

THE SOCIAL POWER OF DANCE

A study of Europeans' relationship to dance within a social context.

72% of Europeans dance, (the Spanish more frequently than others: 87%) and 18% of them even say they dance very often.

Generally speaking, it can be said that there is a social aspect to dancing. If you look at a segment of society, it becomes apparent that more or less everyone in Europe dances. Women dance a little more than men, and younger people logically dance a lot (*20% of 15-24 year-olds and 14% of 25-34 year-olds, out of those who dance the most*). However, the age spread is quite wide - 57% of those who dance at least once per month are between the ages of 14 and 50, meaning that it's not just a question of generation.

There appears to be a general interest in dance in all European countries. To a certain extent, some cultures have been assimilated by dance in the same way that there is a form of assimilation by music, and for young people in particular, dance is a pulsation that sparks an energy, touching all segments of society.

You can learn more about someone by dancing with them (45%) than being their friend on Facebook (22%), as much by dancing (34%) as talking politics (34%), more by dancing (57%) than by taking a selfie together (8%).

Dancing is thus appreciated as a form of "authentic encounter", a simplified version of human relations. 75% of the people questioned agreed that dancing created a social bond, regardless of age and status. Dancing is a way of gauging people. You become part of a feeling. It's like a flow of thought without the thinker, without words. You join a movement, a pre-existing energy. To dance with someone else is to join with them, temporarily, forming a sort of dyad with them for the duration. In fact, in France (55%), Germany (52%) and the UK (58%), people prefer watching someone dance than dancing themselves. It's a great example of 'contemporary inter-passiveness' – we participate in the dance by watching someone else do it.

And yet, this isn't the case in Italy (60%) or Spain (58%). In Europe, we consider that spectating counts as much as taking part, and that dance transcends the state of being with others, without the absolute need necessarily to play an active part.

Indeed, there's a good reason for watching someone dance, as it can tell you a lot about them – whether they are natural (34%) for example, because while dancing a person pays less heed to social predispositions, allowing the spontaneous, authentic side to come through.

45% of those asked have the impression of suddenly 'discovering' or 'rediscovering' someone by seeing them dance. The tendency is even stronger in Italy (60%) and Spain (59%). Getting to know someone through dance is quite common with 15-24 year-olds (58%), 25-34 year-olds (54%) and 35-50 year-olds (46%). Most of the time, it involves a friend (41%) or relation (39%), sometimes even a member of the family (17%) or colleague at work (19%).

Dancing is probably one of the last remaining forms of 'authentic spontaneity' that reveal the personality of the person in question. Through dance, we reveal some of the enigma of our personality that is usually hidden. There's something hypnotic about it, an almost animal-like transgression that goes beyond simple amusement.

What the study reveals is that dancing is another way of bringing ancient truths to light – dancing takes us into the primal, non-rational realm. It's the awakening of an energy, a revelation such as Salome's dance of the seven veils was supposed to provoke more than 2,000 years ago. A dance can thus express that which words do not.

Indeed, for 73% of Europeans, dancing is a way of showing a completely different side of your character and temperament. Especially for young people (81%), dancing reveals a lot about someone's character. By decentering themselves, dancers reveal something of who they really are to onlookers, their almost primitive self, without artifice, free of the social mask. It's a fusion with others while one is less fascinated by oneself. You become closer to others.

In a society that has become very narcissistic, this 'forgetting' of oneself, the renunciation of the ego through dance, seems like a very necessary escape.

Quite logically then, dancing is much less about displaying good technique (26%) than it is letting go (72%), a provisional alienation, suspending for a moment the order of the world. Dance is part of a certain form of contemporary fluidity, a pulsation that awakens an energy, the momentum of the body. What is in the air during dancing is nothing less than the attenuation of gravity. We remove ourselves from the gravity of the social context that surrounds us.

With dance, this 'lightness' seems to have a richer dimension than the serious side. 26% of Europeans see lightness and a feeling of ease in those dancing. There's a real de-sacralisation in dance. Dancers appear to be happier (24%), proof that something radiant is transmitted through dance – there's a positive vibe, an exaggeration, unbridled spontaneity, sometimes even a real feeling of ecstasy when we dance, a form of hedonism and dispersion. By dancing, we appear more open to others (20%) and more dynamic (16%), meaning that there is a real desire for connection with others - an outstretched, accepted hand.

More than half the people questioned believe that in the current climate, it is more important than ever to dance. 53% in France, 58% of Italians and 64% of Spanish. Far from the worries of everyday life, what we read in the news and the state of the world in general, there is a real need for inversion, lightness, frivolity. Dancing represents the flipside of a society which often appears stressed out, slightly aggressive even.

Dancing is the subversion of the system of seriousness. With dance, we trigger an eclipse. It's a return to something carefree, post-ideological, post-political... An indispensable, fertile counter-activity.

Is it not true then that that which is 'in suspension' – danced – is essentially a basic necessity, instilled with a deeper, more metaphysical capacity? "A world where depth advances at the surface" as Vladimir Jankélévitch said? Pina Bausch might also have added, "Dance, or we are all lost".