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# The "Sheer Dynamic Form" of Value: A Phenomenological-Emotionalist Axiology in Light of Dance

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Confronting the experiential dimension of value, this paper critiques rationalist models for reducing axiology to discrete, measurable actions. Echoing Edmund Husserl's critique of the "mathematization" of nature, it posits that rationalist axiology substitutes measurable behaviours for the lived quality of value itself. Using Maxine Sheets-Johnstone's phenomenology of dance, the analysis demonstrates how dance abstracts feeling from everyday content to reveal its "sheer dynamic form," or "import." The argument contends that values function analogously as invariant qualitative forms intuited pre-reflectively. They are "sheer dynamic forms" intuited emotionally and kinetically, distinct from the specific actions in which they appear. This trajectory reframes value as a qualitative presence one becomes one with, suggesting that ethical agency is a process of kinetic-emotional attunement—a re-orientation that reclaims the body as the primary site of axiological discovery.

Keywords: axiology, Maxine Sheets-Johnstone, Max Scheler, phenomenology of dance, kinetic intelligence, material value ethics, embodiment (*corps propre*), affective abstraction, cognitive phenomenology

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## 1. Introduction: The Axiological Problem and the Phenomenological Path

The incompleteness of traditional philosophical value theory, particularly its struggle to account for the lived quality of value, reveals an enduring dilemma: How do we truly *know* values? The relationship between values and emotions is key to addressing this question.[1] The history of value theory is often presented as a historical intellectual contrast, a forced choice between two equally unsatisfying positions.[2] The central challenge facing modern value theory is its persistent struggle to escape the perceived binary established by two powerful, yet fundamentally incomplete, philosophical traditions. Since the rise of analytic philosophy in the early twentieth century, the debate has been dominated by the pronounced binary between intuitionist objectivism and non-cognitivist emotivism.[3]

On one side stands a rigorous rational objectivism, which posits that values such as Justice, Goodness, or Beauty are objective, universal properties akin to mathematical truths. In this view, values are cognised by a pure, disembodied reason, and our messy, embodied, emotional lives are seen not as a conduit for this cognition but as a potential corruptor of it. On the other side lies simple emotivism, which reduces values to mere subjective feelings, personal whims, or culturally contingent prejudices. This perspective, while accounting for the manifest passion of our axiological lives, ultimately strips values of any genuine cognitive content, rendering meaningful ethical discourse or objective claims impossible.

This paper argues that the way out of this persistent binary is not through a compromise, but by re-orienting the inquiry away from discrete actions and towards pre-reflective cognition. Echoing Edmund Husserl's critique of the "mathematisation" of nature in science and philosophy,[4] the paper posits that rationalist axiology substitutes measurable behaviours for the lived quality of value itself. By constructing a framework of axiological emotionalism designed to account for

[1] An earlier version of this paper was presented at the Values and Emotions Conference, 2025. I am grateful to the participants for their insightful feedback.

[2] Mary Warnock, *Ethics Since 1900* (Oxford University Press, 1978), 1–4.

[3] George Edward Moore, *Principia Ethica* (Cambridge University Press, 1903), 9–21; Alfred Jules Ayer, *Language, Truth, and Logic* (Victor Gollancz Ltd, 1936), 107–112.

[4] Edmund Husserl, *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology: An Introduction to Phenomenological Philosophy*, trans. David Carr (Northwestern University Press, 1970), 51–60.

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this lived quality, the analysis utilizes Maxine Sheets-Johnstone's phenomenology of dance.[5] Dance abstracts feeling from everyday content to reveal its "sheer dynamic form," or "import," which is cognised prior to intellectual reflection. Values, such as generosity, function analogously: they are sheer dynamic forms intuited emotionally and kinetically, distinct from the specific actions in which they appear. This reframing suggests that value is not a property assigned by reason nor a feeling triggered by a fact, but a qualitative form one becomes one with, implying that ethical agency is ultimately a process of kinetic-emotional attunement.

