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Understanding dance and its non-human agency in Ekman's "A Swan Lake"

17 dicembre 2024, pp. 139-158

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.6092/issn.2036-1599/20943>

Section: Studi [peer reviewed]



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Abstract

Questo articolo esamina *A Swan Lake* (2014) di Alexander Ekman alla luce dei nuovi materialismi, tra cui un lago di 6.000 litri sul palco che ridefinisce il movimento e la narrazione del balletto. Rifacendosi al concetto di *intra-action* di Barad (2003) e alla nozione di *thing-power* di Bennett (2010), il film esplora l'acqua come agente attivo che trasforma le tecniche e le esperienze somatiche dei danzatori. La prima parte parodia l'eredità del *Lago dei cigni*, combinando l'ironia con la conoscenza scientifica del comportamento dei cigni. Il secondo atto esplora l'imprevedibile materialità dell'acqua e offre nuove possibilità coreografiche. Ekman offre una prospettiva postumanista che integra la materialità umana e quella non umana.

This article examines Alexander Ekman's *A Swan Lake* through new materialisms, focusing on how the introduction of a 6,000-liter lake redefines movement and narrative in ballet. Drawing on Barad's (2003) concept of *intra-action* and Bennett's (2010) notion of *thing-power*, it explores water as an active agent that transforms the dancers' techniques and somatic experiences. The first act parodies the legacy of *Swan Lake*, blending irony with scientific insights into swan behavior. The second act shifts to an immersive exploration of water's materiality, where its unpredictability creates new choreographic possibilities. By integrating human and non-human materialities, Ekman creates a multisensory experience that challenges traditional representations, offering a posthumanist perspective.

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Introduction

This paper examines dance through the lens of new materialisms, using Alexander Ekman's *A Swan Lake* – which premiered on 26 April 2014 by The Norwegian National Ballet at the Oslo Opera House in 2014 – as a case study. By analyzing Ekman's work, this study systematically explores how the materiality of the dancing body intersects with interdisciplinary discursive frameworks, including Anthropology, Postcolonial Studies, and Ecocriticism. The primary focus is to investigate how the introduction of a lake in the second act transforms the possibilities for movement and narrative within the ballet.

Rosi Braidotti is one of the first scholars to coin the term "new materialisms"¹. She critiques the legacy of Cartesian subjectivity and the construction of the human as a white, heterosexual male. Braidotti challenges the nature-culture dichotomy and emphasizes the vitality of matter, both human and non-human. She suggests focusing on what matter does, rather than what it is, by considering its interactions and capacities. Jane Bennett² extends this notion by arguing that things are not passive objects but active entities that produce effects, underscoring the power of non-human materialities in shaping our world. Similarly, Karen Barad³, contends that matter plays an integral role in the formation of bodies and identities. Barad proposes that matter contributes to the material production of bodies, challenging the dominance of linguistic and discursive constructs in shaping identity. She emphasizes that material encounters are crucial for the emergence of new possibilities and actions.

Jussi Parikka⁴ suggests exploring materialities that elude human perception, such as technolo-

1. Rossi Braidotti, *El conocimiento posthumano*, Gedisa, Barcelona 2020.

2. Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, Duke UP, Durham 2010.

3. Karen Barad, *Posthumanist Performativity: Toward an Understanding of How Matter Comes to Matter*, in «Signs: Journal of women in culture and society», vol. XXVIII, n. 3, 2003, pp. 801-831.

4. Jussi Parikka, *New Materialism as Media Theory: Medianatures and Dirty Matter*, in «Communication and Critical/

gical artifacts and networks, and considers their role in media theory. Parikka's work highlights how power is embedded in these often-invisible materialities. Additionally, Mónica Cano Abadía⁵ reviews new materialist thought and connects it with Spinoza's monist materialism. She posits that nature and culture are not separate but part of a continuous relationship. Cano Abadía adopts Grosz's view of nature as an active force rather than a passive object, arguing that humans should recognize themselves as a part of this continuum rather than as separate controllers of nature.

Therefore, this analysis will center on how the convergence of human and non-human materialities, specifically the integration of water, generates new forms of movement and contributes to the choreographic composition of the ballet. This investigation seeks to answer the following question: how does the lake's presence in the second act reconfigure the movement and narrative possibilities of *A Swan Lake*? By exploring this, the paper aims to reveal how the ballet's discursive practices are reimagined through the dynamic interplay between water and bodies.

The following sections provide a historical overview of *Swan Lake* and its adaptations. This is preceded by a theoretical discussion of the new materialisms, dance and water. Afterwards there will be presented the approach to analyze the ballet, hand in hand with a description of the ballet. In doing so, a discussion will be established around the study of animality, the dance of water, the everyday in the work, the question of (re)presentation and the agency of materiality.

Swans dancing in the lake

In 19th century Imperial Russia, Tsar Alexander III sought to promote local culture in order to distance the nation from the European influence that had been incorporated into the country since the time of Peter the Great⁶. Within this context, the Imperial Theatres hired Russian composers such as the famous Pëtr Il'ič Čajkovskij (Пётр Чайковский), and thus began to work together with the Imperial choreographer Marius Petipa as well as the director and scriptwriter Ivan Aleksandrovič Vsevoložskij (Иван Александрович Всеволожский). Their first work together was the ballet *The Sleeping Beauty*, premiered at the Mariinskij Theatre in St. Petersburg on January 15 in 1890 and considered «thus the first truly Russian ballet»⁷.

However, in the mid-1870s Čajkovskij had previously composed *Swan Lake* ballet in Moscow on commission from Vladimir Petrovič Begičev (Владимир Петрович Бегичев) for the Bolšoj Ballet

Cultural Studies», vol. IX, n. 1, 2012, pp. 95-100.

5. María Cano Abadía, *Nuevos materialismos: hacia feminismos no dualistas*, in «Oxímora. Revista Internacional de Ética y Política», n. 7, 2015, pp. 34-47.

6. For a more detailed analysis of the history of Russian ballet see: Jennifer Homans, *Apollo's Angels: a history of ballet*, Random House, New York 2010, pp. 245-395.

7. *Ivi*, p. 277.

and choreographed by Julius Reisinger. The *Swan Lake* was premiered on 4 March 1877 by the Bol'šoj Ballet at the Bol'šoj Theatre in Moscow. According to Homans⁸, Begičev may have been inspired by Wagner's *Lohengrin* to create the ballet, drawing on the medieval German tradition which abounds with tales of people being transformed into swans and of tragic if not heroic encounters with their lovers.

