

Dance between Gesture, Experience, and Articulation in the Philosophical Contexts of José Gil and Susanne K. Langer

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ABSTRACT: This study examines dance as a unique form-generating medium of meaning-making that transcends traditional linguistic structures. It focuses on a comparison between two distinct approaches: the modernist aesthetics of Susanne K. Langer and the poststructuralist philosophy of José Gil. The aim is to demonstrate how their divergent understandings of embodiment and meaning in dance reflect the cultural and historical frameworks of their thought, as well as distinct epistemological dispositifs. Susanne K. Langer conceives of dance as a symbolic language expressing emotional and rhythmic structures, whereas José Gil understands it as a corporeal flow of intensities that articulates sense beyond classical language.

This study proposes an interpretation of dance as a liminal form of articulation that interweaves corporeal, spatial, and symbolic dimensions. The selection of these two thinkers illustrates a broad philosophical spectrum – from the symbolic aesthetics of modernism to a poststructuralist ontology of the body. Methodologically, the text draws on poststructuralism and phenomenology, combining philosophical exegesis with the interpretation of selected choreographic cases (e.g., Marlene Monteiro Freitas, Germaine Acogny, Rudolf Laban). The study aims to offer a new reflection on the language of art through the lens of corporeality and the cultural situatedness of dance.

KEY WORDS:

dance, articulation, virtuality, gesture, José Gil, Susanne K. Langer, Merce Cunningham, Rudolf Laban, Moshe Feldenkrais, Isadora Duncan, Marlene Monteiro Freitas, Germaine Acogny

INTRODUCTION

This study focuses on both the theoretical and applied aspects of artistic language – specifically the language of dance – with the aim of exploring the possibilities and limitations of scholarly approaches to artistic signification. The selection of Susanne K. Langer¹ and José Gil² as central figures is deliberate, driven by the intention to confront two fundamentally different theoretical frameworks that offer contrasting perspectives on corporeality, articulation, and meaning.

Dance is approached here as a meaning-generating practice operating outside the domain of traditional verbal language. Through a comparison of Suzanne K. Langer's symbolic model and José Gil's poststructuralist conception, the study highlights differing philosophical assumptions and cultural contexts. Working within the modernist tradition, Susanne K. Langer views dance as a symbolic system that objectifies vital feelings through form and gesture. In contrast, José Gil, whose thinking is shaped by postcolonial and Deleuzian theory, understands dance as a dynamic current of intensities, in which the body articulates meaning through energy and motion. Methodologically, the study is grounded in a comparative analysis of philosophical texts and their correlation with case-based interpretations of selected choreographic works, revealing how theoretical frameworks are inscribed into praxis. Examples from contemporary choreography, especially the works of Marlene Monteiro Freitas and Germaine Acogny, serve to demonstrate how articulation in dance varies across cultural frameworks. Thus, the study seeks to contribute to an understanding of dance not merely as an aesthetic phenomenon, but as a philosophically significant field of meaning.

Susanne K. Langer's thought emerges from the context of mid-20th-century American modernity, in which the aesthetics of form and symbolic expression offered a pathway to understanding human experience through art. Her notion of the symbol is tied to the idea of inner form and vital rhythm. Conversely, José Gil's philosophy, developed within the poststructuralist paradigm and shaped by the postcolonial context of the Lusophone world, conceives of the body as a dispersed energetic field of articulation, where meaning does not arise through representation, but through the passage of force, intensity, and affect. This research raises questions aimed at distinguishing verbal and artistic language and at comparing the

1 Susanne Katherine Knauth Langer (1895–1985) was one of the first women to pursue an academic career in philosophy in the United States, and among the few to gain significant recognition both within scholarly circles and among the broader public. She studied under several leading philosophers, including Bertrand Russell and Alfred North Whitehead. From the outset, her thinking was deeply influenced by the philosophy of Ernst Cassirer, a connection that is evident throughout much of her work. For more, see DRYDEN, D. Susanne K. Langer. In *Dictionary of Literary Biography*, Vol. 270. Durham, NC : Duke University Press, 2004, p. 190.

