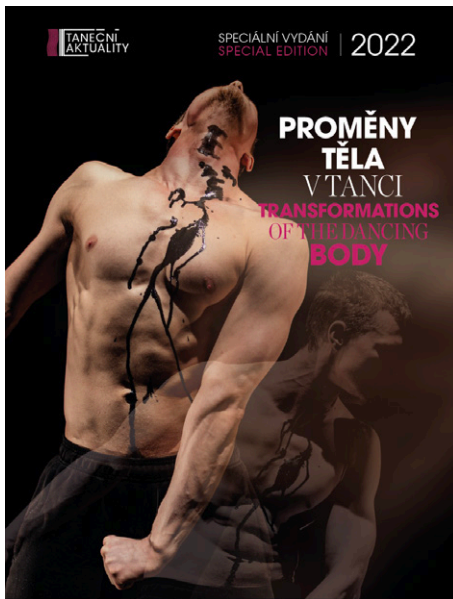

Taneční aktuality Special Edition 2022:
Transformations of the Dancing Body



Elisa Frasson



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Encountering this special edition of *Taneční aktuality*, “Transformations of the Dancing Body”, I once more experienced, through the text, the emotions, feelings and physical distress but also potential actions of reconstruction of these last two pandemic years. As a dance person who enjoys dance from a theoretical perspective, I found myself instantly responding to these pages. Nevertheless, the contributions to this edition embrace a wide range of viewpoints and contexts that offer necessary testimony to what we all (both inside and outside the dance world) went through. Furthermore, as an Italian who currently lives in Berlin, I had the chance to appreciate the Czech dance landscape framed in a European cultural context.

As editor Lucie Hayashi describes in the editorial, the focus is the body in its heterogeneous conceptualisations, an object and a subject, “without which [the body] no dance would be possible” (2). Sometimes this concept is taken for granted; even though the pandemic condition questioned its boundaries, the post-pandemic reactions somehow easily skipped over issues of proximity, and somehow we soon resumed our lives, trying to make up for the lost time. Interestingly, this text is proof that the research around dancing bodies and

the challenges they went through is vital to understand what we have been through.

Organised in two main sections, “Season 2021/2022” and “Transformations of the Dancing Body”, this special edition works as a comprehensive constellation of perspectives and methodologies in and around corporeal dancing bodies, in their singularities and communal problematics.

Ranging through the 13 articles, there emerges a variety of understandings and uses on the part of each of the authors. Through this wealth of experiences, the reader can comprehend what the dance world went through during the COVID pandemic and gain some insights into specific topics such as nudity and costumes, embracing a heterogeneity of contents.

I will briefly navigate through the articles to give you an overview. As previously mentioned, the first three articles are on Season 2021/2022. In “Ballet: Active Despite Obstacles”, Roman Vašek happily stresses that the 2021/2022 season featured more than a third more shows than in the previous year, delineating the signs of a consistent restart. Zuzana Smugalová’s “Unfortunate Events and Contemporary Dance – From Crisis to Catharsis” investigates post-COVID dance theatre and the post-pandemic future of the Czech dance scene, where dance solos have become an instrument for an individual reconfiguration, and the extent to which COVID was also a resource, in terms mainly of video creation and the use of innovative spaces, in line with what has been happening for a while in Czech dance. Instead, in “New Circus and Nonverbal Theatre in the Age

of Spectator Attraction”, Hana Strejčková highlights the shifts taking place in the field of New Circus, where if, on the one hand, we are assisting in a thematic shift, such as introspection and reflection on new life experiences and family roots, on the other there are still objective difficulties in getting the audience back in the room owing to the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

It is with the article by Marianna Panourgia, “Reflecting on the Dancing Body During COVID-19”, that we enter a personal, universal perspective on the distress of COVID in the dance field. In this brief but rich article, she compiles a comprehensive list of the physical and mental states and reactions of dance artists, from the “lack of physical workout, emotional stress of corporeal disconnection and the compulsory social distance” to “silent suffering” owing to overwhelmed feelings versus “over-dancing hysteria” with homemade dance videos and “the living room body” (34–36). Panourgia argues that the COVID pandemic not only challenged dancers’ individual perception of their physicality but also their role in the political community. Nevertheless, for Panourgia the pandemic was “a building momentum that could become a way to reinvent the (dance) world”.

