised dance, and, despite the occasional differences in

3 A. Bresnahan, *The Philosophy of Dance*, [in:] *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Stanford 2015, p. 2.

4 G. McFee, *Dance: Contemporary Thought*, [in:] *Encyclopedia of Aesthetics*, ed. M. Kelly, University of Oxford Press, New York and Oxford 2014, p. 494-497.

5 M. Cohen, *What is Dance?*, [in:] *What is Dance?*, op. cit., p. 8.

6 D. M. Levin, *Ballachine’s Formalism*, [in:] *What is Dance?*, op. cit., p. 91.

7 In the dancers’ conceptualization, the conviction that dance creates indivisible wholeness and that the dancer cannot be separated from the dance gave rise to most controversy. The notion of direct experience also posed an interpretational difficulty and required clarification of how it could be communicated going beyond the first-person perspective.

conclusions which they drew, they shared the common starting point in the notion of lived experience. Notwithstanding the details of their interpretations of this experience, all of them, on the one hand, advocated the uniqueness of the experience of dance, based on the belief that access to experiences is given in an unmediated manner, through pre-reflective embodied consciousness, and, on the other, in various manners, they all applied the Husserlian conception of the body as a sensitive perceptual organ regarded non-dualistically as a spiritual-corporeal unity and the place where experiences are being gathered. They struggled themselves with the problem of how to communicate a bodily experience.

I would like to examine selected problems regarding understanding the pre-reflexive experience of dance in the perspective of phenomenology. In the centre of my attention is the fundamental question of phenomenology if and if yes how an experience of dance can be communicated. What I am interested in is how in a different way than a simple description communicate the knowledge gained through dance. Contact improvisation is being treated here as an example of an interkinaesthetic form of knowledge and an explanation of some aspects of Fraleigh's conception, such as her concept of "ecological self".

Several reasons influenced my choice of Fraleigh rather than any other of the dancers referring to phenomenology⁸. Firstly, she placed a strong emphasis on the position of dancers' experience and confronted her reflection particularly with her own experience of practising dance. She wrote, "Dancing has taught me the inseparability of body, mind, and movement (...)"⁹. Secondly, she used those experiences in her later works to devise a kind of research stance and to formulate her own methodological conception, which "frame an embodied metaphysics through the voices of dancing"¹⁰. Thirdly, she did her own kind of research, especially in *Dancing Identity* where she cited dancers describing their experiences while dancing. As she explained herself, "(...) 'When I dance...' or 'When I make dances' ...'. I ask dancers to finish these phrases without preparation and in the less than five minutes to let their experience speak"¹¹. In her early works Fraleigh devised an enigmatic notion of "becoming through dance"¹², originating in dance experiences¹³. This formed the foundation for her conception of "ecological self"¹⁴, referring to cognitive psychologist J. J. Gibson, clearly corresponding with the tendencies of contemporary art of dance, which, as

8 It is worth noting that her conception evolved. In *Dancing Identity* Fraleigh criticizes existentialism and proposes a corporeal metaphysics. S. Horton Fraleigh, *Dancing Identity: Metaphysics in Motion*, University of Pittsburg Press, Pittsburg 2004, p. 7.

9 Ibidem, p. 57.

10 Ibidem, p. 4.

11 Ibidem, p. 12. For example: "When I dance (...) my sensors become more active and find myself as part of my environment, my environment as part of me". Ibidem, p. 50. "When I dance I become, I connect with the world". Ibidem, p. 64.

12 However, she draws the conclusions that apply to dance in general, regardless of how it is practised. S. Horton Fraleigh, *Dance and the Lived Body. A Descriptive Aesthetics*, University of Pittsburg Press, Pittsburg 1987.

13 She built on this thesis and reinterpreted it, in the later period drawing from feminism, developmental psychology and even neuroscience, combining aesthetic aspects with ethnological ones.