2 José Gil (born 15 June 1939, Muecate, Portuguese Mozambique) is Emeritus Senior Research Fellow at the Faculty of Human and Social Sciences, Universidade Nova de Lisboa, where he taught Aesthetics, Philosophy of Art, and Modern and Contemporary Philosophy. His research focuses on aesthetic problems and the ontological underpinnings of a philosophy of the body. GIL, José. *José Gil – Profile*. In IFILNOVA – Nova Institute of Philosophy, Universidade Nova de Lisboa. [online]. [cit. 25 July 2025]. Available at: <https://ifilnova.pt/en/people/jose-gil>.

expressive means of modern and classical dance. In the concluding section, the applicability of these theoretical findings to various dance genres and other artistic forms will be evaluated.

Verbal language is a system of signs and rules, organized into grammatical structures, and designed for precise communication. In contrast, the artistic language of dance employs symbolism and emotion, lacking fixed grammatical structures. José Gil regards dance as a language that generates meaning through the continuity of movements and gestures. "The points of contact or intersections are the centers of intensification of the series. Internal intensification of the distances (tensions) between two successive gestures; intensification of differences between one series of gestures and others (notes, words, objects, non-danced gestures). From the contact arises the connection, the event."³ Thus, dance is not merely an aesthetic form, but a modality through which the body speaks and interacts with its environment, generating a dynamic interplay between physical expression and energetic flows.⁴

Susanne K. Langer conceives of dance as an art form that creates a virtual appearance among interacting forces. Dance expresses the nature of human emotion and subjective experience, resonating with audiences on both emotional and perceptual levels.⁵ A central element of this expression, according to both Langer and Gil, is the dance gesture, which transforms physical movements into symbolic forms that convey rhythm, tension, and motion – thereby transmitting emotional and inner experience. Susanne K. Langer describes dance as a virtual reality that is perceived by the viewer yet does not physically exist. She likens it to a mirror image or a rainbow – experienced as real, yet intangible. The movements of dance generate "apparent forces" that exist solely for our perception, much as painting and music create virtual objects for the eye and ear.⁶

Gesture is the fundamental "thread" of dance, producing rhythm and conveying inner life and emotion in a manner unattainable by verbal language. Dance differs from other arts in that its medium is movement and gesture, producing visible forces that trace rhythm and spatial motion.⁷ "All dance movement is gesture, or part of the display of gesture – perhaps its mechanical contrast or foil, but always motivated by the appearance of expressive motion. (...) Gesture is the basic abstraction by which dance illusion is constructed and organized. Gesture is vital movement; to the dancer it is known very precisely as a kinesthetic experience, i.e., as action, and somewhat more vaguely as a visual effect. To others, it appears as visible motion,

3 GIL, J. *Movimento Total – O Corpo e a Dança*. Lisboa : Relógio D'Água, 2001. Quoted text translated from Portuguese into Czech by the author. With Miloš Ševčík, the author co-translated *A Arte Como Linguagem*, forthcoming at Karolinum Press.

4 GIL, J. *Metamorphoses of the Body*. Minneapolis : University of Minnesota Press, 1998, p. 76.

5 LANGER, S. K. *Feeling and Form: A Theory of Art Developed from Philosophy in a New Key*. New York : Charles Scribner's Sons, 1953, p. 169.

6 LANGER, S. K. The Dynamic Image: Some Philosophical Reflections on Dance. In *Salmagundi*, Spring-Summer 1976, p. 81.

7 Ibid., pp. 170–172.

but not as the motion of things, sliding, waving, or tumbling – it is perceived and understood as vital movement. It is therefore always simultaneously subjective and objective, personal and public, intentional (or evoked) and perceived. In actual life, gestures function as signals or symptoms of our desires, intentions, expectations, demands, and feelings.”⁸

