

# **THE PLAY OF DANCE**

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## **Abstract**

Gadamer's aesthetics provides us with a different way of looking at art – he has not given any definition of art, but he tried to explain it more closely. According to him, art is play. Even though he has not written about dance, his theory can be easily incorporated in dance aesthetics, and it is helpful for understanding the nature of dance, and more specifically, the nature of Argentine tango. In this paper I argue that Gadamer's account answers some contemporary questions on aesthetics of dance, and it does better justice to aesthetic experience than aesthetic theories grounded in a subject/object dichotomy. Gadamer's account grasps exactly the experience that happens in a tango dancer.

## Chapter 1 - Introduction

Even though it is true that many philosophers have written on dance, still there is not much literature, compared to that of other arts. That is why there are so many questions, and so few answers. Over the course of history, dance has been seen differently in its relation to art – it was considered to be something that does not belong to the highest rungs of civilization; now it is widely accepted as art. Of course, it continues to be difficult to distinguish between non-artistic and artistic movements in dance. But, this difficulty accompanies every art, for it is not clear where the line between art and non-art should be drawn.

History of dance shows that it was, and still is, frequently compared with theater. Dance was often considered as a part of some theatrical play, and as a sort of performance that uses a theatrical method of organization (Sparshott 1982: 5). Today, however, everybody admits that there is a difference in means of expression: dancers do not use words, but only motions to express themselves. Aestheticians admit that dance is an art, and separate from theater. However, dance was for centuries neglected by the theoreticians of art. There are different explanations for the reason of this neglect: one reason could be that Hegel is responsible for this. He held dance to be something that belongs to savages, and philosophers after him have just followed the same line of thought. Another theory claims that dance is nothing more than mere motion. If so, then it could not be regarded as art – a picture of a dancing body is art, but dance itself is not art. There are theoreticians who say that philosophers are responsible for the overlooking of value of dance as art because they are too concerned with the rational, so they do not give any importance to the emotional aspect of life. Also, a possible reason for the neglect,

which is related to its corporeal and emotional nature, could be its call for lust. Among the reasons for not being in a focus of philosophers' attention could also be the fact that dance was for a long time viewed as a sport, not as an art. Whatever the reasons were, today they are overcome. Dance is accepted as art, and it is being more and more discussed among aestheticians.

Being finally recognized as an art, dance became an inspiring topic for discussion among philosophers. Various questions have been raised about it, and it has been interpreted in different ways. In this paper I will raise the most frequent questions on dance and develop one interpretation of this art – that dance is play that, in my opinion, gives the most plausible answers to these questions.

Gadamer was one of the philosophers that spoke of art as play. This way of explaining art is helpful for understanding dance. Gadamer borrowed this notion of play from Kant and Schiller, but gave it a different, non-subjective meaning. His theory is less abstract, he talked of play as of an important experience in our lives and compared that what happens in us while being a part of artistic play to what happens to children during their play. Each play has its sacred seriousness, that only players share. It is not aimed at an audience<sup>1</sup>, but it has representational character; that character does not require spectators, for players are enough for play to exist, but if there is someone who watches it, he should take his part in it, and play along. To play means to be lost in that play. Art is that kind of play. It has numerous interpretations, and there is not a single right interpretation. Every new right interpretation is welcome, because it enriches the play. When spectators interpret a dance,

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<sup>1</sup> By this I mean that no play (children's play, sport, dance, etc) is inherently aimed at an audience. It is in its (play's) nature to reveal another world to those who play. It is the human nature, not the nature of play, that asks for attention, spectators, applause... In that sense, people easily make spectacles from everything, but it does not mean that the thing was meant to be a spectacle. On this Gadamer says: "not even those games (e.g. sports) that are played before spectators are aimed at them. Indeed, contests are in danger of losing their real play character precisely by becoming shows" (2006: 108 – 109).

they “play along”, they become lost, and in return they gain an entire new experience, a new world, truth and a new way of self-understanding.

Some authors have already connected this notion of play with dance – Best compares dance with a chess game; Grondin talks of dance as the most natural response to music, and we should let ourselves be moved by it, and play along. My thesis is that it is helpful to talk of dance as play, in the way that Gadamer did. My dancing experience, enriched in conversations with some of the best tango dancers in my country and in the world, supports Gadamer’s claim that the purpose of play (in this case, dance) is fulfilled when players lose themselves in it. Each dance has its seriousness, especially when it is a result of years of practice. Every movement, taken for itself, but also as a part of the whole, bears some meaning. That meaning waits to be interpreted.

## Chapter 2 – Dance and aesthetics

### 2.1 *History of dance aesthetics*

Although Graham McFee, a contemporary aesthetician and expert on dance, says that dance is a ‘Jenny-come-lately’ to the aesthetic feast trying to find its own elbow room (2005: 683), this is not quite true. There have been many authors in the history of philosophy that have written on dance. Plato in *Laws* held it to be an educational device. For Plato, one who does not dance is uneducated and unrefined. The question of the role of dance in education is still current. Aristotle in *Poetics* wrote that dance steps can imitate emotion, character or/and action, Lucian (Lucian of Samosata, 2<sup>nd</sup> Century A.D.) in his work *On dance* (around 160 A.D.) follows the mimetic tradition in which all that is expressed is only mood or generalized purpose. Plotinus and Judeo-Christian theologies of the Middle Ages follow the line given in Plato’s *Laws*: dance is a metaphor for the cosmic order. Renaissance authors, concerned mainly with ballet, emphasized even more this notion of the cosmic order in the role of dance. (Sparshott 1993: 227-228)

Eighteenth Century aesthetics can be divided into the early and the late period. Philosophers of the early period do not discuss dance. In the late period the thesis that was advanced was that art and language are the results of highly intelligent beings, and could only flourish among humans thanks to the significance they were able to give to the bodily movements. During the nineteenth century emphasis was placed on two things: the rise of the proletariat, and the value of movement seen as being mechanical. “In this light, dance can be seen not as enhancing and celebrating social graces, but as exploiting the movement potential of bodies whose beauty comes from health and efficiency” (Sparshott

1993: 228). That is why people of this period were impressed by the perfectly trained movements of ballet – it shares an accuracy of a mechanism. But, by the end of this century, Isadora Duncan brought innovations to dance – she promoted freedom, democracy, nature and feminism. As a result of this “struggle” between ballet and free movements of Isadora Duncan we have “the resolution of human body into a system of pure energy” (Sparshott 1993: 228). Today, the place of debates of contemporary issues of dance aesthetics is the United States<sup>2</sup>.

People who also wrote on dance are Saint Augustine, John Locke, the Earl of Shaftesbury, Friedrich Nietzsche, Herbert Spencer, Raymond Bayer, Paul Valery, Mikel Dufrenne, Nelson Goodman, etc. However, even though various authors have written on the topic of dance as art and aesthetics of dance, literature is not really abundant. On the contrary.