The original libretto tells the story of the young Odette, tormented by her cruel stepmother, as she lives with other maidens in a lake of tears. They are swans by day, but at night return to their human form to freely dance and the only way to break the spell is by marriage. Prince Siegfried falls in love with Odette while hunting near the lake, but later he is deceived by the stepmother with an impostor: a black swan posing as his lover. When he realises his mistake, he searches for Odette, but it is too late and together they drown in the flood of the lake of tears.

Almost two decades later, Čajkovskij and Vsevoložskij contemplated producing the ballet again, but the composer died (1893) before seeing the ballet in St. Petersburg. With the libretto revised by Čajkovskij's brother Modest (МОДЕСТ ИЛЬИЧ ЧАЙКОВСКИЙ) and joint choreography by Marius Petipa (Act 1, Scene 1 and Act 2) and Lev Ivanovič Ivanov (ЛЕВ ИВАНОВИЧ ИВАНОВ) (Act 1, Scene 2 and Act 3), the ballet was premiered with the Imperial Ballet at the Mariinskij Theatre (St. Petersburg) on 15 January 1895. Petipa «took responsibility for the court scenes but delegated the more lyrical and introspective lakeside dances to his Russian colleague Ivanov»⁹. It is especially the latter choreographer who is responsible for the lake scenes¹⁰, the dancers' movements, the characteristic position of the arms and the use of rather simple moves in the space create an atmosphere resembling the flight of birds; hence an animalistic mobility.

Modest's script replaced the stepmother with Rothbart, the sorcerer who controls Odette. It also gave the ballet a heavenly ending to the tragic love of Odette and Siegfried¹¹. This version remains to the present day and is staged in different parts of the world, although local and contextual variations are also incorporated. In a Soviet Russia Konstantin Sergeev (КОНСТАНТИН МИХАЙЛОВИЧ СЕРГЕЕВ) produced a happy ending's *Swan Lake* on 8 March 1950 with the Kirov Ballet at the Mariinskij Theatre (St. Petersburg)¹², by making «the sorcerer die and agonizing death so the lovers could be blissfully joined not in heaven but here on earth»¹³.

Different versions have also been created in which the storyline is challenged by questioning

8. *Ivi*, pp. 281-282.

9. *Ivi*, p. 284.

10. Ana Abad Carles, *History of Ballet and Modern Dance*, Alianza, Madrid 2017, p. 134.

11. «Modest kept the flood but modified the ending, introducing a melodramatic double suicide: Odette throws herself into the lake and Siegfried stabs himself. In subsequent revisions things got softer and sweeter» (Jennifer Homans, *Apollo's Angels: a history of ballet*, cit., p. 283).

12. For details of Sergeev version visit: <https://www.mariinsky-theatre.com/performance/swanlake-mar/> (u.v. 4/9/2024).

13. Jennifer Homans, *Apollo's Angels: a history of ballet*, cit., p. 365.

masculinity. An example of this is Jurij Grigorovič's (Юрий Николаевич Григорович) version created in 1969. «*New Swan Lake*, recast (he said) as a psychological struggle between good and evil told from a masculine point of view»¹⁴, in which Siegfried and Rothbart are the protagonists of the romance. However, this work was censored by the Ministry of Culture of the USSR before it premiered. Another piece that pushes heteronormative boundaries is one of Matthew Bourne's ballet, first performed on 9 November 1995 with Adventures in Motion Pictures dance company at the Sadler's Wells theatre in London, where the swans are all male and the original love story is modified by incorporating a homosexual romance between Siegfried and the swan-king¹⁵.

Marcia Haydée's *Swan Lake*¹⁶, premiered in 2009 by the Royal Ballet of Flanders, gives a new reading to the story by giving a leading role to Rothbart's character and highlighting his animality through movements that are closer to contemporary dance. Besides the updated and innovative versions of this ballet, there have been works that take *Swan Lake* as a reference including Michail Michajlovič Fokin's (Михаил Михайлович Фокин) *Dying Swan*¹⁷ set to Saint-Saëns's *The Carnival of the Animals* musical suite. This piece was first performed by Anna Pavlova (Анна Павлова) on December 22, 1905, at the Nobleman's Hall in St. Petersburg, and later premiered in 1907 at the Imperial Mariinskij Theatre. On the other hand, Balanchine did a work of recovery of Čajkovskij's original composition for a *pas de deux* in the second act. Resulting in the *Čajkovskij Pas de Deux* 8-minute piece, premiered on 29 March 1960 by the New York City Ballet at the City Center in New York¹⁸.

Karl Wilhelm Alexander Ekman (born 1984) is a renowned Swedish ballet dancer and choreographer. He received his formal training at the Royal Swedish Ballet School from 1994 to 2001, beginning his professional dance career at the Royal Swedish Opera (2001-2002) before joining Nederlands Dans Theater II (2002-2005) and later, the Cullberg Ballet (2005-2006), where he made his debut as a choreographer. His choreography gained early recognition with the piece *The Swingle Sisters* (2005), which earned a prize at the International Choreographic Competition in Hannover. He continued to establish his reputation with *Unknown Art?*, created for the Cullberg Ballet's *Växtverk project* and performed in Stockholm and Malmö in April 2006. Another notable work from this period is *Flockwork*, which premiered on November 26, 2006, with Nederlands Dans Theater II at the Lucent Dans Theater in The Hague. In 2010, Ekman expanded his choreographic repertoire with new

14. *Ivi*, p. 390.

15. For a detailed study of this ballet see: Rita Maria Fabris, *Femminile/Maschile nel corpo danzante: "Il lago dei cigni"*, in «Danza e ricerca. Laboratorio di studi, scritture, visioni», n. 4, 2013, pp. 31-56.

16. This version was performed between 2010 and 2018 at the Opera Nacional de Chile with the Ballet de Santiago, which Marcia Haydée directed for 16 years.

17. For further details visit: <https://detroitopera.org/four-minutes-a-dying-swan-anna-pavlova-and-becoming-the-symbol-of-the-new-russian-ballet/> (u.v. 4/9/2024).

18. For further details see: <https://www.balanchine.com/Ballet/tschaikovsky-pas-de-deux> (u.v. 4/9/2024).

works such as *La La Land* for the Göteborg Ballet and a piece for Cedar Lake Contemporary Ballet in New York. His celebrated work *Cacti*, created for NDT II in the winter of 2010, was notably gifted by Her Majesty Queen Beatrix of the Netherlands to the Oslo Opera during a state visit¹⁹.