The argument contends that this entire framework, which pits reason against emotion, is predicated on a fundamental methodological limitation. This limitation is analogous to the one diagnosed by Husserl in his late work, *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*. Husserl argued that modern science, beginning with Galileo, precipitated a "crisis" not by being wrong, but by being so successful that it forgot its origins. In its "mathematisation of nature," it performed a substitution: it replaced the Lebenswelt, the pre-scientific "life-world" that is directly "intuited, experienced, and experienceable," with an idealized, "mathematical manifold." Husserl warned against this "fundamental naïveté," the reification and objectification of the method—the quantifiable object or mathematical model as reality itself. In this process, the "real world" of scientific models was put beyond our experiential grasp, and the life-world was degraded to a mere illusion.[6]

Traditional axiology, this paper contends, replicates this methodological reduction. It "mathematises" value. It substitutes its own abstractions—the describable action, the formal rule, or the logical proposition—for the lived phenomenon of value itself. In a critique that will become central to this paper, Sheets-Johnstone observes that science has traditionally defined movement as a "measurable property of an object, namely, change of position or place," reducing the phenomenon

[5] Maxine Sheets-Johnstone, *The Phenomenology of Dance*, fiftieth anniversary edition (Temple University Press, 2015), 48; Maxine Sheets-Johnstone, *The Primacy of Movement*, expanded ed. (Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1999), 154–157.

[6] Husserl, *The Crisis of European Sciences*, 23–26.

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to an "object-in-motion."[7] Rationalist axiology does the same, reducing the *felt quality* of generosity to a measurable "action-in-motion," for example, a discrete, describable behaviour rather than inquiring into the *lived quality* of generosity itself.

The paper seeks a re-orientation of the inquiry by returning to the *Lebenswelt* of value. It proposes a phenomenological-emotionalist axiology, arguing that values are cognised through emotion, not as irrational whims, but as pre-reflective, embodied "qualitative presences." To construct this framework, the analysis adopts Sheets-Johnstone's phenomenology of dance, which provides a foundational mechanism for understanding how the "sheer dynamic form" of feeling is abstracted from its everyday content and cognised directly.

The inquiry unfolds as a systematic progression from aesthetic theory to axiological grounding. Initially, the analysis explicates the Sheets-Johnstone/Langer framework of affective abstraction, demonstrating how the "dual abstraction" of dance isolates the qualitative essence of feeling from its utilitarian context. Building upon this foundation, the argument extends this aesthetic mechanism into the realm of value theory to define the cognitive faculty of "kinetic intelligence." This faculty is further refined through contemporary cognitive phenomenology, specifically utilising Shaun Gallagher's distinction between the body image and the body schema, alongside the enactive framework of Varela, Thompson, and Rosch. To bridge the gap between aesthetic surrender and ethical action, the paper incorporates Drew Leder's concept of bodily recession and presence, explaining how the body-subject transcends its usual "absence" to become the site of qualitative attunement.

Finally, the paper demonstrates the theoretical convergence between this kinetic approach and the foundational axiology of Max Scheler. By incorporating Eugene Kelly's contemporary defence of material value ethics and Martha Nussbaum's theory of cognitive affectivity, the synthesis refutes the "mathematisation" of value and grounds ethical agency in the *corps propre*. Ultimately, this trajectory offers a principled "non-relative universalism" that reclaims the body as the primary site of axiological discovery.

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[7] Maxine Sheets-Johnstone, "On Movement and Objects in Motion: The Phenomenology of the Visible in Dance," *Journal of Aesthetic Education* 13, no. 2 (1979): 35–37, https://doi.org/10.2307/3331927.

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## 2. The Mechanism of Affective Abstraction: From Symbol to Import

Establishing an axiological framework predicated on affective experience necessitates a non-reductive philosophy of feeling—one that avoids the pitfalls of both rationalism and simple emotivism. The foundation for this framework is rooted in the aesthetic theory of Susanne Langer, whose work provides the necessary bridge between raw affect and cognitive form. By moving beyond the view of emotion as a mere "reaction," Langer provides the groundwork for what Sheets-Johnstone later develops into a precise phenomenological mechanism: a "dual abstraction" that isolates the qualitative essence of movement and feeling from their instrumental and situational contexts.