There are different explanations of a lack of dance literature. After Hegel, it was easy to ignore dance in the fields of art and aesthetics, because he has neglected the role of dance in his system. Dance was seen (following Hegel) as something that belongs to savages and primitive humans whose expressions were not civilized. In some more recent works (of Merce Cunningham, for example) we can find a return to an old theory in which emphasis is placed on the motion – dance is nothing more than mere motion, just as music is nothing more than the sound. According to this theory, “Carpeaux’s sculpture of a dance may be art, and one might think that a real dance, as it were the same thing in animation, could be art too; but it could not, because the dancer as dancer could express no idea higher than the personality and full humanity his life should already more fully and perfectly show” (Sparshott 1982: 6). Jean-George Noverre was one that did not agree with this – he held that dance is more than just a movement, more than just a sequence of steps; it is an

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<sup>2</sup> More on this in 2.2



expression of a motivation of dancer(s).

David Michael Levin claims that philosophers have neglected dance because they represent official culture and follow its rules and propositions, they defend patriarchal life style, argue for discipline and form, they are on the side of “rational”, of the anti-life. On the other hand dance is corporeal, bodily oriented and life-promoting, it supports the “emotional” side, the side of life (Levin 1983: 85-94).

Is this so? Is this why dance has deserved philosophical neglect? Could it, after all, be that “philosophical neglect of dance is not so much a tendency of writers to ignore that art as a tendency of philosophical readers to ignore what has been written” (Sparshott 1982: 5)? Dance is usually associated with theater: it is either part of some performance, or uses its method of organization. “(The dancer) in himself embodies the condition of pure theatricality, and cannot escape its stigma. But what is that stigma? It is social and moral in nature: association with theater as such has traditionally been taken as a sign of immorality and disreputability” (1982: 5). This stigma is the result of the influence of Puritanism, even though it could also be found earlier. Demosthenes, Lucian, Sir John Davies and others have mentioned this stigma, either to affirm it, or to defend dance from it. Puritans objected to dance usually on political, religious or social grounds. They argued that dance promotes lasciviousness and draws people’s attention away from work and worship. Because of all these attacks on it, once when dance was (finally) a socially acceptable form, it was regarded more as a recreation than as an art. We must keep in mind that dance was neglected by philosophers, not as an art, but as something that had the status of an amusing thing or a thing that serves for recreation and entertainment. Philosophers had been interested in arts if those arts could somehow be related to some metaphysical principle or some that concerns mankind in general. There has been no place for the art of dance in such a philosophical environment.

## **2.2      *Dance today: questions, debates, answers***

The consequence of the neglect of dance as art was that in the USA dance classes used to be held in schools as a part of physical education programs. Lately, they are thought to be more close to the theatrical world. The debate about the place of dance (i.e. is it a sport or a theatrical art?) raised the debate about the essence of dance, and the role of motions in it on one hand, and the audience on the other. Sparshott says: "One obvious consideration is that dance as a fine art is an art of the theater, and is regularly associated with other theater arts: either it exists in symbiosis with them as an element in complex performances, or it at least shares their physical settings and methods of organization. And dance shares with theater its lack of theoretical esteem" (1982: 6). A theatrical space is a compound of two elements: the performers and the audience. Each of these two occupies its own space, but they also share some part of the space in which they interact. This is an interesting remark, for it is important for every representational art. This space they share, the space in-between is where dialogue between dancer and audience takes place, and in argentine tango it plays a great role. I will return later in the text to this question.

Not less significant is the question of notation; it is not easy to find and use adequate symbols that represent dance movements; dance notation should show both how bodies move and how these movements are organized. Modern studio dance attempts to develop formalized techniques of movements and positions for the basis of dance form. Nelson Goodman, a contemporary philosopher, held that this is an important question. Dance, as well as music, should have its own notational system. The identity of certain dances is preserved thanks to tradition, but the role of notation should not be neglected, because it

could also help in preserving its identity as artwork, which has already happened in music.

There are many definitions of, or rather attempts to define dance. The contemporary French encyclopedia says that dance is a compound of ordered movements of the body, leaps and measured steps. Gautier held it to be nothing more than the art of displaying beautiful shapes in graceful positions and to develop from them lines agreeable to the eye; to Zorn: it involves the expression of pleasure or other sentiment by means of prescribed movement; (Cohen 1983: pp 13-14). Majority of definitions (and the three that I have chosen as well) explain dance by movement. All of them put most emphasis on the corporeal nature of dance. It is an absolute fact that we see the body in motion when we watch dance. This fact entails many questions, such as is the body all that matters? Does body send us some message? Probably the biggest question is what makes one movement a dance movement? Merce Cunningham, an American dancer and choreographer, was the one who wanted to explore what makes movement dance movement. Is it its character, its context, the attitude of its performer or its spectator, or all or none of these? In my opinion, one should approach a dance movement from more than one aspect: one is its step, another is the position of the dancer, and another is the rhythm that the step follows (the latter two are usually called by one name – interconnection between partners). The issue will be discussed further in the text (4.1) in more detail.

Sparshott says, “However dance is defined, much of it seems to be organized movement of human bodies undertaken for its own interest” (1993: 230). What is that interest? Existential phenomenology says that philosophy should be concerned with the question of subjective consciousness and objective world – how the former one enters into and organizes the latter one. Is it by being embodied in it? If so, then “different ways of moving correspond to and symbolize different ways of relating to the world. So the most fundamental strata of dance movement might be those that symbolize (or stand in some

other meaningful relation to) ways of being could be being-in-the-world" (1993: 230). One of the authors that held this theory was Sheets-Johnstone in her book *The Phenomenology of Dance*. However, this way of looking at dance was neither popular nor successful, either for the reason of the unpopular language it used, or because phenomenology was never properly grounded among aestheticians. There is also a suggestion that this approach in aesthetics was never accepted because philosophers tended to have a general theory of the place of subject in the objective world, that would include all human behavior and experience, not only aesthetical.

Recently some questions of feminism and cultural identity connected dance with issues that are more popular. The situation with dance is unusual when it comes to gender issue. Namely, after Isadora Duncan, in this sphere of human activity women had primacy. It is more frequent to find a woman who teaches dance and practice it than a man. Of course, one could argue that they worked in institutions which were always dominated and controlled by men, and that their position as dominant in the sphere of dance is disputable. The question of a certain community or nation that is identified through dance is also discussed. Aestheticians admit that dances with the most vitality are those of African or Hispano origin. Therefore, there is something in their rhythms that is specific to these cultural communities. In this context, I need to mention that the debate over the origin of tango caused serious international troubles between Argentina and Uruguay, because both nations identified with it.

Some sociologists thought it to be "the vertical expression of a horizontal idea" (Alderson 1989: 268). This definition contains strong implication that dance and lust are in an unbreakable relationship. Debates have been raised on this issue. What is the relation between sexuality and dance? What can we say about the relationship between gender and dance? Does dance promote lasciviousness between sexes? (Sparshott 1982: 6)

Judith Lynne Hanna is a famous contemporary author who has written on issues of dance and sexuality. She has provided us with an interesting theory about argentine tango and its sexual male – female relationship. She compares this dance with ‘game’ that occurs between “pimp and whores” (1988: 164). According to her, sexual relation between man and woman is central to tango. Man is dominant and powerful here, and woman is submissive. She is not the only one who emphasizes this. Many people accuse tango of being a politically incorrect dance, for man is active, while woman is passive – she only follows. Other dances have their expected path; tango movements are unpredictable. Dance is completely left to improvisation of a male partner. Macho cult that has risen through tango is, according to Hanna, a result of the unsatisfied immigrant man who had experienced isolation and economic failure, so had to prove his value somehow. Sexual dominance was the way to do it. I do not agree with her. Later on I will give some historical reasons for closeness of tango and brothels (2.2.1), and in chapter 4 I will explain why I hold this theory of the submissive and exploited woman position in tango to be wrong.