14 S. Horton Fraleigh, *The Spiral Dance. Toward a Phenomenology of Somatics*, Dance Faculty Publications, 1998, 8, p. 17. https://digitalcommons.brockport.edu/dns_facpub/8

Curtis Carter points out, has been revolutionized, in main part, by improvisational forms¹⁵. On the one hand, it is dance that leads Fraleigh, as she explains in *Dancing Identity*, which is why she uses its various forms to reflect on the issues of self, gender, political terrain of movement etc. This confirms the necessity of expanding the field of interest of classical narrowly-taken aesthetics. On the other, in dance she sees the affirmation of her own intuitions about how our human situation in *lifeworld* should be understood, when a lived body in motion is leading us. Such following the body understood in a non-dualistic way is particularly prominent in improvisational techniques, regardless of how they are understood.

How to communicate the bodily experience of dance?

The discussion of Fraleigh's conception should begin with clarifying certain misconceptions in the field of dance aesthetics which have arisen, and accumulated, in the context of phenomenological perspective. Most studies quote Sheets-Johnstone's early work *Phenomenology of Dance* (1979), which pays special attention to Husserl's notion of *Lebenswelt*. The conclusions drawn from it are, however, not necessarily accurate. It is certainly true that her analysis originates in the description of the viewer's visual experience, that is, how the phenomenon of dance reveals and manifests itself to the viewer, which is further suggested by her claim that "It is only through an analysis of the visible in dance, (...) that one might begin to fathom and describe the essential nature of that experience"¹⁶. Her essentialist inclinations are also evident in her assertion as well as the connection to the Husserlian eidetic reduction and the search for the essence of the phenomenon. It must be noted, however, that the author clearly dissociated herself from such aspirations in her later works¹⁷. Also the frequently quoted opinion that the phenomenological perspective favours the viewer's experience seems rather debatable¹⁸, since Sheets-Johnstone lays special emphasis on the dancer's creation and apprehension of dance as a totality and places special emphasis on the "illusion of force" created in dance. "It is immediately apparent that the dancer who is one with the dance, and who thereby creates and sustains the *illusion of force*, is pre-reflectively aware of her body in movement as form-in-the-making"¹⁹. She points to the unity of the dancer and dance, which precludes the separation of the components of dance from dance itself in the totality of the experience... and, at this point,

15 C. L. Carter, *Improvisation in Dance*, "The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism", 2000, 58 (2) spring, p. 181-190.

16 M. Sheets-Johnstone, *Illuminating Dance: Philosophical Explorations*, Bucknell University Press, Lewisburg 1984, p. 132.

17 It must be noted that Sheets-Johnstone would not agree with a number of labels attributed to her views expressed in *Phenomenology of Dance*. The shift in her research stance is evident in *Primacy of Movement*, John Benjamins Publishing Company, Amsterdam/Philadelphia 2011.

18 N. Speletic, *Phenomenology and Dance*, www.speletic.org/Nicole_Speletic-CV.pdf

19 M. Sheets-Johnstone, *Phenomenology of Dance*, Dance Books, Philadelphia 1979, p. 39.

she encounters insurmountable difficulties²⁰. She comes as far as to claim that the viewer seeing the dancer analyzing her movements reflectively shatters the illusion of the totality of the performance. The assumption here seems to be that the dancer destroys the *illusion of force*, since "The body and the movement appear as separate and distinct phenomena"²¹. From this perspective, how is the viewer's position to be interpreted? Does the viewer see the spectacle whose totality has been broken or perhaps he tunes kinaesthetically and bodily in to the dancer's position, as later Sheets-Johnstone adds that "As soon as she [dancer] becomes self-conscious, the audience is aware of a separation of the dancer from the dance"²². If the latter were to be true, it would involve tuning in to the dancer's position. (Historically, there were attempts to explain this issue by means of kinesthesia (introduced by John Martin (1933))²³ and the concept of empathy.

Therefore, it seems more accurate to talk about the viewer's and the dancer's experiences meeting in the context of the dance performance, and the attempt at communication between them, at mutual understanding. This is basically how Mark Franko describes it, in the introduction to "Dance Research Journal" on the importance of phenomenology in dance: "Phenomenological description of dance relied not only on the visual, but also on what would come to be known in dance as both proprioception and kinaesthetic relation. What I would like to call the kinaesthetic-visual pact of phenomenological description when applied to dance facilitated the integration of the performer's discourse of sensation with the spectator's discourse of visual reception (...)"²⁴. This pact, as the author suggests, allows for the common ground where the distinct perspectives of the viewer and the dancer can converge. It is still possible thanks to the direct, bodily experience. However, after Heidegger's reform, the broader-ranging phenomenology has made it problematic to reveal such an experience or make it objective. It is questionable whether it is even communicable²⁵. Sheets-Johnstone shared this conception, assuming that dance phenomenology is the encounter of "this original, pristine body, the pre-objective or pre-objectivized body"²⁶ with language.