### 2.1 Langer's Foundation: Art as "Symbolic Form"

In her seminal work *Feeling and Form*, Langer explores the capacity of art, as a non-discursive object, to convey profound meaning. Her foundational thesis posits that art is "the creation of forms symbolic of human feeling."[8] Distinct from discursive symbols like language, in which constituent elements retain independent semantic value, art operates as a "presentational form" that must be apprehended as an indivisible whole. Through this symbolic operation, art generates what Langer characterises as "semblance" or a "virtual object." This virtual entity is significant because it is decoupled from the "tangible and practical" demands of everyday life; it is treated instead as a self-contained phenomenon defined exclusively by its own qualitative attributes.[9]

Crucial to this foundation is the distinction between a *symbol* and a *symptom*. For Langer, a symptom (such as a spontaneous cry of grief) is merely a "reaction prompt" or a "sign-perception" shared by humans and animals alike. In

[8] Suzanne K. Langer, *Feeling and Form: A Theory of Art Developed from Philosophy in a New Key* (Charles Scribner's Sons, 1953), 40.

[9] Langer, *Feeling and Form: A Theory of Art Developed from Philosophy in a New Key*, 48.

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contrast, an artistic symbol is a "vehicle of conception."[10] The artist's task is to "formulate feeling," creating a projection that articulates the artist's knowledge of feeling rather than its mere spontaneous venting. The result is what Langer terms "import"—the emotional content or 'form of feeling' that the artwork presents for contemplation. This import is apprehended not as a sequence of parts, but as what Sheets-Johnstone describes as a "unitary whole": a total phenomenon in which the qualitative essence of the feeling is inseparable from the movement itself.[11]

Contemporary scholarship further clarifies this symbolic logic, emphasising the cognitive weight of non-discursive forms. Robert Innis argues that such expressive forms facilitate the transition of inner experience into consciousness through a "semiotic abstraction of felt insight." By virtue of this presentational logic, the artwork engenders a "paradox of generality," wherein artistic forms disclose universal structures of experience that nonetheless remain "abstract but specific." Consequently, these forms preserve the distinct qualitative logic of a particular affect while remaining systematically decoupled from any discrete factual or situational exigency.[12]

Moreover, the epistemic efficacy of the symbolic form is contingent upon a structural "isomorphism" between the logic of emotive experience and the empirical morphology of the artwork. As Michael Piechowski elucidates, an aesthetic medium such as music functions as a "tonal analogue" of our interiority insofar as its structural dynamics (rhythm, tension, and resolution) exhibit a formal congruence with the internal stream of human feeling. This "logical form" permits the subject to conceptualize the architecture of emotion even when its biological or empirical manifestations remain resistant to traditional psychometric measurement.[13] By bracketing these forms from the instrumental exigencies of the everyday, art facilitates a direct, unmediated perception of the essence of affect. It is this "sheer dynamic form," liberated through aesthetic abstraction, that serves as the primary cognitive paradigm for the axiological intuition explored herein.

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[10] Suzanne K. Langer, *Philosophy in a New Key: A Study in the Symbolism of Reason, Rite, and Art*, Third Edition (Harvard University Press, 2009), 60–61.

[11] Sheets-Johnstone, *The Phenomenology of Dance*, 17–18.

[12] Robert Innis, "The Making of the Literary Symbol: Taking Note of Langer (Susanne Langer)," *Semiotica* 2007 (January 2007): 88–92, https://doi.org/10.1515/SEM.2007.034.

[13] Michael M. Piechowski, "The Logical and the Empirical Form of Feeling," *Journal of Aesthetic Education* 15, no. 1 (1981): 3–4, https://doi.org/10.2307/3332208.