There is an agreement among aestheticians that dance is the most problematically unstable of all “art objects” – because no performances are ever the same and a lot depends on the performer’s mood. What if a dancer was left by her boyfriend, just before the performance? Her performance would be different from what she has done last time, when she just met her (now former) boyfriend. This emphasizes the similarity, or even the sameness of origin of dance and theater. For, it is true that theater is also ‘unstable’. However, if the sameness is either a necessary or sufficient condition, or both, for the “stability” of art, then there is an easily achievable solution: one can record dance. Also, to the second objection there is a reply that in all arts a lot of reception depends on the spectator’s inner states of mind. For instance, we can imagine that a spectator was left by her boyfriend. Certainly, her experience of the performance would be different from a

previous time she watched the same dance, and I see those things that were objected to as really positive, for they show the role of creativity in representational arts.

There is, thanks to diversity of each play and diversity of emotions both in the dancer and the audience, an indefinite possibility of interpretation. “The task of aesthetics is not necessarily to establish rules or principles of interpretation, nor to undermine them; it is rather to show what ways of interpreting and evaluating are possible and how they fit together” (Sparshott 1993: 234). Here I want to show one possible interpretation of dance, which gives answers to some of the above raised questions – Gadamer’s thesis that art is play could be easily presented as ‘dance is play’, not in form of a definition of dance, but as one way of explaining (or, as Sparshott said, interpretation of) the nature of dance.

Gadamer's theory provides us with the answers to some of the above-mentioned questions. He talks about the rules in play and freedom inside them, which help us understand the importance of creativity in dance. He explains the role of the audience; his theory is helpful in explaining the question whether the movement bears all the meaning in the dance, or only the dance as a whole means something; even some chauvinistic, gender insulting issues of dance could be avoided if we accept Gadamer's theory. By this, I mean that both partners need to be equally lost in the play they share. If one of the partners is neglected in any sense – either as being regarded as less important or as a mere sexual object – play will not fulfill its purpose.

### **2.2.1     *Interlude: The place of tango in the history of dance***

Before turning to Gadamer’s theory in depth, it would be worthwhile to look briefly at the place of Argentine tango in the history of dance, since I will be discussing tango in

particular in a later section of this paper. As a dance, it shares all the above mentioned (2.2) problems, some with more emphasis, some with less, but it also has its own historical development and destiny. It was born as instrumental music exclusively created for dancing to it. According to one theory, tango is a dance that originated in the Río de la Plata, a region of Argentina and Uruguay; according to the other theory, it was born in Buenos Aires. But, all agree that it was created in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, around 1880. This is a young dance, but, it faced the same problems as other older dances. Its status was even more endangered, since it grew in the society of people with African origin and immigrant harbor workers, so it could not be accepted by the respected people of that time.

Explaining the history of tango and its problems, Marta Savigliano emphasizes the sinful character of this dance, which is even now frequently, and I must add, wrongly associated with some erotic content. "The worldwide popularity of the tango has been associated with scandal: the public display of passion performed by a heterosexual couple, the symbol of which is a tight embrace and suggestive, intricate footwork. As a powerful representation of male/female courtship, stressing the tension involved in the process of seduction, the tango performance has gone through successive adjustments as it has been adopted and legitimized by the upper classes and by western hegemonic cultures" (1995: 11). Its connection with brothels of Buenos Aires is a natural consequence of the official prohibition of this dance. After it was forbidden for its stimulation to lust, the dance with its dancers had moved from streets to obscure places such as brothels (Hugo Llamas and Enrique Binda). It is interesting that the tight embrace of tango reminded people of lust, and not of immigrants' longing for home. It is a historical fact that men, in the lack of female partners, danced with each other, with no sexual desire. What they wanted is to stay together, in their community, sharing the spirit of nostalgia. "Tango was "polished" and

accepted by the wealthy and powerful as it made its way from the slums and brothels of South American harbors to the cabarets and ballrooms of Paris, London, and New York. By the 1920s it had become clear that the sin of tango was related to its racial/class origins rather than to its erotic content. When appropriated by “high society”, especially that of Europe, dancing the scandalous tango became an enjoyable, spicy entertainment. [...] Tango emerged as a symbolic expression and ended up as a sign of status” (1995: 12). However, debates about the real reason for its prohibition are still present among historians.

Its passionate nature had opened the debate about genders in tango. Is it really only “the vertical expression of a horizontal idea” (Alderson 1989: 268) or it is more profound dance? Is a woman only the object of a man’s desire, or an equal partner, sharing the nostalgia and sadness of music? Marta Savigliano talks a lot about this issue in her book, giving various examples of texts of tango songs, supporting both sides. It seems that this is a never-ending debate. However, I am more prone to ignore this chauvinistic side of tango, especially when it is grounded in the analysis of the texts, since tango was created as an instrumental music, and texts were added afterwards. Since 2009 Argentine tango is under the protection of UNESCO as “intangible cultural heritage” (Entry in The Sydney Morning Herald).



## Chapter 3 - Gadamer's theory of art as play

### 3.1 *Gadamer on art*

In his theory of art, Gadamer explicitly goes against the view which claims that “beyond pure aesthetic experience lies pure perception”. He wants to show that mere perception is never pure – in a sense that it always contains meaning. He says that we always see relationships between perceived entity and what that entity actually is – we recognize the white phenomenon that we see and to which we prescribe aesthetic value is more than just white phenomenon: it is a man. “Thus, our perception is never a simple reflection to what is given to the senses” (Gadamer 2006: 78). Perception is never mere mirroring of an external object – it always includes understanding of something as something.

Gadamer admits existence of discontinuity between art and everyday life. Hermeneutics should make continuity out of it. For him, hermeneutics “is not the reconstruction of artistic intention which forms the object of his enquiry, but the question of what forms the immediacy of an artwork's claim” (Davey, entry in Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy). The work of art is an object of hermeneutical investigation because it says something to us. We must interpret the artwork, and hermeneutics is required wherever there is an interpretation.

It is obvious that Gadamer attacks aesthetic purism. He wants to show that there is no such thing as pure art entirely free of interpretation. Therefore, he is offering different aesthetic theory. Analyzing Gadamer's artistic theory, Weinsheimer says that Gadamer ascribes to artistic works characteristic to “invite us to interpret them appropriately” (1985:

96). Of course, this issue of proper interpretation implies possibility of improper interpretations, i.e. raises a question of the multiplicity of interpretations. Function of interpretation is important for Gadamer, for he held it should help us transcend the aesthetic dimension. Gadamer thought that Kant's influence on aesthetic theory was such that it had alienated it from the actual experience of art and that he (Kant) is also responsible for the subjectivization of aesthetics, because his notion of free play of imagination and understanding implies "a subjective relationship" (2006: 38). This free play is something that happens inside the subject, in his mind. Thanks to Kant, "the response to art had become abstracted and 'aestheticised' while aesthetic judgment had become purely a matter of taste, and so of subjective response" (Malpas, entry in Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy). When attacking Kant's aesthetics, Gadamer admits that Kant says we should "abstract from all subjective, private conditions such as attractiveness and emotion" (2006: 38). What he attacks is something that he calls subjective principle according to which in taste, nothing is known of the objects that we consider to be beautiful. All that is said is that there is a feeling of pleasure connected a priori with a beautiful object in the subjective consciousness. This principle does not say anything about one's knowledge of the object; actually this principle omits the mention of knowledge (2006: 38). Gadamer's aim is to show that the subject/object dichotomy is useless because it does not explain anything. This dichotomy suggests that truth is to be found in subjectivity. According to Gadamer, this is not so. This is what should be overcome with the help of interpretation. Experience of art is not a mere aesthetic experience; for Gadamer it is a way of understanding ourselves. This self-understanding "opens itself to a hitherto concealed experience that transcends thinking from the position of subjectivity, an experience that Heidegger calls *being*" (2006: 86).