The perspectives of Langer and Gil should not be understood as sequential or hierarchical developments; rather, they represent parallel epistemological viewpoints that frame the relationship between body and meaning in fundamentally different ways. While Susanne K. Langer emphasizes a symbolic logic of form, José Gil privileges flow, affectivity, and the spatial multiplicity of articulation. Both thinkers consider gesture to be the key to linking the body with its surroundings – or as the basic unit of dance that expresses rhythm and inner states. They underscore that gesture is not merely physical motion, but a symbolic medium of meaning production. Although their approaches differ in their emphasis on corporeality (José Gil) and symbolism (Susanne K. Langer), both demonstrate that dance constitutes a complex mode of communication intertwining body, mind, and space, offering a space for deeper individual and collective experience. Dance is not merely a kinetic art, but is rooted in ritual and has evolved into an autonomous aesthetic discipline. Classical dance prioritizes technique, beauty, and harmony, while modern dance, emerging as a reaction to this formalism – strives for freedom and the expression of individuality.

1. FROM GESTURE TO MEANING IN MOTION

Verbal and artistic languages constitute distinct systems, yet they remain intrinsically interconnected. While verbal language excels in precise description, artistic language offers a broader interpretive space and deeper emotional resonance. In this study, artistic language is understood as a system that transcends the literal meaning of words, reaching toward symbolism and figurative significance. As José Gil notes: “On the other hand, we know that the term ‘artistic language’ can withstand all objections. We speak, and will continue to speak, of the language of dance, of the language of sculpture, of the language of painting. There is thus something in this notion of artistic language that fundamentally resists and seems to possess an inner truth, even if it is only a metaphorical language.”⁹

José Gil introduces the concept of the “artistic language” of individual art forms – painting, music, and dance – as non-verbal yet meaning-bearing systems. These systems operate with their own internal logic, resisting reduction to linguistic codes, and their metaphorical character can often be more expressive than conventional verbal language. The language of dance, according to José Gil, functions without discrete units such as words; rather, it generates a continuous flow of movement that conveys emotion and force through the body. While the body does not articulate in the same manner as language, it is “quasi-articulated,” enabling it to operate

⁸ GIL, J. *A Arte Como Linguagem*, p. 11.

⁹ Ibid.

dynamically, move, and generate meaning. He explains: “The ordinary body expresses meaning, even if not through language. Although its anatomical constitution does not allow the formation of a language with a double articulation of discrete units, the body is no less articulated. Or rather, precisely because it is not fully articulated, we can say that its movements are quasi-articulated. It is this quasi-articulation that guarantees its mobility, operability, its integration into space, and prevents it from falling into the amorphous immobility or inertness of a mere object.”¹⁰ This language is therefore more than mere metaphor; it functions as a medium that, through the integration of rhythm, space, and force, can express complex thoughts and feelings that surpass the limits of ordinary verbal communication.¹¹

The writings of Gil and Langer share a vision of dance as a language of symbols and gestures, capable of expressing intricate emotional structures without words. Dance becomes a dynamic image in which each movement carries aesthetic value and reveals the nature of emotional experience – both that of the dancer and of human life in general. Susanne K. Langer conceives of dance as a universal language of emotions that mediates intellectual and affective processes through rhythm and form. José Gil, by contrast, interprets dance as a sensory manifestation of movement without the need for representation. As he writes: “Dance is in fact the most serious intellectual concern of the life of the savage: it is a conception of the world that transcends the place and moment of animal existence – the first conception of life as a whole, a continuous, transpersonal life interrupted by birth and death, surrounded and nourished by the rest of nature.”¹²

1.2 BETWEEN ENERGY, BODY, AND SPACE

In José Gil’s conception, the dancer’s body is not merely a physical object but a dynamic space permeated by energies and emotions. The body functions like a Möbius strip – absorbing and transforming internal affects while exceeding the physical boundaries of the skin. The dancer becomes a witness to their own bodily transformation, which requires deep introspection. This process enables an intense fusion of body, music, and movement: „At these points of energetic intensification begins the osmosis of movement, whereby musical spaces become bodily spaces, quarter tones become quarter gestures. Notes become gestures, and gestures become notes. How? On the plane of immanence, where bodily movement reaches such an intensity that gesture and note become one and the same. Through ‘fusion’ or osmosis, through extreme intensification of energy, one ‘form’ permeates another. In short, the connection between divergent series arises from the immanence of the body with music. Tones are bodily actions, vibrations of corporeal movement.”¹³

¹⁰ GIL, J. *Movimento Total – O Corpo e a Dança*, p. 89.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 89.