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### 2.2 Sheets-Johnstone's "Dual Abstraction" in Dance

While Langer provides the general symbolic framework, Sheets-Johnstone, in *The Phenomenology of Dance*, offers a rigorous phenomenological account of how this process operates through the moving body. She identifies a "dual abstraction" as the core mechanism by which dance constitutes itself as a "virtual" world, a realm of "pure appearance" that brackets the practical and functional values of the natural attitude.[14]

The first move of this dual abstraction involves the decoupling of feeling from its situational content. In the everyday *Lebenswelt*, affect is typically intentional and causal; one feels anger *at* a specific injustice or joy *because* of a particular event. In the dance, however, this link is severed. The dance does not present a symptom of a personal history; rather, it abstracts the dynamic form of the affect from its ontic cause. The result is what Sheets-Johnstone characterises as a "pure appearance" of feeling, wherein the qualitative structure of the emotion is disclosed without the clutter of situational contingency.[15]

The second move is the abstraction of movement from its functional or utilitarian context. In daily life, movement is instrumental—a lunge is a means to retrieve an object or a transition in exercise. Dance brackets this utility, presenting movement as a self-contained phenomenon. Because the dance is abstracted from the "continuum of form" that characterises everyday life, it exists as a "complete form" that requires no prologue or epilogue to be valid. It is a "unitary whole" that is apprehended in its own right, rather than as a reference to a past or future action.[16]

Critically, this dual bracketing does not result in a sterile formalism. Instead, it reveals a structural "congruency" or "organic similarity" between the architecture of the dance and the architecture of human feeling. Sheets-Johnstone argues that the "sheer dynamic form" of the dance—constituted by its tensional, linear,

[14] Sheets-Johnstone, *The Phenomenology of Dance*, 47.
[15] Sheets-Johnstone, *The Phenomenology of Dance*, 25–26.
[16] Sheets-Johnstone, *The Phenomenology of Dance*, 17–19.

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areal, and directional qualities—mirrors the formal properties of emotive life: its "tension and release, suspension and fall, anticipation and climax."[17]

This "sheer dynamic form" is the "import" of the dance. It is not an intellectual concept to be decoded, but a lived quality intuited directly and pre-reflectively by the subject. By isolating the "dynamic contours" of feeling—its "concentrations and diffusions, attenuations and eruptions"—the dance provides a space for a unique form of kinetic reflection. One does not merely observe the value-form; one intuits its qualitative essence through a shared kinetic intelligence.[18]

### 2.3 Sheets-Johnstone's Husserlian Critique: Reclaiming the Qualitative

The process of abstraction required to reveal a "sheer dynamic form" is, at its core, a Husserlian project. The analogy to Husserl's *The Crisis of European Sciences*, introduced earlier, is not merely a convenient framing device; it is a critique that Sheets-Johnstone herself explicitly leverages to retrieve movement from its scientific reduction. She argues that the traditional rationalist view—characteristic of what Husserl identified as the "mathematisation" of nature, substitutes the phenomenon of movement for a mere "measurable property of an object, namely, change of position or place."[19]

To expose this reduction, Sheets-Johnstone utilizes the term "object-in-motion" to denote the sterile, abstract concept found in classical mechanics. This "object-in-motion" is precisely Husserl's quantifiable object: an entity whose movement is defined as a series of static "limit-shapes" or coordinates in time and space. As she notes, if an arrow in flight is said to be "there" at any given moment, its very nature as movement—its flow and qualitative presence—is denied. This represents a logical problem akin to Zeno's paradox, where the divisibility of space and time into discrete points effectively annihilates the lived reality of the transition.[20]

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[17] Sheets-Johnstone, *The Phenomenology of Dance*, 26.

[18] Sheets-Johnstone, *The Phenomenology of Dance*, 48–49.

[19] Sheets-Johnstone, "On Movement and Objects in Motion: The Phenomenology of the Visible in Dance," 34.

[20] Sheets-Johnstone, "On Movement and Objects in Motion: The Phenomenology of the Visible in Dance," 35–36.

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Therefore, Sheets-Johnstone's phenomenology of dance functions as a restorative project with Husserlian principles. It seeks the ontological reclamation of the qualitative flow of movement from the quantitative, "mathematised" models that have historically eclipsed it. This paper suggests that one may, in turn, utilize this recovery of movement as a methodological archetype for a broader axiological investigation.[21]

By doing so, one may retrieve axiological values from the constraints of a calculative axiology, a framework that, much like the scientific reduction of movement to an "object-in-motion," mistakes the discrete, measurable behaviour for the lived quality of value itself.[22] This transition allows us to move away from a morality defined by quantitative outputs and toward an ethics of qualitative attunement, where the agent seeks to resonate with the "sheer dynamic form" of the value-quality being instantiated.