His theory was largely influenced by Heidegger's view on art. In 1930s Heidegger

gave three lectures on *The Origin of the Work of Art*. There he argues that the essence of an artistic piece is truth, i.e. disclosure. Following this line of thought, Gadamer also emphasized the role of truth in art. It is important to be aware of the fact that accepting the truth in the scientific field should be followed by understanding. If we want to know what that truth is, Gadamer claims, it is helpful to ask a question of truth in art, because precisely this is where truth includes understanding, “and thus itself represents a hermeneutical phenomenon [...] Understanding belongs to the encounter with the work of art itself, and so this belonging can be illuminated only on the basis of the *mode of being of the artwork itself*” (2006: 87). This means that, when we interpret art, we are aware of its variety and multiplicity, but we do not try to transcend this variety. And that fact of the impossibility of going beyond art shows that truth is in art. “We do not expect the truth to be found somewhere else but precisely there, in the works themselves and in their inseparable plurality” (1985: 99).

Another objection that Gadamer raised against Kant’s aesthetic theory is the claim that it belongs to ‘scientific aesthetics’. By this Gadamer understands every theory that denies that truth is in art. Kant, according to Gadamer, answered the question what can I know? i.e. placed the truth into the sphere of science before he had even asked a question of art and beautiful. Whether art gives us truth or not is a disputable question. People are prone to deny that the place of truth is in art, and especially scientists deny that idea. They usually claim that the purpose of art is to give us some pleasure, and truth should be left to science. However, Gadamer did not even question this; he stated, admitted that truth belongs to art. We certainly gather some new information about the world through literature. Also, paintings and sculptures have already provided us with some precious information about history, development of the world, culture and habits of ancient people. However, it is wrong to think that they bare the truth that is concerned only with the past–

Picasso's *Guernica* reveals significant truth about universal values; but also about war, human evil, suffering etc. Connection of truth and dance (or music) is less obvious. I think that when dancers say dance gives them the truth, or make them more close to the truth<sup>3</sup>, they do not talk about propositional truth. What they have in mind is an insight into experience, both subjective and some kind of 'universal experience'. By this 'universal', I understand the experience that all passionate and dedicated dancers share – the experience of harmony that each dance gives.

According to Gadamer, once we have recognized that the place of truth is in art, we made the first step in de-subjectivization of aesthetics. The next step requires us to stop thinking of truth as an act, achievement or something that belongs to consciousness or understanding, because that way of thinking implies subjectivity. We must understand an experience of art as an experience whose most important characteristic is that it changes those who experience it. An experience of art is a mode of self-understanding. However, there are some questions that are naturally raised to this explanation: What is art, or maybe, what should it be, if it is to change the self-understanding of those who experience it? What kind of being is the one who changes in this process of experience? What is that truth that is not in a possession of those who experience some artwork, but change them? Answering these questions serve to help us understand what is the truth that we find in art. Art experience is the experience of truth, but it is a misunderstanding to say that that experience is something we have, acquire or come to possess. No, Gadamer claims, we, as subjects, are not in a possession of the truth of art, nor do we have control over it. On the contrary, we must understand that subject belongs to the artistic truth; it is an event of truth that subjects are caught up in (1985: 99).

But, how can we understand art if not as an object (artwork) opposed, or confronted

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<sup>3</sup> Darko Dožić explicitly says this (see 4.2).

with a subject? How else is art to be explained if not by a polarized subject/object world? One can choose to abandon the concept of subjectivity as a fundamental ontological category in art (whether we consider the subjectivity of the creator, a performer or an audience member). One can also give up the idea of artwork as an object that is distinct from and against any subject whatsoever. But in doing so, it may look like he has lost any possibility to analyze art and aesthetic experience. This is not true. Gadamer provides us with a different concept<sup>4</sup>, the concept of art as play. His theory of art does better justice to artistic experience.

### 3.1.1 Art as play

At the time Gadamer wrote, the idea of connecting concepts of play and art was not something new. Kant and Schiller had already published their theories of art that included the concept of play. Even though I will concentrate only on Gadamer's work it is important to say that he was inspired by the other two philosophers, and used their terminology in his work. Actually, he grounded his aesthetics on the critique of Kant and Schiller. The main objection against them was that for them play is a state of mind, a free play of cognitive faculties, and therefore belongs to the subject. Play, as an experience of art, according to Gadamer, is not a state of mind, and it is wrong to place it in one's (either in creator's or spectator's) mind. Play is the mode of being of the work of art. It is an impersonal entity. We can talk about play of colors by which we certainly do not mean that colors play with each other. We should not understand play as something that a person does. This kind of play deletes the subject/object division of an artistic experience. Players belong to the play, not vice versa. If play is to fulfill its purpose, the player must lose himself in the play; its

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<sup>4</sup> Different from aesthetics seen through subject/object dichotomy.

structure “absorbs the player into itself, and thus frees him from the burden of taking the initiative, which constitutes the actual strain of existence. This is also seen in the spontaneous tendency of repetition that emerges in the player and in the constant self-renewal of play”. That is the “primacy of play over the player” (*Truth and Method*, p. 105).

How are we supposed to understand that the player must lose himself in the play? One could think that what Gadamer wants to say is that an object takes over where the subject leaves. But, once again, Gadamer wants to avoid speaking in subject/object terms. What he wants to say here is that the subject loses himself exactly when he stops treating game as an object. When the subject realizes that the play is something he “joins, gets caught up in, and, finally belongs to” (1985: 103), the play fulfills its purpose – the subject is lost in it. The game is not an object, for instance a Monopoly is not what we find in the box, nor is it merely a list of rules. In the same sense, poetry is not merely what is printed in a book. The game exists only when it is played. However, Gadamer does not ignore the role that rules have in games. In his essay *The Play of Art* Gadamer says it is the “characteristic of human play to include binding rules” (2006: 124). We (players = both those who perform and watch) cannot change the game rules during the game (maybe it would be easier to play football without a goalkeeper, but we do not do that). We play inside those rules. In Weinsheimer’s words, “when an artwork plays, this is not free play: to play is to sacrifice freedom and accept limits. These limits, however, are not something that we would want to surpass even if we could. [...] Being limited, being played, is a condition of playing at all” (1985: 104). But, even though game does not allow full freedom to its players, it is also true that it does not determine the way the game is being played. The game is never played twice identically. That is so because within these borders we have freedom of movement back and fro. Thanks to this limited freedom inside the borders of rules, game keeps being unpredictable.