¹² LANGER, S. *Feeling and Form. Feeling and Form. A Theory of Art Developed from Philosophy in a New Key*. In *Salmaogundi*, p. 190.

¹³ GIL, J. *Movimento Total – O Corpo e a Dança*, p. 96.

The space of the body, for José Gil, is not merely the personal domain of the dancer but a dialogical field involving the audience and the environment. Movement creates virtual structures that are perceived both emotionally and aesthetically. This space is mutable, responsive to the energy of motion and choreographic decisions. The dancer becomes a mediator between the physical and the virtual world, infusing space with sensations, affects, and meanings that surpass conventional understandings of embodiment. His concept of the “energetic map” underscores the interconnectedness of the body’s internal and external spaces. The dancer is not simply the object of movement but an active producer of space. Their body is in constant transformation through flows of energy, expanding its boundaries and creating a dynamic space filled with both actual and potential movement.¹⁴

The “energetic map” expresses the link between the dancer’s inner bodily experience and its outward kinetic manifestation. Through energy, the dancer “writes” into space, generating virtual structures perceived by the audience on a nonverbal level. This embodied dialogue allows for the interpretation of meaning without recourse to words or narrative. “Dance movement leads to the quasi-articulation of broad movement (and semantic) zones and to the construction of articulated sequences that are immediately imbued with meaning. The dancing body becomes a system in which syntactic quasi-articulation is transformed into a semantic grammar. This grammar has indefinite gestural micro-units as its lexicon and energetic pathways as its syntax (Gilles Deleuze would say: maps of intensity that traverse the dancer’s body).”¹⁵

In Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari’s theory, such a map of intensities replaces linear and hierarchical structures with a network of flows, lines, and nodes in constant transformation. This rhizomatic approach understands reality as a dynamic field of relations without center or periphery. In the choreographies of Merce Cunningham, to which José Gil refers, forms emerge according to the logic of energy – not as ends in themselves, but as modalities of energy channeled and transfigured through dance.¹⁶ Gil’s perspective emphasizes the importance of tension and energy transmission in understanding dance as a dynamic and transformative art – linking body, mind, and external world: “The body must be adapted to the rhythms and demands of dance. Muscles, tendons, and organs must become instruments for the unimpeded flow of energy. As for space, it means the close overlapping of inner and outer space: of the body’s interior, which generates energy, and the exterior, in which the gestures of dance unfold. The inner space is as vast as the outer space.”¹⁷

The notion of the body as a site of energy flow that extends beyond its visible contours demonstrates how the body interacts with its surroundings, thereby transforming space and endowing it with new textures and emotional qualities. Dancers

¹⁴ Ibid, pp. 90–94.

¹⁵ GIL, J. *Movimento Total – O Corpo e a Dança*, p. 95.

¹⁶ Ibid, pp. 81–85.

¹⁷ GIL, J. *Paradoxical Body*. In *TDR*, 2006, Vol. 50, No. 4, p. 23.

create a virtual “space-body” that facilitates the transmission of energy. Somatic approaches, such as Moshe Feldenkrais’s method¹⁸ Rudolf Laban’s movement analysis,¹⁹ cultivate bodily awareness and energetic flow, linking internal and external bodily space. The energetic map not only refines technique and expression but also impacts the viewer, who perceives the emotional and energetic quality of movement. Dancers construct a “map” of their body that encompasses muscular memory, kinesthetic awareness, and emotional expression.