## 3. From Dance to Values: An Analogous Axiology

This section establishes the primary argumentative move of the inquiry, extending the phenomenological mechanism of dance directly into the realm of axiology. If dance abstracts the "sheer dynamic form" of feeling from its situational content, it may be posited that values are themselves "sheer dynamic forms" abstracted from their specific, content-filled actions.

### 3.1 The Central Argument: Values as "Sheer Dynamic Forms"

The thesis is as follows: An axiological value—such as generosity, courage, or humility—functions phenomenologically in a manner analogous to the "import" of a dance. At its core, a value is a "sheer dynamic form" or a "qualitative presence" that can be cognised emotionally and kinetically, distinct from the specific actions or situations in which it appears. Drawing on the Langerian tradition, this inquiry

[21] Sheets-Johnstone, "On Movement and Objects in Motion: The Phenomenology of the Visible in Dance," 34–36.

[22] Husserl, *The Crisis of European Sciences*, 23–59.

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suggests that values possess a qualitative rhythm, a dynamic "signature" of the act, that the body-subject recognises as the essence of that value.[23]

To refine this mechanism, the analysis turns to Nelson Goodman's theory of exemplification. In *Languages of Art*, Goodman argues that certain symbols do not merely point to a property but actually *possess* and *provide a sample* of it.[24] In this light, a courageous act is not merely a "sign" of courage; it is a literal exemplar of the dynamic form of courage. Just as a tailor's swatch of cloth does not just "stand for" wool but *is* a sample of wool, the ethical act serves as an ontological sample of a specific qualitative rhythm, a "shape" of being-in-the-world.

Consider the example of generosity. The felt quality of generosity is the axiological "import." This dynamic form (a specific, expansive "shape" of self-giving) is the phenomenological universal. Whether the empirical content involves the donation of five dollars or five million, or a moment of time versus a lifetime of service, the "import" remains identical. While the content of the "good" as a measurable object fluctuates, the form of the "value" as a qualitative rhythm remains invariant.[25]

This description aligns with how values are experienced within the *Lebenswelt*. One does not, in the first instance, execute a rational calculation or consult a propositional list of rules. Rather, a value's "qualitative presence" is recognised through a process of axiological attunement. The dynamic "shape" of cruelty is intuited in the jaggedness of a dismissive gesture, or the "form" of courage in a quiet, unyielding kinetic stance. By treating values as exemplars of sheer dynamic form, the inquiry moves toward an axiology that is felt and lived rather than merely calculated and measured.

To be sure, a fundamental disanalogy exists between aesthetic contemplation and ethical action. While aesthetic contemplation in dance brackets practical utility and consequence to contemplate pure dynamic form,[26] ethical action remains irreducibly embedded in real-world obligation and moral consequence. The kinetic abstraction proposed here does not strip moral action of its practical gravity;

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[23] Langer, *Feeling and Form: A Theory of Art Developed from Philosophy in a New Key*, 126–129.

[24] Nelson Goodman, *Languages of Art: An Approach to a Theory of Symbols* (Hackett, 1976), 52–57, https://doi.org/10.5040/9781350928541.

[25] Innis, "The Making of the Literary Symbol," 91–92.

[26] Langer, *Feeling and Form*, 48–50; Sheets-Johnstone, *The Phenomenology of Dance*, 25.

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rather, it provides the pre-reflective orientation through which the agent apprehends *how* to act within those consequences. Where aesthetic abstraction isolates the form for contemplation, ethical agency instantiates that form directly within practical life.