Furthering his exploration of innovative dance, he premiered *Tyll* on April 27, 2012, at the Royal Swedish Opera in Stockholm, and *Tuplet* on May 22, 2012, at the Joyce Theater in New York. In 2014, Alexander Ekman was invited by the Oslo Opera House to create a ballet and he decided to do it on water with a 6000 liters pool, so he chose to do a new version of Swan Lake with the emphasis on the lake. Ekman created his reinterpretation of *Swan Lake*, this was his first collaboration with the Swedish composer Mikael Karlsson and with renowned fashion designer Henrik Vibskov. The designer later adapted the choreography from the ballet for his fall collection, which was showcased during Fashion Week in Paris and Copenhagen. Notably, Ekman transformed the stage into a real lake, filling it with 6000 liters of water. Act I tells the story of the original ballet as a parody and with a metanarrative approach, before proposing a new presentation of this Swan's lake. In the second act, the stage is transformed into a lake, with water being given a leading role, thereby creating the script in a swing from a more abstract thematic to everyday experiences with water.

The ballet featured a distinguished cast, including Camilla Spidsøe Cohen as the White Swan, Melissa Hough as the Black Swan, Philip Currell as Siegfried, Fridtjov Såheim as The Producer, Elisabeth Teige as The Diva, Jan Gunnar Røise as The Artist, and Clair Constant as The Ornithologist. The music, composed by Mikael Karlsson with orchestration by Karlsson and Michael Atkinson, includes references to Čajkovskij's original *Swan Lake* score. The production was filmed in high-definition in May 2014, with Per Kristian Skalstad conducting the Norwegian National Opera Orchestra. The creative team also included Tom Visser (lighting design), Karlsson and Ekman (sound design), and T.M. Rives (video projections). The production was directed for television by Jeff Tudor, with Adrienne Liron and Anne Røthing serving as producers. *A Swan Lake* was released in 2014, further solidifying Ekman's reputation as a groundbreaking choreographer²⁰.

19. Alexander Ekman, online: https://cullberg.com/en/personal_portraits/alexander-ekman/ (u.v. 4/9/2024).

20. His full-length ballet *Midsummer Night's Dream*, score by Mikael Karlsson. debuted on April 17, 2015, with the Royal Swedish Ballet. In 2016, he introduced *Cow*, a 90-minute ballet in one act with a score by Mikael Karlsson, for the Dresden Semperoper Ballet. This was followed by *Play*, a full-evening ballet in two acts also with a score by Karlsson, premiering on December 2, 2017, with the Paris Opera Ballet. In 2018, he performed his own choreography in *Thoughts on Bergman* at the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées in Paris. *Escapist* the 2019 production for the Royal Swedish Ballet featured a hypnotic score by Mikael Karlsson, further cementing his reputation for blending contemporary themes with classical ballet techniques. His most recent work, *Hammer*, a 90-minute dance piece in two acts, premiered on October 29, 2022, with the Gothenburg Opera Dance Company and was brought back for the company's 2024 season. Ekman's choreographic work is distinguished by its dynamic integration of contemporary themes with classical ballet techniques, often incorporating innovative stage elements and deep collaboration with composers like Mikael Karlsson. His contributions continue to influence the landscape of contemporary ballet and dance.

Materiality, water, dance

For an approach to the link between dance and new materialisms, Marie Bardet's proposal²¹ is fundamental. The author argues that dance is neither a mere objective description of movement in reference to the environment, nor a copy or code to be translated. Dance would be a language of movement in itself that articulates images through rhythm, breaths and sounds; weaving the senses of ongoing corporealities, but not only those of the dancer but also those of other bodies with which he or she interacts. To speak of images, Bardet bases her argument on Bergson's understanding of the body as an image: a place of passage between sensation and action, of tension between perceptions and actions, where movement takes on meaning. While Tambutti mentions that the questioning of the power exercised by the word over body language was accompanied by a redirection of the gaze towards the dancer's body²² and a reflection on the possibilities of movement. Therefore, the concept of image allows us to dissolve that binarism between word and body language. Given that images are not intelligible representations, nor do they stand as pure sensations, but, halfway between the two, they are disposed in the attitude of capturing the tendencies of matter in movement²³.

The problem of representation in dance is introduced: would it be a copy and reference subject to reality or a different reality? According to Bardet, rather than a projection of reality, it would be a matter of moving skimming of reality²⁴. Understanding dance as an image, it is a situation halfway between sensation and representation, whose dynamism forces movement and composes it by articulating it. This approach allows us to understand dance as a doing rather than a static sign, as Merleau-Ponty²⁵ states that the phenomenal place of the body is defined by the task and situation in which it finds itself, that is why it can also be understood as a system of possible actions. It is important to remember that for Merleau-Ponty the body is the vehicle of perception and the expressive unit that makes us part of the world, meaning the common sensory texture that we share with all objects (non-human bodies).

In the context of dance, it is important to note that the task and situation are choreographed, but they also respond to a particular material surface on which the body is situated and configuring a specific materiality. It is not the same to dance barefoot as to dance on pointe or half-pointe, these elements are materialities that restructure mobility and therefore structure different techniques, which in turn provoke a different bodily materiality. According to Rita Maria Fabris, the analysis of the body

21. Marie Bardet, *Pensar con mover: un encuentro entre filosofía y danza*, Cactus, Buenos Aires 2012.

22. Susana Tambutti, *Itinerarios teóricos de la danza*, in «Aisthesis», n. 43, 2008, pp. 11-26: p. 21.

23. Marie Bardet, *Pensar con mover: un encuentro entre filosofía y danza*, cit., p. 178.

24. *Ivi*, p. 19.

25. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *La fenomenología de la percepción*, Península, Barcelona 1975.

as a cultural object, decipherable on the basis of the interpretation of codes and conventions through which it acts, finds in dance a privileged field of study because the dancing body comes to constitute a specific source in the analysis of social practices as an embodiment²⁶. In her words, to narrate a thinking/being in the world through the communicative immediacy of the body, a symbol that speaks of itself and opens up a horizon of common sense²⁷.

To understand the configuration of these different types of mobility and materiality of the body, the somatechnics proposed by Nikki Sullivan are helpful. The author defines this as «The inextricability of soma and techné, of bodily-being-in-the world, and the dispositifs in and through which corporealities, identities and difference(s) are formed and transformed, come to matter, if you like»²⁸. It is important to clarify that he means technique in a Heideggerian sense, i.e. as orientations learned in a particular tradition or ontological context and with a particular function for doing²⁹. This can be made more explicitly meaningful in dance, by being able to recognise classical technique and distinguish it from modern or contemporary technique, it can be observed how a certain mobility (orientation) learned in a particular style (ontological context) leads to dancers moving in a specific way. Following this, Sullivan defines perception as «The vehicle and effect of a particular situated somatechnics»³⁰. Going a step further than Merleau-Ponty's approach, not only is the world perceived through the body, but this perception responds to a specific somatic technique. So, we can say that dancers learn to perceive their bodies in a distinctive way through the material technique in which and through which they move.

