

# Editorial

## Eros and Thanatos – Bodies in Dance

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If eros designates those generative impulses within us that affirm and preserve life, and thanatos the latent drive toward death and dissolution, then how might we interrogate these antithetical yet entwined forces through the lens of somaesthetics? The term flesh—as distinct from body—invites us to reflect upon the ceaseless tension and intimacy between eros and thanatos: a dialectic in which vitality and finitude, desire and decay, define and delimit one another. In contrast, the notion of body—objectified, dissectible, the concern of biomedical inquiry—lacks this existential resonance. Most significantly, somaesthetics, in naming the soma, invokes neither the inert body nor the theological connotations of the flesh, but rather the lived, perceptive, and purposive corporeality of human existence.

As Shusterman (2014) clarifies, soma is preferred precisely “to avoid problematic associations of body (which can be a lifeless, mindless thing) and flesh (which designates only the fleshly parts of the body and is strongly associated with Christian notions of sin)” and to underscore that the somaesthetic project “concerns the lived, sentient, purposive body rather than merely a physical body.” The contributions to this special issue, then, constitute an exploration of the tension and interrelation between eros and thanatos through a distinctly somaesthetic prism—with dance, as a privileged modality of embodied expression, occupying a central position.

The issue opens with Eric Mullis’ insightful inquiry, “Reconstruction in Dance Somaesthetics”, which draws upon Shusterman’s initial taxonomy of somaesthetic branches and applies this framework to the domain of performative inquiry. Mullis raises two interrelated questions: How is embodied experimental inquiry presently conceived and practiced within dance studies? And what does this mean for the methodological foundations of dance research? Rather than focus narrowly on representations of eros or thanatos in choreography, Mullis turns our attention to the epistemological and ethical architectures of research-creation itself. Drawing from direct engagement with contemporary dance practice, Mullis argues persuasively for a reconstruction of dance somaesthetics—one that is attuned to current choreographic thinking, modes of collaboration, and artistic rigor.

Christian Kronsted’s “Still Not About Sex — Vernacular Dance, Attention, Affect, and Self-Organization” offers a critical rejoinder to the prevalent evolutionary narrative that casts vernacular dance as an instrument of sexual selection. Mobilizing insights from dynamic systems theory, phenomenology, and embodied cognition, Kronsted displaces this reductive view, proposing instead that vernacular dance emerges from a deeply embodied drive for connection and equilibrium—both intra- and intercorporeal. In doing so, he repositions dance as a site of autopoietic regulation, rather than as mere display within a reproductive economy. “Foraging Amid Perplexity: Queer Pragmatism, Neuropragmatism, and the Erotic Arts” also expands on the notion of *ars erotica*.

With evocative lyricism, Katy Oliver's "Butterflies in the Flames: Romantic Ballet and the Spectacle of the Burning Ballerina" brings into focus the spectral presence of the ballerina in the Romantic tradition—both exalted and extinguished, a paradoxical figure at once virtuosic and vanishing. Her paper meditates on the aesthetics of decay, revealing how the image of the burning ballerina becomes a locus for the uncanny beauty of bodies poised on the threshold between vitality and dissolution. Oliver invites us to consider the haunting power of the dance-body, which, even in its moment of perfection, calls forth our gaze toward its inevitable disappearance.

In "Eros and Thanatos Entwined: Somaesthetic Explorations in Kunqu Dance," Xueting Luo turns to the classical Chinese operatic form of Kunqu to examine how the movement vocabulary of *The Peony Pavilion* embodies the dialectic of eros and thanatos. Luo reflects on how emotional commitment, embedded in the interweaving of poetry, music, and dance, shapes the soma in accordance with traditional Chinese aesthetics. Her work illuminates how Kunqu's dance articulates existential tensions, offering fertile ground for further somaesthetic theorization.

Pooja Sunil and Vinod Balakrishnan's "Somaesthetics and Dance: The Convergence of Bharatanatyam and Yoga in *Kundalini Pattu*" elaborates a nuanced somaesthetic analysis of *Kundalini Pattu: A Dance-Yoga*, a work that seeks to embody the regenerative powers of Kundalini and the cyclical movement from death to renewed life. Framing her discussion through Shusterman's tripartite structure of analytic, pragmatic, and practical somaesthetics, Sunil evaluates two performances of the piece—one by Guru Reshmi Narayanan, the other by her students—demonstrating how the disciplined cultivation of the soma undergirds both aesthetic refinement and spiritual transformation in Bharatanatyam.

The paper "Nietzsche and Freud: A Pandora's Box of Transgressive Contemporary Art" by Pedro Salinas-Quintana, Valentina Molina Fuentealba, Paola Rodriguez, and Belén del Cid, traverses the philosophical and psychoanalytic terrain shaped by Nietzsche, Freud, and Bataille, investigating how these thinkers inform the aesthetics of contemporary transgressive art. Salinas-Quintana et al. illuminates how sublimation, repression, and the eroticization of taboo serve as undercurrents in both visual and performative arts, particularly in dance. Dance emerges here as a privileged medium of corporeal excess, rupture, and liberation—a space in which the limits of representation and subjectivity are provocatively renegotiated.

Nora Horváth's "Desire and Eroticism on the Stage of Pál Frenák" offers a profound meditation on the ineffability of erotic experience and the ways in which choreographer Pál Frenák captures its emotional and ontological intensity. Through choreographic situations where bodies do not touch and yet resonate with deep affective bonds, Frenák stages the unspeakable dimensions of desire. Horváth invokes Bataille's claim that "erotic experience will commit us to silence," arguing that Frenák's work gestures toward precisely that liminal zone where language falters and embodied expression takes precedence. The soma, in these works, becomes the bearer of truths irreducible to conceptuality.

Tomasz Gil in "Erotics in Lacan's Schema L" draws on Lacanian theory to examine how desire shapes the subject. Gil provides an exposition on how, in Lacan's view, desire emerges as a sense of lack when the subject enters the symbolic order—society structured by language—leaving behind the primal closeness of the maternal world. Once within this symbolic system, desire is formed and mediated through language, residing in the unconscious. Lacan's model offers tools to understand how desire functions both internally and socially, particularly through

speech and its relation to the “Big Other.” Other dimensions, like imagination, sublimation, and unconscious drives, guide the subject toward the Real—a lost, pre-symbolic state linked to the maternal. These dynamics are mapped in Lacan’s Schema L, which highlights the role of language in structuring subjectivity. Gil’s paper focuses on how erotic experience fits into that structure, specifically through the interaction between the Real and object *a* (*objet petit a*). It further explores how performance—especially dance—can be situated within this framework to better understand the role of erotics in artistic expressio

Finally, Bernadett Jobbágy’s “Somatic Composition and Embodied Filmmaking – A Case Study on Practice and Practitioners through the Example of a Creative Lab” concludes the issue with a compelling case study that bridges somatic dance practices and experimental film-making. Drawing from the Creative Lab held in Tallinn in 2024, Jobbágy examines how Body-Mind Centering® informed participants’ creative processes in both movement and cinematography. The paper offers valuable reflections from both facilitators and participants, illustrating how somatic methodologies foster collaborative inquiry, embodied expression, and artistic innovation across media.

Together, these contributions illuminate the many ways in which the soma—understood as the sentient, expressive, and reflexive body—mediates the tensions between eros and thanatos, vitality and decline, desire and disappearance, and by means that include an engagement with both the theoretical and dance practice. As a whole, this special issue affirms that dance, in its many forms and traditions, provides a particularly rich field for somaesthetic exploration, wherein philosophy, performance, and the body conjoin in the search for meaning at the edge of being.