Rudolf Laban’s emphasis on direction and space resonates with José Gil’s vision of bodily movement transforming space. In Gil’s map of the body, the dancer acts as a mediator between interiority and environment. Somatic techniques support this integration and enrich the dancer’s expression and technical capacity. The energetic map manifests in a movement vocabulary that is perceived not only visually but emotionally, through the dynamics, intensity, and directional flow of energy, shaping the spectator’s aesthetic experience.²⁰

Susanne K. Langer similarly conceives of dance as a dynamic image formed through the interaction of forces that extend beyond the body’s physical boundaries. In this respect, her perspective approximates Gil’s notion of the energetic map. She does not see dance merely as movement in space, but as the creation of a virtual reality in which intangible forces act as real through the viewer’s perception. The dancer’s energy thus transforms physical space into a realm of aesthetic and emotional meaning. This dynamic image arises solely in the moment of the dance and serves as a symbolic expression of the dancer’s inner world. The space in which dance occurs is redefined and reconstituted through movement and energy, acquiring a new emotional and aesthetic dimension.²¹

According to Susanne K. Langer, dance creates a “virtual reality” that reshapes the viewer’s perception. This reality is charged with invisible forces that connect the dancer’s inner world to their external manifestation. Dance thus becomes the objectification of subjective experience and mediates an aesthetic and emotional encounter for the audience – one that transcends the bounds of physical space.²²

18 The Feldenkrais Method focuses on bodily and movement awareness, emphasizing the integration of internal and external energies. Moshe Feldenkrais explored how the body learns new movement patterns through gentle, conscious motion that minimizes tension and enhances functionality. Like J. Gil, M. Feldenkrais also emphasizes the balance between the body’s internal space and its environment, with movement serving as a means of developing one’s potential. For more, see EDDY, M. A Brief History of Somatic Practices and Dance. In *Journal of Dance & Somatic Practices*, 2009, Vol. 1, No. 1, pp. 4–10 and 17–21.

19 Laban Movement Analysis focuses on space, time, and effort, analyzing movement through patterns of spatial pathways, dynamics, and intentions. R. Laban emphasizes how the body utilizes space and how energy flows during choreography. Space is understood as an extension of the dancer’s body, where movement creates a “spatial body,” which resembles J. Gil’s concept of an energetic map, in which dance movement shapes not only space but also the viewer’s emotional perception. For more, see *ibid.*, pp. 4–10 and 18–19.

20 GIL, J. *Movimento Total – O Corpo e a Dança*, pp. 81–85.

21 LANGER, S. K. The Dynamic Image: Some Philosophical Reflections on Dance. In *Salmagundi*, pp. 78–82.

22 *Ibid.*

This insight is crucial to understanding the language of dance, for it reveals that dance is not merely a sequence of physical movements but a complex expression of inner experience through the body in space. If space and energy are understood as mutable, living elements continually reshaped in dance, then dance emerges as a mode of communication – a language that unifies body, mind, and environment into a singular expression. Dance thereby becomes a medium for sharing subjective experiences and emotions in a manner that exceeds verbal language. The dynamics of space and energy constitute the grammar of this language, through which the audience gains access to the dancer's inner world – without a single word being spoken. Grasping this level of communication allows for a deeper interpretation of the choreographic work and affirms dance as a full-fledged symbolic and aesthetic system.

It is essential to recognize that the conceptual frameworks of Susanne K. Langer and José Gil do not arise from analogous theoretical or cultural-historical contexts. As such, their comparison requires an interpretively sensitive approach. Terms such as “expression,” “symbol,” or “experience,” as used by Susanne K. Langer, are grounded in the American modernist philosophy of symbolic forms and closely linked to the notion of subjective experience. In contrast, José Gil operates within the language of poststructuralism, in which meaning is not stabilized through representation but emerges as a passage of affect, force, and bodily energetics. For him, dance is not the representation of meaning, but a flow of articulation that produces meaning in its very unfolding. These fundamental differences in terminology and conceptual orientation necessitate that any direct comparison between their approaches be conducted with an awareness of their incommensurability.

1.3 WHEN MUSIC FALLS SILENT: DANCE AS AN AUTONOMOUS LANGUAGE

Unconventional in the thought of both José Gil and Susanne K. Langer is their approach to the relationship between music and dance – traditionally considered inseparable. Yet modern approaches have significantly re-evaluated this assumption. On one side stands the concept of independence, as exemplified by Merce Cunningham and John Cage,²³ the idea of deep interconnection between music and dance, embodied by figures such as Isadora Duncan.²⁴ Though fundamentally different, both perspectives offer new insights into the interplay of these two artistic disciplines.