### 3.2 Kinetic Intelligence: The Body as a Cognitive Agent

If values are understood as dynamic forms, the faculty that cognises them cannot be a static, abstract reason; it must be a dynamic, participatory faculty. Sheets-Johnstone provides the necessary framework for this through her concept of "kinetic intelligence." Far from being a metaphorical or secondary form of understanding, kinetic intelligence is a literal mode of cognition—a "thinking in movement" that signifies the "nonseparation of thinking and doing." [27]

This cognitive primacy of movement is what Sheets-Johnstone identifies as its "ineluctable modality." Drawing on James Joyce's experiential descriptions, she argues that movement is not merely a physical act but a "mother tongue," which is a foundational barometer of life that permeates both everyday existence and aesthetic creation.[28] By framing internal life as a kinetic stream of consciousness, she posits that the very process of thinking and feeling is a kinetic phenomenon rather than a static mental event. In this light, the dynamic flow of consciousness and the dynamic flow of animate movement are "cut of the same singular cloth of life itself."[29]

This framework can be further refined by distinguishing between a reflective "body image" and a pre-reflective "body schema." As Shaun Gallagher argues, the body schema is a system of sensory-motor capacities that functions without the need for conscious monitoring. [30] Kinetic intelligence operates at this schematic level, allowing for an enactive process whereby values are not simply found as

[27] Sheets-Johnstone, *The Phenomenology of Dance*, 18–19.

[28] Maxine Sheets-Johnstone, "The Ineluctable Modality of Movement: Its Everyday and Aesthetic Presence," *The Journal of Speculative Philosophy* 36, no. 1 (2022): 3–5, https://doi.org/10.5325/jspecphil.36.1.0001.

[29] Sheets-Johnstone, "The Ineluctable Modality of Movement," 3.

[30] Shaun Gallagher, *How the Body Shapes the Mind* (Oxford University Press, 2005), 24–26, https://doi.org/10.1093/0199271941.001.0001.

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passive facts, but are meanings "brought forth" through dynamic engagement with the world.[31]

In the "surrender" to the dance, or the total inhabitation of an ethical act, the body moves beyond its usual state of "recession." While the body is often an "absent" tool in everyday life, in these moments of qualitative attunement, it becomes a presence where the value-form itself becomes the explicit "doer."[32]

Recognising movement as an ineluctable modality suggests that axiological cognition is not a detached intellectual judgment but is rooted in this primary kinetic flow. One does not "calculate" the value; rather, one cognises the "shape" of generosity or courage kinetically, through an intuitive "getting it" or apprehension that occurs as one resonates with the value's dynamic form through the mindful body.

### 3.3 The *Corps Propre*: Merleau-Ponty and the Primacy of the Lived Body

Sheets-Johnstone's concept of "body-consciousness" is not an isolated aesthetic theory; it is a rigorous development of the phenomenological tradition, specifically the work of Maurice Merleau-Ponty. In his *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty dismantles Cartesian dualism by introducing the *corps propre*, or the "body-subject."[33] He argues that the body is not an object in the world that a separate mind "possesses" or "directs." Instead, the body is the "primary site of knowing the world"—the very condition through which reality is experienced and engaged. For Merleau-Ponty, consciousness is not a disembodied *ego cogito* or "I think" but is fundamentally corporeal.[34]

The link to Sheets-Johnstone's kinetic intelligence is direct. Merleau-Ponty writes that "to move one's body is to aim at things through it," asserting that

[31] Francisco J. Varela et al., *The Embodied Mind: Cognitive Science and Human Experience* (MIT Press, 1992), 172–175, https://doi.org/10.7551/mitpress/6730.001.0001.

[32] Drew Leder, *The Absent Body* (University of Chicago Press, 1990), 22–25 (As discussed in Sheets-Johnstone 2022 regarding "insides" and "outsides").

[33] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception* (Taylor & Francis, 2013), 140–147, https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203720714.

[34] Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 140.

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movement is not "thought about movement" but is itself an intentional act.[35] This concept of a pre-reflective, non-conceptual "thinking in movement" provides the philosophical bedrock for the kinetic intelligence Sheets-Johnstone describes. By grounding the cognitive faculty in the *corps propre*, body-consciousness is established not as a mere aesthetic curiosity, but as a tenable, non-dualistic phenomenological faculty capable of cognising the world—and its values—through a direct, affective encounter with "sheer dynamic form."