Writing within a framework of personal memories as an educator, Katja Vaghi’s “Between Peripheral Vision and the Focused Gaze” investigates concepts such as proprioception, perception adaptation and the sense of touch. She stresses the fact that the pandemic lockdown somehow damaged not only the

sense of touch but also the “visual periphery under-stimulated by the monotony of the four walls” (42), creating issues of nervous system and body dysmorphia. As an artist and educator, Vaghi is aware of the relevance of the digital, but she also questions how much digital competence “should be integrated in the curriculum of dance education” (46).

In “When Choreography Meets Cinematography”, Greta Grinevičiūtė makes an excursus into screendance, a genre widely used during the pandemic, questioning the extreme aestheticisation of bodies on screens, which often negatively impacts the viewer's understanding of the body paradigm. With examples of screendance from the New Baltic Dance Festival 2020, she questions the mission of contemporary dance in the creative shift of bodies onto the screen.

In “How Should Dancers Get Nutrients?” Yuki Kawamura presents some useful and much-needed information on how to create a healthy balanced diet through an overview of nutrients and chemicals. Interestingly, “The Teacher's Body in the Context of Dance Education” by Kateřina Šalounová focuses on the dance teacher community, presenting it as a heterogeneous group. This look into the dancer/teacher world highlights the complexity of this profession, where psychology and the corporeal body are indivisible.

Through a journey into phenomenology, Cartesian dualism and the Deleuzian corporeal turn, Jitka Pavlišová's “Precarious Bodies, or On the Necessity of Inclusion in Dance” investigates the biopolitics

of bodies, and the extent to which there might be inclusion in dance, through the case study of Michael Turinsky, as an example of politics of resistance. Again, in the field of inclusivity, the article “Unique Body, Uniqueness, Diversity, Openness” by Hana Strejčková traces a landscape of various dance therapy case studies in the Czech Republic, where sustainable inclusive trends concerning the “unique body” can generate community significance.

The theme of the naked body, not only as a form of political protest but also as a shift of perception, is outlined by Daniela Machová in “Nudity in Czech Contemporary Dance”. After a discussion of nudity connected to movement, from the 1920s through German FKK, the taboo on the body during the war years and the freedom of the hippy movement, Machová investigates multiple studies of Czech choreographers who deal with nudity. The author affirms that an increase in nudity on stage is useful to open the minds of the audience, thereby creating greater openness to the dance experience itself, overcoming the shock of nudity.

The case of *TANZ. A Sylphic Reverie in Stunts*, by Austrian choreographer Florentina Holzinger, is analysed by Anastasio Koukoutas in “Naked Truth, or the Extraneous Body in Classical Ballet”. Despite the title, the author studies Holzinger's work from the perspective of a corporeal archive of control, in which the women performers construct their own self-satisfaction.

Petra Dotlačilová, in “The Body in Costume, Costume in Dance, or a Brief History of Dancewear”, offers an articulate

overview of the evolution of the art of scenic costume, as well as exploring the active role of women dancers in creating the needs for new shapes. Dotlačilová, who is pursuing a feminist critique of stage dress, furthermore situates her work as a researcher in the field to emancipate the critique of costume.

Before I conclude, special thanks goes to the visual apparatus, which

not only enriches each of the texts but also adds a visual layer of sensing and comprehension.

In conclusion, I find this fifth special edition a rich instrument to understand the time of 'its creation', as Hayashi explains. The spirit in which it is written is to see the pandemic as a resource, merging an interdisciplinarity of approaches, individual experiences, genres and countries.