In this sense, the ballet slippers themselves (or the absence of them) would have an agency because they configure a possible mobility and trigger a series of (more or less favourable) movements. This agency of things is what Jane Bennet understands as thing-power, «The curious ability of inanimate things to animate, to act, to produce effects dramatic and subtle»³¹. A more concrete example is the case of Marie Taglioni, the first ballerina in history to use the pointe and according to Homans³² opened up a new range of movements and ideas in ballet.

Another concept that allows us to understand the relationship between the dancing body and its environment is that of "posthumanist performativity" proposed by Karen Barad. The author understands that matter forms an active part in the becoming of the world and seeks to explain the material production of bodies, taking away the hierarchy of the discursive-linguistic component of

26. Rita Maria Fabris, *Femminile/Maschile nel corpo danzante: "Il lago dei cigni"*, cit., p. 32.

27. *Ivi*, p. 38.

28. Nikki Sullivan, *The somatechnics of perception and the matter of the non/human: A critical response to the new materialism*, in «European Journal of Women's Studies», vol. XIX, n. 3, 2012, pp. 299-313: p. 302.

29. Martin Heidegger, *Ser y tiempo*, Editorial Universitaria de Chile, Santiago 2022.

30. *Ivi*, p. 302.

31. Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, cit., p. 6.

32. Jennifer Homans, *Apollo's Angels: a history of ballet*, cit., p. 143.

their construction. We can recall that dance has been considered as a body that delivers codes that must be decoded by the viewer. However, Barad gives us the key to think of dance as a “discursive practice”, understanding it as a «Specific material (re)configurings of the world through which local determinations of boundaries, properties, and meanings are differentially enacted»³³. So, a discursive practice (dance) is not a synonym for language or what is said, but it is what enables certain things to be said. This condition of possibility of presentation results from a specific intra-action of apparatuses (agential practices), it would be a doing rather than a thing, and agency itself is a configuration rather than an attribute possessed. This view of agential realism makes it possible to understand the dynamisms of beings (human and non-human) and would be a way of understanding the variability of each dance performance; insofar as the steps danced (as a discursive practice) are composed of an intra-action between the dancer’s body and all the apparatuses with which it is linked, thus provoking a constant reconfiguration.

With regard to the performance of the dance, whether it is an old choreography or a new version, Marc Franko points out that «the idea of remains or the remainder is based on materiality, and hence cannot do without space and spatiality. [...] remainder is a proposition for space and, if it is a performative remainder, for spatial practice»³⁴. Other way of understanding the relationship between the human body and its landscape and environment that includes non-human others is through the “environmental dance” presented by Nigel Stewart³⁵. This conception is about the ability to give expression to our relationship with nature and the experience of the value embedded in this relationship; as a somatopsychological practice it offers a methodological bridge between the natural world and our own. It establishes three types of environmental dance practices: dance works that are improvised in specific places or choreographed for them, dance works that mediate an aspect of the natural world and, finally, those that have a somatic education approach.

Stewart’s approach has an empirical component, he performs dance exercises in which dancers must respond to environmental stimuli and move into a distinctive pattern, in the disposition of a non-possessive enjoyment of the environment at hand. The results of this exercise open up the concept of “limonology”, which is the way in which the boundaries of non-human states or characteristics are broken through the lived experience of the environment. A fluidity is established from the body to the environment and movement is produced in response and continuity.

Another empirical research that allows us to understand the effect and affect of the dancing

33. Karen Barad, *Posthumanist performativity: Toward an understanding of how matter comes to matter*, cit., pp. 801-831.

34. Mark Franko, *Introduction: The Power of Recall in a Post-Ephemeral Era*, in Id. (edited by), *The Oxford Handbook of Dance and Reenactment*, Oxford University Press, New York 2017, p. 3.

35. Nigel Stewart, *Dancing the Face of Place: Environmental dance and Eco-phenomenology*, in «Performance Research», vol. XV, n. 4, 2010, pp. 32-39.

body is the one carried out by Paula Montecinos, in a methodological exploration that analyses the sensitive materiality of the body as an articulating agent of meaning³⁶.

She establishes that by paying attention to the environment it is possible to encounter other entities, similar and different, allowing oneself to be affected or to intercalate inner and outer worlds. This author also incorporates the "posthuman phenomenology" of Astrida Niemadis, who presents water as a metaphor and a materiality for practising knowledge. This is understood by considering the link she establishes between body, nature and culture; remembering that our body is natural, and I may add, considering the aforementioned, that our body is matter.

Bardet says that the skin is the place where the sensitive and the distribution of supports (points of touch with surfaces) are shared, in this sensitive experience it can be perceived and related to other materialities. She also pays attention to the mobility of the body, which is experienced at the surface of the skin, where the limits of the interior and exterior are lost. This is why in dancing, the skin renounces its role of closure, of packaging, opening up, sensitively³⁷.

This theoretical journey, which incorporates different and perhaps dissonant approaches, will allow me to analyze the piece *A Swan Lake* from a materialist perspective. With special attention to the new "discursive practices" produced by the "somatic-technical" experience of dancing in the lake, in that encounter of the materiality of water and bodies, together with the agency of different para-choreographic devices that respond to the new configuration generated by that encounter.

How to analyse a swan lake?

Ekman's ballet has the particularity of reflecting on the origin of the ballet referred to in the first act and presenting a new choreography in the lake in the second act. This can be understood according to what Franko points out about reenactment, as a «rediscovery and restaging of particular past works, but also to the relationship of those works to the present in which they are reproduced»³⁸. It is therefore important to analyze the libretto and the ironic aspects with which the historical ballet is referred to. It is therefore crucial to analyze the libretto and the ironic aspects with which reference is made to the historical ballet. As well as paying attention to what is sought to replicate or what is created to reflect on the swans and the lake, the emphasis of reenactment is not on «demonstrate how the dance could be redone by simulating the original dance and the dancer's appearance; the emphasis was rather on what it was like to do it again»³⁹.

36. Paula Montecinos Oliva, *Hidrofeminismo y la práctica como investigación*, in «A.Dnz», n. 3, 2018, pp. 144-149.

37. Marie Bardet, *Pensar con mover: un encuentro entre filosofía y danza*, cit., p. 186.

38. Mark Franko, *Introduction: The Power of Recall in a Post-Ephemeral Era*, cit., p. 11.

39. *Ivi*, p. 1.

This also allows us to have as a precedent the particularity of the dance, given that each presentation has the same choreographic structure, but there is a factor of variability in the bodies of the dancers; whether due to fatigue, technical skill, ease or relationship with other surfaces, each time it is danced it is different. Cifuentes points out that the dynamic essence of dance is the source of movement, a document that lives at the moment it is performed and then exists only in the memory of those who created, performed and observed it⁴⁰. Regarding this, Franko points out that the «reenactment of dance is always already enmeshed in overlapping temporalities»⁴¹ that destabilize the chronological notion of historical time and therefore historicity in dance «is always invested in complex temporalities whose modalities are those of spatiality rather than narrative»⁴².