### 3.4 The Axiological Climax: "Movement is Doing the Doing"

This synthesis represents the explanatory objective of the paper: a direct analogy between the pinnacle of the aesthetic experience and the ideal of a lived ethical life. Sheets-Johnstone describes the goal of the dancer as achieving an "inseparable unity" with the form—a state of "absolute surrender" which paradoxically transforms into "absolute possession." In this state, the dancer's dualistic sense of "doingness" is transcended. The experience shifts from the self-conscious "I am performing this movement" to a significant ontological reversal: the dancer is no longer doing the movement; rather, the movement is "doing the dancer."[36]

Within this "ecstatic unity," the dancer's task is to fulfil a "kinetic destiny" and to "bring a qualitative world to life."[37] The dancer effectively becomes the "qualitative presence" of the form itself. This provides a framework for a phenomenological axiology wherein the ethical goal is understood not as something an agent *possesses* (such as a propositional set of rules) or something an agent *performs* (in the sense of discrete, measured actions). Instead, a value is a qualitative form that the agent becomes one with.

The ethical ideal is to inhabit the "sheer dynamic form" of a value—such as generosity or courage—so completely that, in the moment of action, the deliberate, calculative "I" is transcended. Here, the quality of the value itself becomes the "doer." Much like the dancer who no longer "thinks" the step but "is" the dance, the ethical agent attains a state of qualitative attunement where the action flows

[35] For the explicit connection between Merleau-Ponty's corporeal intentionality and kinetic cognition, see Sheets-Johnstone, *The Phenomenology of Dance*, 23–24.

[36] Sheets-Johnstone, *The Phenomenology of Dance*, 52–56.

[37] Sheets-Johnstone, *The Phenomenology of Dance*, 25–26.

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as a necessary instantiation of the value's own dynamic logic. By moving from a "doing" to a "being-done-by," ethics is grounded in a pre-reflective, kinetic commitment to the excellence of the form.

## 4. Implications for Axiological Theory: A Contemporary Schelerian Extension

The framework derived from the aesthetics of dance extends beyond a heuristic analogy; it represents a contemporary re-articulation of the foundational principles of phenomenological axiology. By utilizing Sheets-Johnstone's phenomenological hermeneutic, a functional mechanism is provided for the "material value ethics" proposed by Max Scheler. This approach offers a perspective from which to navigate the two-sided discourse by grounding the objectivity of value in the lived, kinetic experience of the body.

### 4.1 Material Value Ethics as the Phenomenological Bedrock

The point of departure for this kinetic axiology is Scheler's refutation of Kantian formalism. As Ronald F. Perrin notes in his commentary, Scheler's project was not a rejection of moral objectivity, but a rejection of the rational objectivism that characterises the Kantian "ought."[38] Scheler himself argues that the "formal" approach is blind to the fact that values constitute a "domain of objects" that are accessible only through a "special type of experience."[39] This critique rests on what Scheler calls the "erroneous identification of goods with values," which reduces ethics to abstract rules and ignores the qualitative essence of moral life.[40]

[38] Ronald F. Perrin, "A Commentary on Max Scheler's Critique of the Kantian Ethic," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 12, no. 3 (1974): 348–350, https://doi.org/10.1353/hph.2008.0544.

[39] Max Scheler, *Formalism in Ethics and Non-Formal Ethics of Values: A New Attempt Toward the Foundation of an Ethical Personalism*, trans. Manfred S. Frings and Richard M. Lauer (Northwestern University Press, 1973), 5.

[40] Scheler, *Formalism in Ethics and Non-Formal Ethics of Values: A New Attempt Toward the Foundation of an Ethical Personalism*, 19–20.

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This integration connects with the broader trajectory of contemporary scholarship on the phenomenology of value feeling and moral perception descending from Scheler.[41] This tradition demonstrates that emotional intentionality (*Fühlen*) is not a subjective psychological reaction, but a structured cognitive faculty capable of apprehending objective value qualities prior to intellectual deliberation.