23 Merce Cunningham (1919, Washington – 2009, New York) was an American dancer and choreographer, a key figure in modern dance and a pioneer of new forms of abstract dance art. In collaboration with his partner, composer John Cage, he developed the principles of chance choreography and the concept of the independence of dance from music. For more, see *Encyclopædia Britannica*. Chicago : Encyclopædia Britannica, 2001 [online]. [cit. 26 December 2024]. Available at: <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Merce-Cunningham>; and in numerous works by Cunningham himself, see *Merce Cunningham Trust* [online]. [cit. 26 December 2024]. Available at: <https://www.mercecunningham.org>.

24 Isadora Duncan (1877, San Francisco – 1927, Nice) is frequently referred to in scholarly literature as one of the pioneers of modern dance. According to the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, her art marked a significant departure from the rigid forms of classical ballet as she sought a return to natural movement, the rhythm of breath, and the harmony of the body with nature. For more, see *Encyclopædia Britannica* [online]. [cit. 19 July 2025]. Available at: <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Isadora-Duncan>.

Merce Cunningham, a central figure for José Gil, understood the relationship between dance and music not in terms of melody but of time. Together with John Cage, he developed a concept in which dance and music exist independently, sharing only a temporal framework. In his “choreography of chance,” Merce Cunningham arranged isolated movements randomly (e.g., by tossing dice), and dancers often encountered the music for the first time during the performance itself. Thus, dance acquired autonomy, resulting in a “relationship without relation” in the spirit of Gilles Deleuze’s philosophy of multiplicity.²⁵

At the opposite pole stands Isadora Duncan, who viewed dance as the embodiment of music. For her, dance does not accompany music – it incarnates it. Despite criticism that Isadora Duncan lacked formal musical training, she demonstrated that dance can serve as an authentic expression of music.

The debate concerning the relationship between music and dance reflects the broader issue of artistic autonomy. Merce Cunningham and John Cage advocated for the separation of music and movement, granting dance greater freedom and independence. In their view, music and dance exist in parallel, without determining each other. Isadora Duncan, in contrast, conceived of dance as a natural expression of music – movement was music itself. These contrasting views articulate divergent conceptions of the interaction between artistic forms: either as autonomous entities (Merce Cunningham) or as deeply entwined expressions of human experience (Isadora Duncan). Susanne K. Langer offers a synthesis of these positions through her notion of the “virtual gesture,” understanding dance as an autonomous language capable of functioning independently, while remaining open to dialogue with music and rhythm. The relationship between music and dance is thus not fixed, it may be independent or profoundly interconnected, both on technical and philosophical levels. The discussion remains an open and fertile question.

2. WHEN DANCE SPEAKS THROUGH MOVEMENT

The study now turns to two prominent contemporary choreographers: Marlene Monteiro Freitas²⁶ from Portugal and Germaine Acogny²⁷ from Senegal. Despite differing biographies, both share a vision of dance rooted in cultural tradition and oriented toward new possibilities of artistic expression. Their choreographic approaches can be analyzed through the philosophical frameworks of José Gil and Susanne

²⁵ GIL, J. *The Dancer’s Body*. In MASSUMI, B. *A Shock to Thought: Expressions after Deleuze and Guattari*. New York: Routledge, 2002, pp. 117–120.

²⁶ Marlene Monteiro Freitas is a renowned dancer and choreographer, known for her distinctive aesthetic influenced by the carnival traditions of her home country. Her work is characterized by openness, heterogeneity, and intensity, often exploring metamorphosis and deformation, thereby prompting audiences to reconsider their perceptions. For more, see *KEY PERFORMANCE*. In *Marlene Monteiro Freitas*. ©2024. [online]. [cit. 18 December 2024]. Available at: <https://www.keyperformance.se>.

²⁷ Germaine Acogny is a Senegalese dancer and choreographer, often referred to as the mother of contemporary African dance. She developed her own technique of modern African dance, which combines traditional African dances with elements of Western ballet and contemporary dance. For more, see *Germaine Acogny*. In *The Kennedy Center*. ©2024. [online]. [cit. 18 December 2024]. Available at: <https://www.kennedy-center.org/artists/a/aa-an/germaine-acogny/?utm>.