Moreover, as Abad said, the incorporation of audio-visual registers makes it possible to fix in another medium, other than exclusively the bodies, the performances and thanks to this dance is incorporated into this new (digital) world through which, in one click, one can observe the performances that take place on the other side of the planet⁴³ and this is my case⁴⁴. Therefore, the first clarification I must make is that my source of information is secondary, it is the recording of the première of the ballet and although it maintains an approach that replicates the gaze of the spectator in the theatre, it also incorporates other shots and perspectives inside the stage. In addition, I will use the documentary *Rare Birds* by T. M. Rives (2014) which shows and describes the creative process of the work and its staging, especially the technical elements of the construction of the lake on stage and the costume specifications that respond to the new needs of dancing in water.

In order to explore a qualitative description of the ballet and without being a work that focuses on the purely choreographic aspect of the work, but rather on the role of water and the encounter of materialities, I will take as a reference the postulates by Radoslav Ivelic⁴⁵ for an analysis of dance works and the work of Sheila Marion⁴⁶ on the different research proposals for studying a dance work. Ivelic points out that a work is composed of two languages, the primary language refers to the choreographic tensions that consider the lines and areas of projection of the body's movement and its changes of speed, and the secondary language is constituted by the narration of a story, the music, costumes, scenography and lighting. While Marion analyses the description and approach of different

40. María José Cifuentes, *Acercamientos y propuestas metodológicas para el estudio histórico y teórico de la danza*, in «Aisthesis», n. 43, 2008, pp. 85-98: p. 86.

41. Mark Franko, *Introduction: The Power of Recall in a Post-Ephemeral Era*, cit., p. 2.

42. *Ibidem*.

43. Ana Abad Carles, *Historia del ballet y la danza moderna*, Alianza, Madrid 2017, p. 14.

44. I first came across the ballet by zapping it on television until I got to a European channel in 2017 and then in pandemic I saw it again on streaming arts platforms. I have never had the opportunity to see the ballet performed live, mainly because it has never been presented in Latin America.

45. Radoslav Ivelic, *El lenguaje de la danza*, in «Aisthesis», n. 43, 2008, pp. 27-33.

46. Sheila Marion, *Studying Water Study*, in «Dance Research Journal», vol. XXIV, n. 1, 1992, pp. 1-11.

researchers to study the work *Water Study*, from which I can highlight the attention to the changes of time-space-force, which are considered as moments of major importance, and the identification of the levels (high-middle-low) at which the movements are executed.

“A Swan Lake”, draining the play

The recording of the work begins with a compilation of audiovisual archives of different performances of *Swan Lake*, all in classical style, and then gives way to what will be a new version, with a different format and approach to the ballet.

Unearthing the Swans: Act I as Archaeology and Parody

The first act of the work is more or less set in 1877, the year in which the ballet first premiered in Russia, but from the outset it plays with temporality: the pastel pink costumes of the dancers could be categorized in the style of the mid-twentieth century. Amidst the constant opening and closing of doors, people moving repetitively, a woman appears with a rifle and shoots a swan; the inert body of this animal (which is a prop) falls to the stage. She reminds us of Prince Siegfried who was hunting when he first sees his sweetheart in the form of a swan. As the choreography is replicated, with an increasing (dis)order of roles and steps, the speed of the music and movements increases, the huntress shoots again and another swan falls. Tchaikovsky is recognizable in the melody, until a storm bursts onto the stage and a new phrasing is introduced, and then the scene changes.

In a tone of parody, the creator and producer of the ballet that will become a classic are introduced, these two characters converse, between a television and a lamp that again recalls the crossing of temporalities and epochs. The choreographer hears a voice «swan» and he adds «Human dress as swans», to which his colleague replies «Ridiculous, who is going to believe that» and adds «Humans acting like birds, is not going to work my friend». In this dialogue the meta-narrative that the work establishes becomes evident, questioning the very subject matter of *Swan Lake* and the absurdity that could result from incorporating animality into dance, perhaps this happened in the first premiere given that it was not very well received. They continue to talk about the show they will put on, the producer says it must be a musical and demands a story from the choreographer. A book falls from the sky, *A Swan Lake*, which contains a German fairy tale about a prince, Sigfredo, who on his birthday must marry and flees to the forest to hunt, where he falls in love with Odette, the enchanted swan queen. As the choreographer reads the story, the stage fills with dancers, Sigfredo appears in his usual costume, while the swan-woman is represented by a cardboard with a swan with a crown drawn on it in black ink. In a movement of an erotic type that the prince makes with the cardboard, it becomes

evident that the story itself would have tinges of zoophilia, although this is questionable in the light of the present day. Then comes the character of the drag prostitute playing the role of Rothbart and she also brings a cardboard with a swan drawn on it, which would be the black swan.

Once you have the story you proceed to the search for the perfect swan movements and for this you do your research. The choreographer sits in front of the television and starts watching a documentary, which is also projected at the back of the stage. As the voice describes the behavior of these birds, three dancers appear on stage to perform the movements of the swans: long, flexible necks, arching arms and bent legs. Then a zoologist appears, who comes to add the scientific explanation of the swans, their morphology, their character and the five basic positions: neck down, submerged under water, in attack position, flying, and sleeping. Just as in classical dance there are five basic positions for standing. But this character also questions the choreographer about the intrusion and interruption that reality should have in a good story, posing the difference between imitating the movements or creating one's own swan. A line is drawn here between copying and creation that takes as its inspiration the animality of this bird, encouraging a perfect imitation of the real or the capacity to create new worlds through art.

This act will end with the transposition of dancers, in pastel pink clothes, who act as a chorus to the story and the main characters: the prince, Odette and Rothbart in costumes recognizable in any adaptation of classical ballet. With music by Čajkovskij, the corps de ballet replicates those typical ballet movements, the flapping of the arms, the half-turn, while on a stage Odette and Sigfredo embrace each other.