Horton-Fraleigh's interpretation makes the issue more problematic²⁷. Drawing on Merleau-Ponty's approach to language she states that dance "(...) passes between the dancer and the audience in an intersubjective field (...)

20 According to Cohen the phenomenological method is often criticed because of treated dance as non-divisible wholeness. R. Cohen, *What is Dance?*, [in:] *What is Dance?*..., op. cit., p. 8.

21 Ibidem.

22 Ibidem.

23 Martin in his conception of "kinaesthetic sympathy" postulated "correlations of physical movement with psychological qualities" (quoted: A. Berleant, *Art and Engagement*, Temple University Press, Philadelphia 1991, p. 168) as well as the existence of a strong autonomous self, supporting the interpretation of the emotion expressed in dance. Thus he applied dualistic notional categories.

24 M. Franko, *Editor's Note: What Is Dead and What Is Alive in Dance Phenomenology?*, "Dance Research Journal", 2011, 43 (2) winter, p. 1.

25 Initially, this communicability in phenomenology was guaranteed by the premise that a philosophical description and an original bodily experience were the one.

26 M. Sheets-Johnstone, *Illuminating Dance...*, op. cit., p. 133.

27 First of all, the author, although inspired by Sheets-Johnstone, particularly her later works, rejected her conception of the "illusion of force" introduced in the early book *Phenomenology of Dance*. It seems

But dance does not necessarily call for interpretation in words; it exist as a site for a worldless (yet poetic) communion"²⁸. She explains, "We look behind the poetic image or symbol to our immediate communion with the dancer, we focus on the immanent and inmost hidden body, our expressive elusive body of dance"²⁹. And in later works she says that the words are not substitute for experience³⁰. All of this confirms that she herself struggled with the problem of how to express the experience of what transpires in dance, both from the perspective of the dancer and of the viewer who participates and relates to it in a bodily, sensual way.

Fraleigh never subscribes to Husserl's transcendental point of view. She believes that the notion of a transcendental subject assumes that we are detached observers of the world while in her opinion it is impossible to separate a human being and the world³¹. It is essential for her that phenomenology introduced the understanding of perception which "is an activity, not a passivity". As she explains, "The observed (the object) and the observer (the subject) become one (interact) in the moment of observation"³². Fraleigh's understanding of the process of perception as an interaction³³, (not only the dancer with dance, but also the dancer with the viewer) dramatically changes the way the dancer's experience is thought of as well as translating to the field of the aesthetics of dance, where aesthetic aspects are closely linked with epistemological, and by this existential, ones. Her conception illustrates that to understand the experience as pre-reflective (at the same time serving as a source of a sense of body-mind integration) as well as dance as wholeness, of particular significance is seeing it from the perspective of the dancer ... and the corporeal knowledge they gain in practice, in action. Therefore, in her later works she refers to ecological aspects, putting more emphasis on the connection between thinking and acting as well as the act of aesthetic transformation which results from dance.

Contact improvisation as interkinaesthetic knowledge – research findings by ethnologists

Contact improvisation provides a kind of embodiment, and at the same time explanation of some aspects of Fraleigh's conception. This convergence of theory and practice is hardly accidental, as the dancer's first dancing steps were under supervision of the German expressionist Mary Wigman and was inspired

to me that situating dance in the sphere of illusion would detach the participants of dance from the reality of our being in the world.

²⁸ She explains that the aesthetic intent of dance, can be transferred from performer to audience through intuition. S. Horton Fraleigh, *Dance and the Lived Body...*, op. cit., p. 67.

²⁹ Ibidem, p. 252. Fraleigh draws on Merleau-Ponty's notion of expression. See about expression in Dance: A. Bresnahan, op. cit., p. 10 and following.

³⁰ S. Horton Fraleigh, *The Spiral Dance...*, op. cit., p. 17.

³¹ S. Horton Fraleigh, *Dance and the Lived Body*, op. cit., p. 8.