K. Langer, particularly with regard to symbolic gesture and energetic articulation. Marlene Monteiro Freitas focuses on expressivity, aligning with José Gil's conception of the body as a dynamic field of energies. Her choreographies transform space into emotionally charged environments, where each movement articulates a tension between body, mind, and surroundings: "Characters and fictions. Or images and fantasies. The elements of a piece link together like a dream, forming intense, sometimes contradictory relationships, lending themselves to multiple interpretations. As they combine, coexist, and permeate one another, they open up new pathways – or eventually suffocate them. Sometimes both. Both the performance – gesture work – and the sequencing of stage situations, i.e., the compositional structures, follow a specific musicality and rhythm. These often partially determine the possible meanings of the compositions."²⁸ Marlene Monteiro Freitas extends the meaning of gesture as a symbolic expression of emotion, much like Susanne K. Langer, who sees dance as a dynamic image of forces and affects that exceed the dancer's physical boundaries. Through grotesque elements, Freitas disrupts traditional aesthetic norms, allowing audiences to perceive dance on new emotional and perceptual levels.

Marlene Monteiro Freitas's work resonates with the philosophical ideas of José Gil and Susanne K. Langer, especially concerning corporeality, movement, and expressivity. José Gil describes the body as a dynamic field of energies, transformed through movement and spatial relations. Marlene Monteiro Freitas embodies this view in choreographies marked by extreme expressivity, carnivalesque grotesqueness, and bodily deformation. Her dance becomes a visual manifestation of José Gil's theory of energetic maps, in which the body does not merely occupy space but actively reshapes it through movement, tension, and rhythm. The expressive deformation of the body in her work intensifies this mapping, turning the body into a charged field of force.

Marlene Monteiro Freitas's choreography can also be interpreted through Susanne K. Langer's theory, which views dance as a symbolic language expressing emotions and vital forces. Susanne K. Langer asserts that dance is not a representation of reality, but a dynamic image whose essence unfolds in performance. This conception resonates with Freitas's use of virtual gestures, distortion, and fragmentation. Like Susanne K. Langer, Marlene Monteiro Freitas creates a dance language that transcends the body, symbolizing ongoing transformation and inner tension. Both thinkers critique traditional dance aesthetics, conceiving of dance as an autonomous system of expression. Freitas furthers this notion by dismantling classical dance norms through grotesquerie and contrasts between controlled and uncontrolled gestures. In doing so, she forges a performative language that integrates José Gil's theory of intensification and Susanne K. Langer's symbolic form, positioning her choreography at the intersection of philosophy, aesthetics, and performative experimentation – a space where corporeality, space, and rhythm are questioned and reinvented.

28 ACOGNY, G. – JOWET, J. Ageless: Interview with Germaine Acogny. In *Yorkshire Dance*, 6 June 2022. [online]. [cit. 26 January 2025]. Available at: <https://yorkshiredance.com/news/ageless-interview-with-germaine-acogny>.

Germaine Acogny draws on her African heritage, merging modern techniques with traditional African dance to embody José Gil's energetic map. Her movement aesthetics emphasize continuity and ritual elements, aligning with Susanne K. Langer's concept of virtual gesture. Germaine Acogny demonstrates how dance can transcend cultural and geographical boundaries to become a universal language: "You can expect to transform your body to become part of nature. Nature has many beautiful movements – for instance, you can dance like a buffalo or a deer. Specifically, we study animals and trees from Senegal; for both types of trees, I have developed beautiful movements. This helps dancers grow with their own bodily dance language."²⁹ Her approach, combining physical intensity, symbolic depth, and a strong connection to space, reveals philosophical parallels with both José Gil and Susanne K. Langer.

In his studies, José Gil emphasizes the body as an intensive field in which energy continuously circulates and transforms space. This resonates with Germaine Acogny's technique of integrating movement, breath, and inner energy. For her, the body is not merely a representational instrument but an active medium that forges new relationships between dancer, space, and spectator. Her choreography, rooted in ritual dance, exemplifies José Gil's view of dance as a process of bodily transformation and of rewriting meaning through somatic experience.