Flooding the dance: the lake of the second act

Set 137 years later in time (in the year of the play's *première*), the curtain opens and the dancers, wearing a special jacket, hat and shoes, stand in the 6,000-litre pool above the stage. They begin to move slowly, arms first, one foot followed by the other, they move from the neck, exploring the space. They splash a little water, then bend down to start touching it gently and staying within the same area. Gradually they expand their range of mobility, touching, sliding, sounding the water and moving faster and faster. They return to slow movements, mainly of the trunk and neck, and then fall. With an accelerated and constant rhythm, they touch the liquid surface where they are, stop for a moment and continue splashing more and more. This scene, and rather this whole act, has no correlation with previous versions of *Swan Lake*. Nor is it possible to identify a particular script or narrative; it is more about the experience of water, achieving a different stability that allows for sliding, falling, braking and splashing. This crossing of surfaces, that of the body and that of water, provokes reactions between the two and also invites new kinds of sensibilities, especially when they take the jackets and

hit them against the lake, creating an auditory but also a visual stimulus: circles are formed with the splashing drops.

In the following scene there is an encounter between swans, two dancers walk across the lake until they meet face to face; the white swan advances more smoothly and silently, while the black swan splashes violently until she reaches the center. When they meet, the latter slaps the other, then slaps the other again, and in the silence of the orchestra, the echo of the blow can be heard. In this case, it can be seen that the sensoriality of the body together with that of the water act beyond a mere response to the music, as the stamping of the dancer's foot and the noise it provokes provide the initial rhythm for the orchestra. Then they move smoothly across the lake, between *battements* and *cambrés*, gliding between medium and high levels. They are joined by other dancers who act as mirrors or rather shadows of the swans' dance, until they are alone again, face each other, fall and run. Leaving one dancer alone, splashing in the water in search of someone else, he takes water from the lake and a dancer appears on tiptoe in a colorful costume, handing him a helmet and a breastplate for protection.

In this new scene, the melody of *Swan Lake* itself is suspended, in order to give prominence to the lake and the multiple possibilities that arise in everyday life. A musician appears with wellies and rubber swans begin to fall, the dancer puts on his protective gear because more and more swans are falling until it becomes a deluge. The rhythm of the music changes and the work takes on a more humorous tone. More dancers join the stage, one of them urinates in the lake, another group brings inflatable balls with them to play with. The various relationships and uses we can establish with water are shown: watering plants, drinking it, setting up statues that function as fountains, walking a shark as if it were a dog, washing, sliding on inflatable beds, and above all splashing. This atmosphere of play and splashing is interrupted when the opera singer drops her hairdryer into the lake, causing a power cut and multiple electrocution.

After the blackout, the stage is flooded with candles that create a romantic atmosphere in which couples of dancers stroll around the lake, caress each other and even have dinner. The light comes back on, a trumpeter appears on stage and the rhythm of the music changes, the dancers celebrate and then begin to clean up, to (re)order the lake by sweeping the rubber swans out. But the playful relationship with the water is maintained, some dancers lift it up with plastic tubes and a couple ride around the lake on a swan-shaped water bike. The lights dim and the music drops, the same dancer who had been left alone after the swans' encounter remains in the middle of the lake and the dancer appears on her toes, bringing him protection again, but this time he won't need it.

In the last scene of this act, water falls from the sky (theatre ceiling) and only the sound of the drops meeting the wet floor can be heard. The dancer looks up, takes off his protection and lets his face get wet, as do the dancers who join the lake. They allow the sound of the rain to spread throughout the space. A more nostalgic music begins to play, while these modern swans get down on their

knees and begin to hit the water with their hands in a constant and harmonious rhythm: hit, hit, slide, and repeat. Increasing the intensity of the movement and the music, until they reach a point where they collapse on the surface of the water and stay there. They incorporate the swaying of the lake into their body, slowly begin to move on the lower plane, hands, neck, legs. Then they get up and remain in a *plié* position, with their neck leaning forward and their arms in a winged position.

A last act, consisting of a single scene, set another 427 years later: a robot with wings and a swan's head walks across the stage. The idea is maintained in principle, but the representations are assumed to be mutable.

Discussion: a play of sensory affects and encounter of corporealities

The study of animality

In the first act of the work, Ekman chooses to show the research process carried out by the choreographer to find the appropriate movements of the swans. Beginning with the projection of a documentary that describes their behavior and followed by the presentation of the zoologist who explains the characteristics of the swans; there is a scientific approach in this search. Without questioning the objectivity of this perspective, it is important to consider that we prefer to understand the totality of these birds: their mating dynamics, aggressiveness, rest, among other elements that characterize them⁴⁷. It is an attempt to account for the complexity of these beings beyond an elegant flight that can be transformed into a signature gesture (like the arm movements in classical ballet). Instead of idealizing the swans, especially their elegance and almost passive fragility that presents them as easy prey, or taking them as an object from which some movements can be extracted (or copied), a horizontal relationship is established with this other form of life and it is hoped to learn from it.

Once the description of the swans' corporeality has been made, respecting their autonomy and versatility, the same zoologist raises the question of whether to imitate their movements or to create a swan of their own. In other words, once the animality of these birds is understood, should it be represented or presented in a different way? Throughout the play, the possibility of presenting the swan is played with: the one who is shot, the trio of dancers, the one in rubber, the group dancing on the lake, the black and white swans, the water tricycle, the robot with wings in the third act. All of these are swans in their own way, without seeking to copy the birds but rather presenting other materialities and possible ways of being a swan. Franko points out that by performing movements that are

⁴⁷. I remember that from the window of my parents' bedroom I could see black-necked swans in my hometown, and I could also see them walking along the Valdivian waterfront. But I always kept my distance so as not to disturb or provoke them, knowing that they could react violently.

assumed to be obsolete in their original context «danced reenactment unsettles the closure of history, the conviction that new movements do effectively supersede earlier ones»⁴⁸. Ekman not only does it bring back the movement of Ivanov, but also the fluttering of anonymous birds that in their natural habitat move, or we could say, dance without spectators.

In the documentary *Rare Birds* they capture the process of creation of the work, between interviews and audiovisual recordings they show how the choreographer tries to create some kind of bird: his own swan. Taking into account the movement of the arms that is already part of the classical swan gesture, he tries to have a deeper approach to these birds. By paying attention to the long neck, the chest outwards, he tries to capture the generality of the movement (the most figurative, in pictorial terms) in order to imitate the intention of the movement: be it aggressiveness or attraction. The aim is to present the quality of these birds in dance. A dancer mentions that in such mobility he becomes more than a human being, he becomes one of the animals.