³² According to Fraleigh, new physics, relational aesthetics and phenomenology prove it. S. Horton Fraleigh, *Dancing Identity...*, op. cit., p. 10.

³³ Fraleigh refers here to, among others, John Dewey's conception, regarding interactions as introducing changes as well as undergoing changes.

by Eastern philosophy, which was a major influence in the development of improvisational techniques.

At its beginnings CI was seen as a more of a way of life than a dance technique³⁴. It was founded in the 1970s in the USA by Steve Paxton, who exhorted people to “come and see what we are doing and join in”... CI is usually characterized as communication through touch. It involves sharing the body weight with the partner, rolling, giving in to the laws of physics allowing for a dialogue with other people through movement. It is a way of examining how to deal with the weight – giving it and taking and putting it in motion, how to listen to (other bodies) through touch, movement and weight and at the same time it is a form of sharpening perception, bodily sensations of the body³⁵. Is it proof that the body has its own knowledge and intelligence. CI also embodies the way the process of active perception proceeds, where, similarly to Fraleigh’s conception, all the senses, not only the so-called distance ones, are involved. It is definitely a perfect research field for theoreticians examining communication through body.

Contact improvisation is a way to gain embodied/bodily knowledge through raising kinaesthetic awareness, which is confirmed by the participants of jams. As an example I will cite the participants of CI workshops and courses organized in three places (in Bologna and Ferrara in Italy, Sydney in Australia) by the ethnographers doing research on interkinaesthetic knowledge³⁶: “It is a medium of non-verbal interpersonal communication but really deep”³⁷. “I have the feeling that through the body you get to know and learn things in a deeper and lasting manner than through words. Also the concept of intimacy has been redefined for me (...)”. “It’s a dance that allows me to express my movement without filters and judgments”. For me it is, in short, a practice of knowledge and personal transformation”³⁸. The participants’ declarations that in CI through the body they can gain a better and deeper insight into themselves and redefine their own intimacy serve as proof that through movement they acquired knowledge which so far had been beyond their reach.

The organizers of this interdisciplinary project, inspired by phenomenology, draw far-reaching conclusions. They argue that many participants underline that CI develop “attentiveness towards interkinaesthetic awareness and bodily sensations”, due to the fact that it is oriented towards experimentation, which involves becoming aware of ourselves as a self in/through the relation to others. Some claim that CI proves the existence of the embodied collective process of conveying and at the same time shaping the knowledge, which can be verified

34 H. Thomas, *The Body, Dance and Cultural Theory*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York 2003, p. 103.

35 Initially, CI focused on senses and reflexes whereas later on it was transformed into a form of social practice oriented towards examining the relationship between the body and the mind.

36 It was a part of a larger interdisciplinary research project that addresses questions of consciousness and intelligence in action. The originators of the project treated CI workshops as a kind of research material, which could be analyzed based on Geertz’s “thick description” or Csordas’s “somatic attention”. They also employed such concepts as Wacquant’s “carnal sociology” S. Pini, D. J. F. McIlwain, J. Sutton, *Re-tracing the Encounter: Interkinaesthetic Forms of Knowledge in Contact Improvisation*, “Antropologia e teatro. Rivista di studi”, 2016 (7), p. 227, 228.

37 Ibidem, p. 233.

38 Ibidem, p. 235.

by training and developing skills practiced by acting together with others. It is a kind of communication of bodies, which according to Jaida Kim Samudra “pay more attention to his own embodied skills” since “the communications of the body can be verified even when not encoded into language because they work in practice”³⁹. Furthermore, the phenomenologist Elizabeth Behnke maintains that CI teaches its practitioners to give up a self-centred approach in favour of “multiperspectival meeting of vectors in which I directly experience not only my own mobilized momentum, but that of others with whom I am in contact”⁴⁰ (2003, 52). It is possible since CI, thanks to its orientation towards the relation with others, sensitizes the body and sharpens the senses to the context of change and forces an instinctive, instant reaction of the body outside rational thought. For this reason some of the project participants state that CI enables them to interact with other bodies and the environment in a more instinctive, “natural” way and sensitizes them to the embodied knowledge without reaching the level of, as they put it, rational thought⁴¹. That is why the project participants frequently use expressions such as “the absence of a judgmental attitude; a potential transformative power; (...) and a lack of a privileged standpoint”⁴².