Germaine Acogny's work also aligns with Susanne K. Langer, who conceives of dance as a dynamic image of vital forces expressing inner experience through rhythm and movement. Germaine Acogny avoids concrete narrative structures, focusing instead on universal symbols and archetypal gestures. Her dancing body does not represent characters or stories; rather, it translates experience into a mobile symbolic language.

Both José Gil and Susanne K. Langer understand dance as a transgressive act – one that exceeds boundaries. Germaine Acogny embodies this in her fusion of traditional African and modern European dance. For Gil, dance transcends the physical and symbolic limits of the body – a notion reflected in Acogny's technique, which expands natural bodily energy. Langer conceives of dance as a balance between formal order and expressive gesture, a dynamic that Acogny masterfully realizes in choreographies that allow for improvisation and personal interpretation. Her work affirms both philosophical positions: the body as a field of movement, and dance as a symbolic language that links past and present, tradition and innovation.

Marlene Monteiro Freitas and Germaine Acogny, each in their own way, expand the understanding of dance as a language. Freitas does so through expressive deformation; Acogny through the fusion of tradition and modernity. Both demonstrate that dance is a complex medium of communication that transcends verbal articulation. Freitas's bodily deformation intensifies José Gil's energetic mapping, while Acogny's fluidity echoes Susanne K. Langer's virtual gesture imbued with cultural and emotional resonance. Their work not only affirms but also enriches Gil's and

29 ACOGNY, G. – JOWET, J. Ageless: Interview with Germaine Acogny. In *Yorkshire Dance*, 6 June 2022.

Langer's theories by offering new perspectives on dance as a convergence of energy, space, and symbolism – a mode of meaning that operates beyond the reach of verbal language.

However, applying theoretical frameworks to the work of Marlene Monteiro Freitas and Germaine Acogny requires a deeper engagement with their artistic strategies. Both choreographers reflect postcolonial identity in their work, and their dance languages can be interpreted as dynamic corporeal scores through which they articulate cultural belonging, historical memory, and resistance to dominant representational discourses. Rather than merely ascribing José Gil's and Susanne K. Langer's theories to their work, it is more productive to analyze how these artists transform bodily signs – gestures, rhythms, and spatial lines – into a meaningful language that cannot be definitively deciphered, but instead opens new epistemological terrains. It is in this multiplicity that the theoretical intelligibility of the body and dance becomes actualized – contextualized, politically sensitive, and culturally performative.

CONCLUSION

Dance constitutes a unique language through which not only emotions but also the deeper affective strata of human experience – often inaccessible to verbal articulation – can be expressed. In the philosophies of José Gil and Susanne K. Langer, dance emerges as a form of symbolic, corporeal, and spatial expression in which gesture serves as the key to understanding the internal and external forces that shape our perception.

José Gil emphasizes the energetic continuity and variability of the body as a medium of movement that, through quasi-articulation, transcends the limits of language while simultaneously producing semantic fields. Susanne K. Langer introduces the concept of the virtual gesture as a symbolic form that objectifies subjective experience, allowing dance to be perceived as a dynamic image of affects and emotions.

The contemporary choreographic approaches of Marlene Monteiro Freitas and Germaine Acogny demonstrate that dance can simultaneously function as a cultural, philosophical, and aesthetic language – linking space, body, and meaning. Whether through grotesque expressivity or ritual symbolism, dance reveals its capacity to move between the subjective and collective, between tradition and innovation.

This study confirms the thesis that dance cannot be reduced to a movement schema or aesthetic form; it is a mutable language of gesture, energy, and rhythm through which experience may be shared and embodied in ways that surpass words. It is precisely this capacity that renders dance not only an artistic expression, but a tool of understanding and profound communication – within a space that is always both physical and symbolic.

Merce Cunningham once claimed that dance can change a person's life, because the moment one begins to dance – regardless of age or reason – one becomes aware, through movement, of truly being alive. This idea aptly captures the existential

dimension of dance: in movement, we not only become present in the moment, but rediscover our own bodies as spaces of energy, affect, and dynamic being.

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