The dance of water

The fact of performing the ballet on a water stage, leads to a restructuring of the dance, because the medium of water requires a different technique and parachoreographic elements that favour mobility in this new materiality. In the documentary they point out that they have to learn how to work with this slippery surface, and in order to do so they begin by spilling some buckets of water in the rehearsal room, starting little by little to interact with the water. Ekman pointed out that the first relationship is rather playful to see what is possible: to start slipping, falling and then being able to use the muscles in a completely different way. There is a direct effect on the bodies of the dancers, who are used to maintaining their central body axis and moving on a stable floor; they break out of the mobility they had built into their skin. They must find the speed and freedom of the body to move with the slippery water, which in principle is neither masterable nor predictable. Among several changes they must make and the incorporation of somatechnics⁴⁹ elements to adapt to this new surface⁵⁰, in which water marks their agency, is the incorporation of helmets to avoid neuronal damage⁵¹. This relationship between water, the dancers and the other objects necessary to dance corresponds to the

48. Mark Franko, *Introduction: The Power of Recall in a Post-Ephemeral Era*, cit., p. 7.

49. The costume team of the National Opera also created special costumes for dancing in the water: jackets and kneepads with a fabric made in such a way that one part allows for braking and the other for easy sliding. They also created non-slip shoes that allow the dancers to run, jump and move in the water with greater stability.

50. Following Norwegian regulations, the water temperature had to be considered, the flow of 6,000 liters of water had to be maintained and special care had to be taken not to get the rest of the facilities wet (they put a plastic sheet around the pool).

51. In the documentary, the Opera's osteopath explains that there is a Norwegian term for shaking brain; the shaking of the brain when walking on ice in anticipation of falling.

intra-action that Barad speaks of, as the putting into action of different agencies that bring about a new discursive practice: the dance of water. Another way of understanding this is by following Bardet who explains the collective agency of diversified and changing corporealities that traverse the bodies they envelop⁵², where the different surfaces of this dance – water, skin, costume, etc. – meet and affect each other. Multiple imbalances are provoked in the bodies that experience contact with other images of the world, tensing the sensory-motor present that undoes the limits between surfaces. Provoking an unfolding of differentiating continuity⁵³ in which movement is actualized in an oscillation of directions, expansion and contraction; in a back-and-forth in the midst of the bodies.

Montecinos points out that water connects materialities⁵⁴ by flowing, migrating and destabilizing fixed habits and knowledge; with its internal mobility (which is never completely controllable or predictable) it provokes a new understanding of states of uncertainty. Dancing in water leads to moving out of a single category or style of dance, to combining techniques and creating others; just as Ekman had to do when experimenting in the flooded rehearsal room. Furthermore, Montecinos points out that exploring and investigating in a space that is neither manageable nor translatable (as a fixed meaning) awakens the body's sensory-motor capacities to an intimate coupling with the environment⁵⁵. To describe this intra-action that leaves traces in the body and its mobility, Stewart's concept of Parviainen's bodyscape is helpful. This refers to the moment when the dancing body develops a symptom of the landscape, rather than a mere sign of it, intertwining the elements of the environment and the movement of the dancer in them⁵⁶.

As well as the particular mobility and reconfiguration of the dancers' bodies that water provokes, it plays a central role in the whole work. It has a visual and sound component that envelops the whole sensoriality of the ballet. The drops that splash and move with the contact of other bodies create silhouettes in the air, especially when the dancers hit their jackets against the lake and form spirals of drops. And unlike Čajkovskij's version where it is possible to dissociate the music from the choreography and perfectly listen to a concerto of the fourth movement, just as it would be possible to stage the ballet without an orchestra; to dance the choreography to the sound of packaged music. While in this work the music is created with the water, in the choreographed intra-action of the bodies with the liquid surface the sonority is provoked. There is a relationship of interdependence between choreography and music here, since it is not possible to tame the water but rather to discover its rhythms and tones, the composition of the music was subject to the sonority of the water and was adapted to it (as shown in the documentary).

52. Marie Bardet, *Pensar con mover: un encuentro entre filosofía y danza*, cit., p. 221.

53. *Ivi*, p. 227.

54. Paula Montecinos Oliva, *Hidrofeminismo y la práctica como investigación*, cit., p. 148.

55. *Ivi*, p. 148.

56. Nigel Stewart, *Dancing the Face of Place: Environmental dance and eco-phenomenology*, cit., p. 35.

Dance of the quotidian

In this play we can (re) recognize different links with water. In the first and last scenes of the second act, Bergson's *non-impossible* movements are presented, there is a creation of new experiences in water. For Bergson the question of the possible is linked to *novelty*; the realisation of something is conditioned by its non-impossibility; for something to happen it is necessary for that something not to be impossible⁵⁷. Whereas to speak of possibility would be a metaphysical illusion that suppresses the possibility of surprise or variability that allows for the novelty of the non-impossible. Bardet presents Bergson's notion of novelty: the author raises the question of existence and refers to the moving originality of things, as a fact that is constantly occurring. This is why he argues that art is a creation of reality and not a representation of it, as it is a rupture of fixity and monotony, by bringing novelty to the present.

While in the intermediate acts, those actions that are part of our life in which water is involved are shown. Following what Marie Bardet says, it is possible to dance without necessarily always inventing the absolutely new, but to be in an attentive attitude that allows us to bring habits back into play in a different way, to repeat something while listening to the context⁵⁸. In this the work incorporates a dance of the everyday, showing actions such as drinking, showering, splashing, playing, swimming, riding a water tricycle or even forming a fountain with dancers spouting water from their mouths. Although Pérez Soto points out that dance is a space that is in the middle of a series of more or less close human activities that can often overlap with it⁵⁹. This work reminds us of those multiple aesthetic experiences that are possible thanks to water and can provoke a kinesthetic empathy: a gravitational contagion of being moved with. According to Bardet, the movement performed by the dancer *con-moves*⁶⁰ and forces a movement in the spectators that leads them to reorganise their own gravitational arrangement in order to enter into a different temporality. Thus, by watching the dance we apprehend the sensibility of movement, it provokes a resonance in our bodies and generates an immediate kinesthetic experience; an internal sensation of the movements of one's own body⁶¹.

In addition to the sensorial effect on the level of the body that dance generates, there is an important and necessary biographical component on the part of those who attend to see the work; to be able to recognise the touches of reality that everyday situations present, it is necessary to have

57. Marie Bardet, *Pensar con mover: un encuentro entre filosofía y danza*, cit., p. 201.

58. *Ivi*, p. 172.

59. Carlos Pérez Soto, *Sobre la definición de la Danza como forma artística*, in «Aisthesis», n. 43, 2008, pp. 34-49, in particular p. 35.