Embodiment of “ecological self” in contact improvisation

– Fraleigh’ conception inspirations

This interdisciplinary project led Robert Turner to the conclusion that in the case of CI the body cannot be described by means of dualistic terms such as “consciousness” or “habit”, and words like “bodily” or “reflex” are much more relevant. He claims that such terms define a more fluent dynamic self, open to constant changes and relying on the context of movement. Such a self is unformed, subject to endless transformations, action-oriented, allowing for action “without consciousness’s interference, its cultural blocks, gaps, impositions, and habits”⁴³. To illustrate how such a self works, the creators of project cite the position of cognitive ecology, according to which cognitive processes always take place in a certain context, in the interaction with the broadly understood environment⁴⁴.

Although she takes a different path, Fraleigh reaches similar conclusions... She asserts that dance shows the “fluent sense of self”, “unfixed, temporalized

39 J. K. Samudra, *Memory in Our Body: Thick Participation and the Translation of Kinesthetic Experience*, “American Ethnologist”, 2008, 35 (4), p. 667.

40 E. Behnke, *Contact Improvisation and the Lived World*, “Studia Phaenomenologica” 3, 2003, p. 52.

41 Some even saw CI as evidence of the existence of a pure unmediated experience, i.e. outside cultural filters. It is possible thanks to interactions with other bodies.

42 S. Pini et al., *Re-tracing the Encounter...*, op. cit., p. 236.

43 R. Turner, *Steve Paxton’s “Interior Techniques”: Contact Improvisation and Political Power*, *The Drama Review*, 2010, 54 (3), p. 130-131. Cynthia Bull described it in a similar manner. See: H. Thomas, *The Body, Dance and Cultural Theory...*, op. cit., p. 103.

44 S. Pini et al., *Re-tracing the Encounter...*, op. cit., p. 237.

(human subject) in a fluid state of becoming"⁴⁵. Therefore, she understands the body in terms of constant creation and employs the term of the "ecological self" referring to Ulric Neisser⁴⁶. As she explains, "I utilize the psychological concept of the 'ecological self', the self directly perceived as it moves through, acts upon, and experiences its immediate environment"⁴⁷. In this manner she demonstrates how the knowledge drawn from dance helps to get to know human subjects and the way they function in the world, through their actions in the environment, not unlike in the case of CI. The position of the observer describing the phenomenon of dance has no place here⁴⁸. Instead it is all about actions and interactions taking place in changing conditions when a dancing, and at the same time perceiving, self is shaping itself.

Moreover, CI provides the proof of the contextual as well as situational character of the knowledge gained in practice. Only from the perspective of the participant, the doer, here and now, in the changing context, can it be communicated and gained/shaped, but also constantly verified (or perhaps only modified due to changing circumstances). It can better be described as an incessant process of interaction never aiming at acquiring accumulatively gathered knowledge⁴⁹. This happens even more frequently when the self is taken in ecological terms⁵⁰, as a result of which it becomes merely a temporary configuration in the relationship with the broadly-understood environment⁵¹. (It is also worth noting that the concept of "becoming in dance", which Fraleigh introduced into her conception, gains new interpretations in the context of the ecological self and the artistic creation of the subject, as a strong self expressing itself is here out of the question.) *Deep Ecology* (or so-called *New Ecology*) introduces radical changes in the understanding of a human being and

45 S. Horton Fraleigh, *Dancing Identity...*, op. cit., p. 9. Fraleigh holds that the body is performative. "We 'say' our bodies constantly, incessantly, performatively". She refers to Judith Butler, and her conception of mattering of body. S. Horton Fraleigh, *The Spiral Dance...*, op. cit., p. 16 and following.

46 Quoted in: Ibidem, p. 11.

47 Ibidem.

48 In her conception, Fraleigh asserts that the changes in seeing the bodily involvement of perception require verification of the position of the viewer as an observer. These are the kind of conclusions and problems that the issue of DRJ journal discusses. Franko states, "phenomenological description is under considerable pressure from new concepts of the subject, new theories of cognition (...) that alter the terms of the observer's perception of movement" M. Franko, *Editor's Note...*, op. cit., p. 2011, p. 1. It is worth noting that new technologies additionally undermine the phenomenological emphasis on a corporeal unmediated experience. Franko points out other difficulties which phenomenology has to address: "(...) cognition studies have located the brain rather than the body at the core of aesthetic reception; and innovations in new media and digital performance have destabilized the primacy of the lived body itself in dance performance". Ibidem, p. 2.