Gadamer says that we try to define the concept of play by determining its relation with seriousness. This is a “special relation” (*Truth and Method*, p. 102). Gadamer holds that when we play we are seriously in it; we are present in that play with “sacred seriousness”. His position on this is that only those who do not play are not serious about play, and I completely agree with him. “Seriousness is not something that calls us away from play; rather, seriousness in playing is necessary to make the play wholly play. Someone who doesn’t take the game seriously is a spoilsport” (*Truth and Method*, p.103). The reason for his not taking the game seriously is precisely the fact he is not playing. Analyzing Gadamer’s notion of seriousness, Grondin says that the experience of an artwork is not an experience of someone observing the play with sovereignty from outside (as Schiller held), but the experience of being drawn into that play. The contrary of play is not seriousness, since the play has its “sacred seriousness”, but not taking part in play (2001: 44)

To understand the role of change that one experiences while being exposed to art, it is important to explain what Gadamer means by *transformation into structure*. It is the “change, in which human play comes to its true consummation in being art”. Structure is the translation of the German term *Gebilde* (the root of this word is German noun Bild, which means picture). This means that reality comes authentically to its true self-presentation in the picture, that imitation is not merely a copy, but knowledge of the essence (2006: 114). Change refers to what happens in a person who experiences the work of art. This transformation entails a ceasing of existence. We must differentiate between alteration, which is merely the change of quality, i.e. of an accident of substance and transformation. “Transformation means that something is suddenly and as a whole something else, that this other transformed thing that it has become is its true being, in comparison which its earlier being is nil” (2006: 111). But, when something ceased to exist, something else is created. And that what exists now, “what represents itself in the play of

art, is the lasting and true” (2006: 111). The play is, at least in principle, repeatable, and that is what makes it permanent. What no longer exists in the play is the player himself. No one asks of the identity of the player anymore, but of what is represented. This is closely concerned with the above mentioned question of the relation between persons and characters. Personality of the actor disappears, and what is left is the character he plays and what that character represents and what that character means to the audience.

The characteristic of human play is that it plays something. “That means that the structure of movement to which it submits has a definite quality which the player ‘chooses” (2006: 107). First choice he makes is that he wants to play. After that, he chooses to play one game over another. The game requires a playing field suitable to it. Every game sets a task for the players. That task makes our own aims become the aims of the game. For example, our aim might be winning, but, this also serves to the game. However, solving it is not the purpose of the game, but shaping and ordering the movement of the game itself (p. 107). The aim of the game is to be played, and when we play with the aim to win, we serve a game in a sense that we do exactly what play asks us to do - we play. One plays within the frame of his own possibilities, i.e. the more creative he is, the more interesting the shape will be, and, consequently, the more interesting the game becomes.

However, to play something also includes representing it. Representation has two different meanings: representation of and representation for. Performance is what brings the play into existence. Presentation is the most important aspect of art and it implies the spectator's existence. All presentation is the representation to someone. Showing it to the audience does not imply the openness of the play-world in a literal sense; rather, that openness toward the spectator is the part of the closeness of the play. “Play is essentially open – it allows the players to keep changing while the play is still the same play” (Weinsheimer 1985: 108). In that case, the spectator himself becomes the player. I would



say that this also involves great creative power – for every spectator has a different experience while being a part of that play. One could interpret this by saying that what Gadamer wants to show is that the essence of the play is in the consciousness of the audience. This is not true. Gadamer explicitly says that games “are not aimed at an audience. Children play for themselves, even when they represent. And not even those games (e.g. sports) that are played before spectators are aimed at them. Indeed, contests are in danger of losing their real play character precisely by becoming shows” (2006: 108 – 109). Play takes place “in between”. It absorbs players and fills them with its spirit. This, of course, does not mean that any of the players are disabled to feel the meaning of the play. The fact that it is played for someone just proves that the play bears the meaning within itself. The essential identity of an artistic piece depends upon its reproduction. “[...] the work of art must constantly be reconstructed as a creation”<sup>5</sup> (*The play of art*, p.126). This does not mean that good music would be less good if there were only performers and no audience, because there would be players that would keep play going.

Characteristic of artistic works, tightly connected with their representational nature, is that they call for interpretation. When we go to the theater we see interpretation of some play. There is no way that we could go to the theater and watch a play without interpretation, for it is interpretation that brings play into existence (1985: 110). Of course, it is clear that there must be various interpretations of a single artwork. One could think that this means that only one could be right. But, Gadamer says that “it is not at all a question of a mere subjective variety of conceptions, but of the work’s own possibilities of being that emerge as the work explicates itself, as it were, in the variety of its aspects” (2006: 117). This means that the being of the artwork is to be interpreted, and therefore different kinds

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<sup>5</sup> It is clear that creation plays an important role in Gadamer’s account of art. However, nothing precise is said about it, and I think it is because, by the time he wrote, the concept of creativity has already been deeply implemented in understanding of art, so it was not necessary to explain it.

of interpretations are only different ways of being of that work. “The work is the multiple possibilities of its interpretation. It is open to interpretation” (1985: 111). Gadamer wants to say that there is no criterion of truth. The truthfulness of an interpretation is a matter of taste. That is why interpretations do not fall under categorizations of right and wrong. There is no single right interpretation; there are many right interpretations. Of course, there are many wrong ones, too. To explain this, it is helpful to compare it with a drawing of a chair. One chair can be represented in a pictorial manner from a number of perspectives, none of which could be exclusively called right, and all of which are legitimate. Not a single one of them, however, makes the chair look like a pretzel, which makes a drawing that would do so false. Gadamer, in the same manner, holds there are some wrong interpretations, but he establishes no criterion that should decide the issue. One could say that this is too subjective of a standpoint for someone who tries to refute subjectivity in aesthetics. But, Gadamer answers that interpretation is part of the play – when we interpret a work of art, we are being interpreted, and we belong to the life of that artwork. The interpreter is also to be lost in the play. In his essay *The Play of Art* he says that “the mere on-looker who indulges in aesthetic or cultural enjoyment from a safe distance, whether in the theater, the concert hall, or the seclusion of solitary reading, simply does not exist. Such a person misunderstands himself.” (1991: 129-130).

One could criticize Gadamer’s aesthetics by claiming that the play is a broader concept than art and there are many more things that we call play, which are not art (Monopoly, for instance). It is true. But the statement: ‘Art is a play’ is not the answer to the question what is x, in the sense that it provides necessary and sufficient conditions to call something ‘art’. We do not find anything wrong with the statement ‘car is a mean of transportation’ just because a plane and a ship are means of transportation too. We do not define the term by placing it into some set; I would rather say that, using that way of talking

of some entity, we describe it more closely. We try to find some specific characteristic of it.

There must be something essentially different between Monopoly and painting, for example, and they both participate in the 'play'. I think that what is the most important characteristic of one artistic piece is that it becomes permanent. Its creator dies, but what he made does not cease to exist with his death. After being created, a work of art lives its own life, independently of the one who created it. That is what is essential and specific to this kind of play.