60. In Spanish Bardat writes *con-mueve*, meaning that dance is movement and touching at the same time.

61. Marie Bardet, *Pensar con mover: un encuentro entre filosofía y danza*, cit., p. 229.

experienced them. Tambutti affirms that in contemporary dance, common movements are incorporated, subtracting virtuosity and making that which is considered dance under a traditional paradigm disappear. This requires a greater involvement on the part of the spectators, provoking a change in the ways of receiving the works because in the face of the dissolution of any indication that would allow us to differentiate dance from that which was not dance⁶². An active participation on the part of the spectators is necessary to identify what is shown. In this case, the work breaks with the script of the classic and incorporates activities that we can find in everyday life; it invites us to think about our link with water. The possibilities of action and life that are possible thanks to water are presented, and our relationship of dependence on water may become more evident and may even (albeit with a forced footing) lead us to reflect on what the lack of water would imply. A key point is that the recognizable aspects of the second act are neither universal nor inclusive. Thinking of a personal example, having grown up in a city in the south of Chile where it rains almost all year round, gives me a kinesthetic empathy with the ballet that is very different from what someone who grew up in the north of Chile, where the driest desert in the world is found, might have. Or to think of places like Petorca, where avocados are grown and exported outside Chile, and where all the drinking water is used for irrigation, leaving hundreds of families without water⁶³. Watching the second act of the ballet could be a re-traumatic rather than a pleasurable experience.

The (re)presentation

Swan Lake in its many versions and creations approaches the non-human as a reference scheme for the mobility of dance.

It is possible to trace a (generic and rather reductionist, because there is not enough time or space to analyse all the versions of the ballet) route through the choreographies: starting with a more idealised (clean or aestheticized) mode of the flight of Ivanov's birds, passing through the incorporation of aggressiveness in Matthew Bourne's version and reaching Ekman with the creation of a lake in which another type of swan dances. This last work takes into consideration the animal corporeality, in the first act this more scientific approach to the birds is revealed, seeking to capture the intensities of the swans and at the same time it must be adapted to the medium (the lake) in which the dance takes place.

A question that still echoes in aesthetics and the philosophy of art is whether a work of art is a copy of reality or a creation of reality. Above all, in cases where it is possible to establish more evident

62. Susana Tambutti, *Itinerarios teóricos de la danza*, in «Aisthesis», n. 43, 2008, pp. 11-26, in particular p. 25.

63. For further details see *Global Atlas for Environmental Justice*, online: <https://ejatlas.org/conflict/the-avocado-agribusiness-and-water-drought-in-petorca-chile> (u.v. 4/9/2024).

links with phenomena of everyday life, a distinction could be made between the original referent and the thing created. Such as in this case where it is possible to (re)know games and interactions with water in the second act, just as the title and the first act of the ballet give us away that the work is about swans in their lake. But would such a focus on the non-human (water and swans) result in a copy or creation of these materialities?

To find an answer to the dilemma of representation, Marie Bardet introduces Bergson, who states that the problem of the possible is rather the question of novelty; where art is always the creation of reality by bringing the non-impossible into the present. Here dance is considered as the moving originality of things, it is articulation in the midst of the immediacy of the present as an emanation of novelty. Since the work takes as its starting point the mobility of the swans and at the same time allows the bodies of the dancers to be affected by the water, the encounter of these materialities result in a novel dance. Therefore, the movements that incorporate animality would not be less real than those of the bird in the water, whose intensity is sought to be captured, but would present a reality in itself that allows the actualization of a non-impossible corporeality. In this way, mediated representations are broken with to give way to direct signs of reality and, according to Bardet, the work of art abandons the path of representation to become experience⁶⁴. Bardet also cites Deleuze in his articulation of the problem of the real. For Deleuze there would not be a distinction between real and unreal things, but existence is constituted in a process of differentiation where the virtual is actualized, but always in a changing way and in a specific spatio-temporal context. Bardet proposes that the experience of the variability (differentiation) of the gravitational relation as sensation and composition in dance offers the occasion to grasp and be grasped by processes of actualization⁶⁵.

Finally, from the perspective of the new materialisms, Karen Barad proposes an escape from the ontological division between word and thing, which would be the distinction between representation and represented entity. By considering representation as a discourse that articulates a subject about an object, the thing that is being talked about is deprived of its autonomous value and sense of reality. For Barad, «Meaning is not a property of individual words or groups but an ongoing performance of the world in its differential intelligibility»⁶⁶. She invites us to de-emphasize the mediated character with which we approach the world and to pay attention to the active agency of matter. This allows us to understand that Ekman's swans dancing in his own lake would not be a conceptualization of the birds we see in lakes and rivers, but can be considered a sensory response to animal intensity and would be the result of the crossing of human and non-human materialities. At the same time, Barad's reconceptualization of matter allows the empirical world to be taken seriously, without the need for

64. Marie Bardet, *Pensar con mover: un encuentro entre filosofía y danza*, cit., p. 224.

65. *Ivi*, p. 209.

66. *Ivi*, p. 821.

conceptual “mediation” but rather through the sensible experience of the materiality and materialization of the world. In the encounter of surfaces, of different corporealities (water, swans, skin) and in the affectation of materialities (intra-acting bodies), discursive practices are provoked.

Conclusions

The analysis of this ballet was intended to account for the agency of the non-human in dance, where the introduction of the lake on stage makes more evident the power of the materiality of water and how it escapes the total domination of a previous dance technique. Although there is a gesture of will in deciding to set up a six thousand litre pool in the Opera House⁶⁷ and there is a search for animal intentionality, this intention is not structured as an asymmetrical relationship between subject (choreographer and dancers) and object (non-human materiality). It is rather an intra-action between matters that modify the daily functioning of those who are part of the theatre, where water shows its agency by propitiating a different mobility for the dancers that leads to a somatic-technical work of different teams of the theatre, as well as having a visual and sound component that affects the whole work. This also makes it difficult to replicate this work on another stage that does not have sufficient resources to create the lake, particularly in Latin America where water scarcity due to drought or industrial exploitation makes it almost violent to use water for dancing instead of drinking.

In the meeting of surfaces there is a destabilisation of the mobility of the human body that is affected by the water, there is a loss of subjective control and a horizontality of agencies in which the whole creative process of the work is influenced by the liquid matter. The incorporation of the animal is presented in various ways: as an ironic and scientific gesture, in the first act and in the playful scenes of the second act. There is also an exploration of the mobility of the swans in general terms, together with an exercise in the search for animal intentionality that is always accompanied by the learning of aquatic mobility. In this sense, there is an encounter of corporealities: water, birds, dancers, which intertwine a discursive practice and give way to a new way of presenting this swan lake. As Bardet mentions, the dance is a work of exploration of the problems of presenting gesture in the present⁶⁸, where the aim is to show the movements that we perceive as impossible in everyday life, but which are non-impossible and verge on reality.

67. As Ekman mentions in the documentary and in a presentation at the Bolshoi where he explains the creative process of this ballet by dancing. See Alexander Ekman, *Thoughts at the Bolshoi*, online: <https://bit.ly/37BjUvr> (u.v. 4/9/2024).

68. Marie Bardet, *Pensar con mover: un encuentro entre filosofía y danza*, cit., p. 19.