49 The question remains whether the type of knowledge gained by people actively practising CI is accessible to everybody. For instance, in the project taking place in Bologna, purposefully both well-trained practitioners and novices were asked to take part, which confirmed that interkinaesthetic knowledge is accessible to everybody. Fraleigh, on the other hand, seems to favour dancers' intuition and employs their observations as a reference point for her own processual metaphysics. Another issue is whether we can talk about the deepened self-awareness of CI practitioners or everybody is capable of reaching a similar level, or whether some develop it better and others worse and so on.

50 For example Harold J. Morovitz states that subject exist "in dispersion". According to Paul Shepard the ego is "relational self". Quoted in: K. Wilkoszewska, *Luc Ferry, Stary jad – lecz proekologiczny, "Sztuka i Filozofia"*, 1996, 12, p. 191.

51 According to Arnold Berleant, "There is no outside (...) person and environment are continuous". A. Berleant, *The Aesthetics of Environment*, Temple University Press, Philadelphia 1992, p. 4.

the environment, with the former rather than constituting a permanent whole is but part of the environment seen as a complex network of relationships and interactions taking place in a given area⁵². That is why improvisation in dance provides a perfect example of what Tim Ingold, an ecological social scientist and anthropologist, refers to as “sentient ecology”, where being of a human involves incessant development based on the corporeal knowledge sensitized to the structure of action in a given context, in specific circumstances⁵³. Improvisation is also frequently claimed to be the embodiment of what ecological scientists of perception, for instance Ingold, regard as “synergy of organism and environment”⁵⁴.

In her later works, Fraleigh, inspired by John Raty’s neuroscience, assumes that the “brain is the embodied ecosystem”⁵⁵ and argues that the common misconception is to maintain that dance should be defined exclusively “in terms of body, rather than mind”⁵⁶. It appears to be a total opposite of a commonly-held belief about how dance should be thought of; in my opinion, however, that it is based on the conviction that there is continuity of the spheres of affective and acting as well as the body and the mind. Hence her conception can be regarded as an expression of a more general tendency characterized more and more frequently in broadly-understood humanities as the return to biology or bringing closer natural sciences and humane studies. The specific nature of ecology cannot be disregarded here, however, as it prefers to draw from new physics rather than biology, assuming that the processes of energy exchange take precedence over material objects. Within *deep ecology*, in particular, the ecosystem is regarded as the ‘field theory’ and processes and interactions seem more real than the elements undergoing these processes and interactions. Thus processual holistic view enables Fraleigh to look even at the world in terms of dance as a process of incessant interaction.

Some conclusions

CI seems to, on the one hand, offer a way to overcome the fundamental problem of phenomenology: how to describe but also, so to speak, convey, communicate (to avoid academic parlance) a lived corporeal experience. It provides proof that it can be achieved through corporeal kinaesthetic communication, in action, below the level of reflective thought. On the other hand, however, the problem of the chasm between what is happening between participants and how to describe it on the level of language is far from being resolved. The

52 B. J. Callicott, *The Metaphysical Implications of Ecology*, “Environmental Ethics”, 1986, 8 (4). According to Aldo Leopold and Paul Shepard „ontology of the object” is not appropriate for description of the environment. Living organisms can be conceived better in the categories of events and processes than in the category of substances. Quoted in: Wilkoszewska, op. cit., p. 190.

53 T. Ingold, *The Perception of the Environment. Essays on Livelihood, Dwelling and Skill*, Routledge, London and New York 2000, p. 24 and following.

54 Ibidem, p. 9.

55 S. Horton Fraleigh, *Dancing Identity...*, op. cit., p. 10.

56 Ibidem, p. 9.

ethnographers' experiments in Australia and Italy illustrate that issue, since the participants, despite developing bodily experiences and kinaesthetic self, still used such terms as awareness, depth or authenticity. What is more, they were convinced that they acted instinctively in harmony with nature. Also the ethnographers, although they employed Geertz's concept of "thick description", problematized the possibility of examining the participants' experiences within theoretical reflection by means of confronting it with the statements made by people taking part in the workshops, the statements made from the first-person perspective⁵⁷.