## Chapter 4 – Play and dance

### 4.1 *Dance understood as play*

Jean Grondin was the one that talked of Gadamer's view on aesthetics in more narrow sense – he talked of the role of play in festivals and rituals, and there he tackled the relation of play and dance. He claimed that it is not possible to grasp conceptually the play of art. What we can do is to play along, to participate and to take part in the play “to the extent that we allow ourselves to be moved by its magic” (2001: 45). When we hear music, we instinctively start singing and dancing. Grondin developed this idea and said that “the most authentic mode of execution for music is, therefore, to dance along. [...] Gadamer's thesis concerning the concept of play is that this going along with is not external to the work, but belongs to its statement: it is “art” only if there is this addressing” (2001:45). This “playing along with” is what movement of the play requires (Gadamer 1991: 23).

Weinsheimer thinks that Gadamer, even though he had never written on dance, would have said that we cannot know the dancers from the dance. I agree with him, for Gadamer's entire theory is about non-personal, non-subjective account of art. However, “also dance comes to be only through the dancers” (1985: 103). This is not paradoxical, as might seem at first. Dance, as every play, exists when it is played; dance is a dancing of that dance. Art exists only if someone is experiencing it – in that sense, if there is no dancer, there can be no dance.

I have already said (3.1.1) that Gadamer held that if play is to fulfill its purpose, the player must lose himself in the play. Similar idea of play and being lost in it could be found

in Marta Savigliano's book *Tango and the Political Economy of Passion*: she said for Argentine tango that it "is a *game*<sup>6</sup> of minds, or, to be more precise, of bodies pushing mind boundaries..."(1995: 157). In the same book, she gives the analysis of a picture *Negros milongueando 1* by Fernando Guilbert: "These dancers are possessed, out of their minds and too much into their bodies..." (1995: 34). Term "possessed" here has the same meaning as "lost" in Gadamer's aesthetics. Dancers are possessed, i.e. lost in the play of their bodies. One of the purposes of this analysis is to show the bad consequence of tango's primitive roots – it is supposed to remind those who look at it of strong primitive instincts that are untamable in people of African origin. However, according to those who dance tango, the element of possession is one of the essential elements of the dance, only it is not merely the possession of the bodies they refer to, but the possession of their spirits.

Play is naturally associated with creativity<sup>7</sup>. Even though 'creativity' is a difficult (or, rather, impossible) concept to define, it is of great importance in art. That is clear from the fact that, once we have realized we have not seen the original but a copy of an artwork, we feel deceived. There are people that have perfected the technique of a famous painter to the extent that even experts have difficulties in saying whether their work is an original or just a copy. However, we do not admire the work of someone who copies Rembrandt in the same way we admire Rembrandt's work. To create implies being original. However, this does not mean that that we will admire something only because it is new. To call a novel, painting or a poem an artwork, it needs something more. We must hold that novelty and difference that it brings valuable.

The concept of creativity is tightly connected with freedom. Art, as understood by the

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<sup>6</sup> My emphasis

<sup>7</sup> How close these two can be connected is obvious from Kim Lasky's definition of creativity as "the inner freedom to play to a purpose" (*Purposeful play: what we might mean by subjectivity*, p. 1).

Ancient Greeks, did not imply any kind of freedom, but subordination to the rules and laws. In such an account of art, the concept of creativity was not desirable. Art was considered to be one of the skills, and for skills, one needs to be familiar only with the rules and with ways of applying them. It was not before the Renaissance that people started applying term 'creativity' to art. In the 19th century the term creator was used as a synonym for artist.

Kant used the term genius only when he referred to art. Genius is guided by spirit (Geist), and his originality (creativity) is productive only in an artistic field of human activity. According to Kant, there is no role of genius in scientific, technological, political, or any other aspect of human practice. Scientists possess great minds, but what they discovered could have also been learned. What Newton wrote in his book can be learned; but one cannot learn how to write a poem, no matter how good were all the instructions he got for writing poetry. Collingwood also wrote on creativity. According to his theory, words (to a poet, tones to a composer) "occur" to an artist. He begins with this, and then, moved by creative power, makes an artwork, without clear insight to what it will turn out to be at the end. Dewey was also a proponent of this theory. Davor Džalto, a contemporary Serbian thinker, holds creativity to be the basic feature on an artwork's coming into being. For him, the entire idea of art is grounded in finding a way to express creativity, which is associated with difference and novelty that have value. In my opinion, even though terms such as 'valuable novelty' need further explanation, this approach is more close to my point of view than any other. Creativity is what matters in art.

Great part of what makes a good tango good is creativity, i.e. improvisation of dancers. In the following quotes, we read about the explanation of the role of improvisation, i.e. creativity in Argentine dance of tango, but what also becomes clear to us is that it is easy and natural to talk about dance in terms of play or game. "Its [tango's]

mechanism is accidental, unexpected, surprising; *man and women play different games*<sup>8</sup>, disencounters, oppositions known somewhat a priori, and thus they are enabled to continue gliding together” (Lázaro Liacho, *Nuevas Premisas Sobre el Tango*, Columna 7 [December 1937], quoted by Savigliano, 1995: 155). “The combination of the tight embrace and the figuras generated choreographic novelties such as sudden changes in the steps and in the direction of the dancing trajectory. Frequently, each partner performed a different step challenging the couple’s synchronization with the music. In addition, the sequence of *marcha* (walks) and figuras (figures) was *left to improvisation*<sup>9</sup> and was adjusted by the dancing couple to the musical stimulus” (Novati and Cuello, *Antología del Tango Rioplatense*, 1980:26, quoted by Savigliano, 1995: 161). Gadamer says that we have freedom of movement back and fro. This is limited freedom, freedom inside the borders. The dancer knows rules of his dance, he knows which steps he is allowed to make. Dance limits him in the sense that he cannot make movements not belonging to that dance, but it does not limit him in the sense that it dictates his next step. Within these borders, the dancer is free. Depending on his creative powers, his dance will be good or bad. This is true for every dance. However, argentine tango significantly differs in this aspect from most other dances, in a sense that its tight embrace and the lack of strict definition of steps and figures give more freedom to the dancers, but they can also be a strong limitation. Different styles of the embrace, which are caused by different arms and axis positions, enable or disable freedom of movements. Also, its unpredictable steps could be limitation in dance with a less careful or a less experienced partner.

Also, talk of a less experienced partner connects the gender issue of tango with the theory of play. Namely, if play is to fulfill its purpose only with the player's losing himself in it, it is clear that it is impossible to achieve that goal if only one of the dancers enjoys. To

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<sup>8</sup> My emphasis

<sup>9</sup> My emphasis

be lost in a dance requires fulfillment of certain conditions – an adequate song, sense of rhythm of both dancers, they should be of similar skill level, etc. If one of them is limited by his/her partner in any way, the feeling is fake. There is no real play, for at least one of them is not lost (in my opinion, it is disputable whether only one of the players can be lost, and therefore, whether either of them can enjoy in such dance. I would say that, either they are both lost, or there is no losing at all). In the words of Sebastian Arce and his partner Mariana Montes, who are one of the best tango couples in the world, all these conditions fulfilled make harmony. “They [Sebastian and Mariana] developed their own methodology based on the harmony between conscious and unconscious body control applied to movement/non movement. Their methodology also focuses on awakening senses before applying them to the dance (understanding of relationship stimuli – answer, physical and theoretical/ sensorial and auditive), and have as a final goal the self expression, the research of your own dance from the needs created by the student’s own tango path, paying much attention to the non-movement, the introspection of the dance, the contemplation” (Entry in *Sebastian & Mariana official website*).

When we talk about the relationship between the audience and the performer in tango, Gadamer’s understanding of play is helpful: for him, play is not in a subject (neither in a performer, nor in a spectator), but somewhere in “between”. His accent is put on the space they share. He emphasizes the representational role of artistic work, but he refuses to state that without an audience, art loses its meaning. On the contrary, the fact that the play of art is played for someone only proves the impersonal character of the play; it does not mean that the player cannot grasp the meaning of the play without the spectator. Support for the claim that audience is neither necessary nor sufficient condition for something to be called dance I find in the historical sources of Argentine tango: at the beginning of it, in so called Academias, there were no chairs, so people did not have a



place to sit and observe, i.e. there was no audience at all (Hugo Lamas and Enrique Binda, *El Tango en la sociedad porteña*). But, of course, the fact that the presence of an audience is not necessary for dance to be called dance should not be interpreted as the claim that an audience should never be present.

What is the role of audience, once it is watching a dance spectacle? Sebastian Arce<sup>10</sup> says that, while being exposed to an audience, a dancer is in danger of limiting himself. He may want to do something, but the presence of the audience can stop him, because it distracts him from the essence of dance. That essence is to be lost in dance, to go along with it, not to pay attention to anything external. Of course, this is not necessarily the case. It is possible that a spectator himself becomes a player. Then both the dancer and the audience become involved in the play, and they lose themselves together. To achieve this, dancers should establish a dialogue with the audience (entry in *Sebastian & Mariana official website*). When that happens, the dancer does not dance to impress the audience (even though that is usually one of the consequences of a good dance). What he is doing is trying to “put musical, stage argument”<sup>11</sup>, which must be differentiated from logical argument. Because, as Arce says, those musical ‘arguments’ would most probably be senseless for most of the people, but for the dancer they make sense, and only while he is dancing. This is a way of self – understanding. According to him, there is no agreement on meaning of these ‘arguments’; however, dancers will continue to give their “argumental choreography on stage”. This means that dance calls for interpretation. The dancers are giving some arguments, but the reception of them would depend on the power of interpretation of audience.

According to Gadamer, play takes place “in between”. It absorbs players (both audience and performers) and fills them with its spirit. It seems for me that Arce is following

<sup>10</sup> He said that in Belgrade, April 10 2010, during Belgrade Tango Encuentro festival.

<sup>11</sup> Sebastian Arce

the same line of thought. Dance is to absorb us, both those who dance and those who watch. It does not happen on stage; it does not happen in the audience, but it happens somewhere in between.

David Best also talks of dance in terms of game. He compares dance with the play of chess. According to him, it is important to realize that no move in chess is concerned with its cause, in a sense that we never ask what caused the player's hand to move in that particular way, what happened in his brain before he did that, or what feelings he has had when he moved his hand in the way he did. It is wrong to value a move as isolated; it must be analyzed as a part of the whole. According to him, if we are to appreciate the move we need to see it in the context of the game (Best 1975: 14). I have also emphasized the context of dance (play) (2.2) when I was talking of what makes a movement dance movement. To understand tango movement it is important to place it in the context of dance (play).

This question of valuation of an isolated movement is deeply investigated in Cunningham's theory (see 2.1), in which emphasis is placed on the motion – dance is a mere motion. According to this theory, sculpture of a dance may be art, photography of a dancing couple could be art as well, but the dance itself cannot. This way of interpretation of dance is not necessarily opposed to Gadamer's dynamic play theory. To support the claim that dance is, or at least could legitimately be considered as play, but at the same time to show that the play (dance) respects each and every one of its movements, I give as an example a technique of another world's famous tango dancer and instructor – Mariano “Chicho” Frumboli. He has developed a specific and extremely popular tango style, which understands that he creates his choreographies by sculpturing: he treats the bodies of dancers as “living sculptures” and by putting them to motion in particular ways, he creates movements and choreographies that should represent living moving sculptures.

According to him dance is a sequence of movements, but that is what makes dance a good art. This means that we should value dance as a whole, but also each and every movement also bears a meaning and deserves our attention and admiration. Paying attention to each movement, dancers shape their steps in such a way that each of them could be seen as a sculpture. However, this does not prevent them from losing themselves in their dance. They give in, give of their bodies and music takes over, and their highly stylized figures and steps shape a dance that is extremely valuable as a whole.

I talk about isolated tango movements, and about context in which they are created. It is important to understand the meaning of these terms. Something is a simple walking step until partners are in a characteristic tango embrace, and vice versa. Something is a mere embrace, until you add to it a tango step and appropriate rhythm. What is important is the context in which we find it. If we see a person walking alone in the street having a posture of a tango dancer, making steps that are usually used in tango, we will not say that he is dancing. We could say that he is practicing or preparing to dance somewhere else. Tango movement is not “given” in a sense in which a mere step is given as a means for reaching a destination. Dance movement is something that we work on – we develop it, make it perfect, and we do that consciously and constantly. What makes a tango step different from any other step is its necessity to include the existence of certain processes that are exactly the same and equally complex in both tango partners. Tango dancers call it, simply, communication. Therefore, a tango step (movement) one makes, that is initially most powerful and graceful, may result merely as a pointless twitch that leads to disharmony unless one makes it (the tango step) in harmony with the sensibility and technical abilities of the person (tango partner) that creates the dance together with him. Most tango dancers say that a tango couple becomes one single tango being in which it is necessary to erase those distinct limits between a subject A and a subject B in a process in which success is

measured by the unification of man, woman and music – in harmony. In that sense, we may say that a dance experience changes those who experience it. In a technical sense, a tango step (movement) has two basic imperatives: interconnection with the ground (a dancer stands firmly on his own feet), and interconnection with the partner (communication of two possessed spirits that create a single tango being in harmony with the rhythm).

Furthermore, it is more appropriate to talk of tango movements, than of tango steps. Tango is a walking dance and as such, it almost completely consists of steps - whether they are just steps or rotating steps or various kinds of steps that are reshaped or intentionally interrupted in order to create a different, more interesting form. However, using the word step would be too narrow because micro dynamics of the dance includes the work of the entire body, and legs/feet – or steps that legs/feet take – are merely the most extrovert part/segment of a dancing body. To my mind, interdependence of motion (movement) and emotion is the essential question/issue of Argentine tango. That it is why it is extremely important that partners make one tango being during their dance. Only when they achieve that level of synchronization we can talk of context in which we have tango movement. That context is the perfect harmony of two bodies that must be achieved in each movement.

#### **4.2      *Darko Dožić: the play of tango*<sup>12</sup>**

Together with Sebastian Arce and Mariana Montes, Darko Dožić gives a great significance to the notion of harmony. According to him, to the extent to which an artist plays, to that extent he achieves it (harmony). The harmony he is talking about is harmony

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<sup>12</sup> While doing my research for this thesis, I had a great opportunity to take personal correspondence with the instructor of the largest tango school in Belgrade, Darko Dožić. With his permission, I will use most of his answers to my questions to support the thesis that dance is play.

between dancer's ego that qualifies, estimates, instrumentalizes, competes, etc. and his natural and social environment. He holds play to be similar to life, in a sense that it should be the more serious and, at the same time the less serious activity, and this paradox is the key to understanding dance as play. Namely, the attribute of "presence in this very moment" is inherent to play. This means that it (play) is extremely serious in communication with the immediate. This seriousness is dedicated to not allowing the interpretation of the past and anticipation of the future to destroy communication with this moment, which is only real and certain. One could now ask what it is that is not serious in play. The play is not serious if we look at it from the point of view of conventionality, because in its freedom it does not take into consideration any of the rules by which something is qualified as acceptable or non-acceptable. In that sense, the dancer can play on the scene, and it is up to the audience if it can grasp the seriousness of the present moment, in which the dancer creates. According to Dožić, it is extremely important to emphasize that this seriousness has nothing to do with ego, will and their instrumentalization of the moment, but that it is all about "giving in to the present moment".