CI also provides the proof that it cannot be grasped within narrowly-understood aesthetics, which is partly confirmed by the workshop participants, who asserted that apart from being a form of dance it is also "reflective modality to access and foster bodily awareness and self-transformation"⁵⁸. Although it constitutes part of contemporary dance training, it does not embody what Susan Leigh Foster called the "hired body"⁵⁹, and Helen Thomas the "flexible body"⁶⁰, since it does not subject a well-trained body to the aesthetic vision fully controlled by a choreographer⁶¹. Therefore, this interpretation requires the approach which includes various issues such as aesthetics, ethics and epistemology.

It is worth noting that when the participants of the CI workshops claim that they act instinctively, they are more likely than not to mean without taking time to think, so they still see the sphere of thinking and that of acting as separate, thus operating in dualistic categories. Fraleigh, however, proposes quite a different perspective when, referring to Sheets-Johnstone⁶², she assumes that "thinking and moving are not distinct processes – we think as we move and we move as we think"⁶³. The notion of "continuity" well-established in the ecological position by no means allows for separating these processes⁶⁴. I believe that dance proves the indivisibility of not just the spheres of acting and thinking but also sensing and affective. According to Fraleigh "the affective is the aesthetic" and

57 Fraleigh declares that she speaks from phenomenology's first-person perspective but it is problematic in the context of ecological self, which is unfinished, as we see it in CI. For example according to Franko "first-person perspective was accused of placing a unitary subject at the center of all perception and possible description", M. Franko, *Editor's Note...*, op. cit., p. 1.

58 S. Pini, et al., *Re-tracing the Encounter...*, op. cit., p. 238.

59 S. Leigh Foster, *Dancing Bodies*, [in:] J. C. Desmond (ed.), *Meaning in Motion: New Cultural Studies of Dance*, Duke University Press: Durham, London 1997, p. 253-256.

60 H. Thomas, *The Body, Dance and Cultural Theory...*, op. cit., p. 112.

61 Thomas argues that the fact that CI is focused on what is happening between the participants results in its changing the relationship between the performers and the audience. *Ibidem*, p. 103.

62 Sheets-Johnstone believes that "thinking in movement" is "our primary way of making sense of the world" and dance improvisation (irrespective of how it is understood) proves the existence of "kinetic bodily logos". Quoted: J. Parviainen, *Dance Techne: Kinetic Bodily Logos and Thinking in Movement*, "The Nordic Journal of Aesthetics", 2003, 27 (8), p. 162. According to Parviainen it is common to assume that thinking „takes places only via language“, and she holds that we discover thinking in movement in dance improvisation. She also maintains that the commonly-held view linking thinking with language should be abandoned and that improvisation proves that communication existed at least at the pre-language level and that language is postkinetic. *Ibidem*, p. 163, 164.

63 S. Horton Fraleigh, *Dancing Identity...*, op. cit., p. 10.

64 See for example Arnold Berleant's conception of continuity. A. Berleant, *Art and Engagement*, op. cit., p. 46 and following.

it underlines the aesthetic qualities of bodily experience⁶⁵. She states that “The aesthetic as the affective is that which is valorized in consciousness, selected somatically beneath the sway of thought and language, and embodied quality that ‘moves’ us to think about something, to laugh, to dance, (...) etc.”⁶⁶. This enables her to consider dance as both aesthetic phenomenon and a specific kind of knowledge (“dancing is a mode of thought, (...) and being in the world”⁶⁷), which situates her within the trends of contemporary reformed aesthetics returning to *aisthesis* in new re-interpretations, where aesthetic aspects are closely linked with epistemological.

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⁶⁵ S. Horton Fraleigh, *The Spiral Dance...*, op. cit., p. 14-17. She uses the term *affect* in twofold sense: “to influence change”, “to move emotions”. Ibidem, p. 14.

⁶⁶ Ibidem, p. 17.

⁶⁷ S. Horton Fraleigh, *Dancing Identity...*, op. cit., p. 9.

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