He says explicitly: "By choosing to be an artist, I do not receive the capacity to play and I enter the field of freedom and non-thinking of other people's judgments, but I merely choose the path on which I shall give my best to make my inner creation result in giving me the ability to become a true dancer (player)<sup>13</sup> i.e. someone able to constantly be in the present moment and win the freedom by playing, i.e. without any censorship create his own worlds that get him closer to *the truth*<sup>14</sup> and happiness". The similar idea is present in Gadamer's theory: that work of art provides us with the truth.

Talking about the audience, he agrees with Arce – audience can set serious

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<sup>13</sup> It is interesting to add that Dožić wrote in Serbian, and in that language words 'play' and 'dance' can be used interchangeably, i.e. to 'dance' and 'dancer' is frequently referred as to 'play' and 'player', but never vice versa. Therefore, translation of this word from Serbian could be problematic, because it is ambiguous.

<sup>14</sup> My emphasis

limitations to the dancer, but it also can “play along with the dancer”, in which case there are no obstacles to a dialogue between performer and audience. There are two dangerous limitations that spectators can set: one is when they do not respond to dancer's energy and movements, when they do not want to take part in the play; another is when they give too much significance to the artist himself. The result of the former can be that the artist completely caves in the play itself and localizes it as the means that help him surround himself with freedom. On the contrary, the result of the latter could be the artist's stepping out of the play as such and misusing the play to build his own ego by impressing the audience, thus “commencing an ode to his own greatness and exceptionality”, as Dožić would put it. These are challenges that require a dancer to constantly improve and question himself, thus enabling himself to gather extremely important experience.

Dožić says that if the dancer falls under the influence of the audience, and start dancing in order to impress those who admire him, then his tango is not a good tango. I am prone to say that Gadamer would hold that, if that happens, the play cannot fulfill its purpose.

True tango is tightly connected with creativity, i.e. improvisation. Improvisation is the aim that is to be achieved and dancing technique has the purpose only as means to achieve the level (of the technique) that makes us able to improvise. The more perfected technique gets, the greater are the possibilities for improvisation. Technique is therefore the necessary but not the sufficient condition for improvising in tango. Improvisation emerges from the irrational and the unconscious. It arises from the “possessed spirit”, the kind of spirit that is “lost in the play”. It cannot be taught in the same way that an emotion that gives birth to it cannot be taught. In that sense we can understand what Carlos Gavito, one of the greatest tango teachers of all time, had taught his students: “You embrace the music. You make love with music. Then it is the feeling. I am not saying I can teach you to

feel. No, I cannot teach you to feel. Nobody can teach you to feel” (Entry in Youtube).

On this subject Dožić says: “The idea is to perfect technical skills and to gather the greatest possible variety of technical knowledge so that in a moment of spontaneous creativity we are able to express ourselves in accordance with what we feel. In other words, technique is being practiced and perfected in order to be overcome and enter into the unconscious, in the natural power (or capacity) of expression”. A similar idea was put forward by Sebastian Arce at the Belgrade tango encuentro 2010, when he was describing his experience as a dancer. He stated that he and his partner have repeated a variety of steps and choreographies together so many times during their career, that those have become pure improvisation. In that sense, as much as technique (that contains the rules of the play, but not only that) limits the freedom and creativity of a dancer, it also makes them possible.

Rules of tango are forming the dance itself, but are also conventional and therefore subject to change and perfection in accordance to the temporal development of technique and the dance. In that sense Dožić makes the distinction between a child's play and the one of an adult. He holds that a child creates its own rules that are subordinate to satisfying some momentary and spontaneous impulses. An adult, on the other hand, is capable of postponing the momentary satisfaction and contemplating the play (tango in this case) which gives him the opportunity to set such rules that are going to enable him the greatest possible freedom and creativity at some future moment of playing.

## Chapter 5 - Conclusion

Hans Georg Gadamer wrote many pages on art. He held it to be play – simple, childish play that absorbs those who play it, and that has its sacred seriousness. Art is an experience, such that it changes those who experience it. If we let ourselves be moved by the magic of play, we will lose ourselves, but we will also gain something, and that what we gain is of greater importance than what we had lost – we gain the truth, and different way of self-understanding.

In similar way many tango dancers and maestros (instructors) explain what they do and how they feel when they dance. Gadamer's way of looking at the audience, the role of the rules, his strongly emphasized notion of experience that is the experience of losing and gaining is an accurate description of the state of the spirits of the tango dancer(s). Conditions that he held to be enough for art to be play which fulfills its purpose are almost the same ones that tango instructors hold to be necessary and sufficient for harmony. I have spent a lot of time listening to tango teachers and realized how close their way of understanding what they do is to Gadamer's theory, without their awareness of that fact.

Notion of play is easily associated with creativity and freedom, which both have great importance for dance. Freedom of movements and improvisation (creativity) in tango are caused and enabled by perfection in technique (which presupposes skills and perfect display of choreographical figures). This is what Gadamer calls freedom inside rules. Inside them an artist creates – he plays. And that is what is important to him. What is the result of his playing depends on those who look at it. Importance of interpretation was strongly pointed out by Gadamer, but it also plays a great role in dance. It is at the audience to share the feeling, to be lost, possessed, to play along, and, finally, to



understand the stage arguments given by players (dancers). The more different interpretations there are, the more ways of being of one dance we will have. Those who do not lose in the game, as well as those who do not interpret an artwork, misunderstand themselves. They make the audience that is impossible to establish a dialogue with; they are, in Gadamer's words, "spoilsports" (2006: 103). In Dožić's words, they are such an audience that make dancers run away from it and go deeper into the safety of play.

Gadamer did not talk of art in terms of definition – his attention was to describe art, not to define it. In the same sense, I did not mean to be pretentious and to provide any kind of definition of dance. What I wanted is to show one possible way of interpreting dance, the one I find most plausible. It happened to be the interpretation of dance that is extremely close to famous tango instructors. The attempts to define dance (and art in general) have not led us far. At best, we can say that dance is indefinable, or that it is whatever institutions (art world) say it is, or that dance is whatever is created by a person who intends his creation to be a dance.

Gadamer's theory of play does better justice to aesthetic experience – it wipes away the subject/object dichotomy. Aesthetic theories grounded in that dichotomy do not explain anything, while Gadamer's account grasps exactly the experience that happens in a dancer. The nature of play does not permit the player to think in subject/object terms. What I understand by this is that when Gadamer said that game takes over, he meant that the player becomes lost in the play (and that is when play fulfils its purpose) when he stops treating the artwork he creates as an object. Dance is not an object. In a tango play both dancers are lost, and existing are one tango being and harmony. If we start treating dance as an object, we falsify the nature of its experience.

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