### 4.1.1 The Ontology of Value: Invariant Qualities vs. Contingent Goods

Drawing upon Hanchuan Zhong's contemporary defence of Schelerian objectivity, it is necessary to recognise *Wert* (Value) as an objective, *a priori* quality that is "intuitively given" without the mediation of rational judgment.[42] Scheler explicitly states that "a value is not a thing, and it is not a part of a thing," but rather an "autonomous essence."[43] This provides the ontological support for the distinction between "situational content" and "sheer dynamic form" developed in this paper.

Specifically, a distinction must be made between goods (*Güter*), which function as the concrete, empirical "bearers" of value existing within the *Lebenswelt*, such as a specific act of donation.[44] Values (*Werte*) are the objective "value-qualities" that "adhere" to goods. As Scheler notes, a value is a "pure quality" that remains the same even when the good changes.[45] Zhong underscores that values are discovered through a phenomenology of givenness.[46] This supports the thesis that the "shape" of a value—such as generosity—represents an invariant form, the

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[41] Kevin Mulligan, "Values and Emotions," in *Mind, Values, and Metaphysics: Philosophical Essays in Honor of Kevin Mulligan*, ed. Anne Reboul (Springer, 2014); Roberta De Monticelli, "The Phenomenology of Value Feeling," in *The Routledge Handbook of Phenomenological Ethics*, ed. Eduardo Caminada et al. (Routledge, 2019).

[42] Hanchuan Zhong, "Max Scheler and the Objectivity of Goodness: Towards a Phenomenology of Value," *Religions* (Basel, Switzerland) 13, no. 9 (2022): 831, https://doi.org/10.3390/rel13090831.

[43] Scheler, *Formalism in Ethics and Non-Formal Ethics of Values: A New Attempt Toward the Foundation of an Ethical Personalism*, 15.

[44] Zhong, "Max Scheler and the Objectivity of Goodness," 831.

[45] Scheler, *Formalism in Ethics and Non-Formal Ethics of Values: A New Attempt Toward the Foundation of an Ethical Personalism*, 21.

[46] Zhong, "Max Scheler and the Objectivity of Goodness," 835.

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value, which remains distinct from the fluctuating empirical content of the gift, the good.

### 4.1.2 The Cognitive Faculty: Intentional Fühlen as Kinetic Intelligence

If values are given as objective qualities, the faculty that cognises them must be more than a "dead" emotional state. Juan Velázquez emphasises that Schelerian emotionality is not a mere "feeling-state" (*Gefühlszustand),* but an intentional feeling (*Fühlen)*.[47] Scheler defines this distinction clearly: feeling-states are "non-intentional" and "sensory," such as a vague mood or physical pain, whereas intentional feeling is a cognitive act that "targets" a value-quality just as vision targets a colour.[48]

This synthesis is aligned with Eugene Kelly's analysis of the "material" nature of values, where values are identified as materially given qualities that possess an objective rank. Kelly argues that the objectivity of these values is grounded in the act of "preferring," which is not a rational choice but a direct, affective "apprehension" of the value-quality itself.[49] This *Fühlen von etwas* thus serves as the axiological counterpart to Sheets-Johnstone's "kinetic intelligence." It is a pre-reflective "thinking in movement" that cognises the "sheer dynamic form" of a value through a shared kinetic-emotional resonance.

By integrating these contemporary insights with Scheler's primary text, it may be posited that the body-subject does not merely "react" to an ethical situation; it intends and cognises the value-quale through a direct, affective encounter with its dynamic form.[50] Just as the melody of a dance is perceived through its

[47] Juan Velázquez, "Feeling in Values: Axiological and Emotional Intentionality as Living Structure of Ethical Life, Regarding Max Scheler's Phenomenology," *Human Studies*, ahead of print, December 20, 2022, 44–46, https://doi.org/10.1007/s10746-022-09656-0.

[48] Scheler, *Formalism in Ethics and Non-Formal Ethics of Values: A New Attempt Toward the Foundation of an Ethical Personalism*, 257.

[49] Eugene Kelly, *Structure and Diversity: Studies in the Phenomenological Philosophy of Max Scheler,* Phaenomenologica (Springer Netherlands, 1997), 141: 34–38, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-017-3099-0.

[50] Sheets-Johnstone, *The Phenomenology of Dance*, 25–26.

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rhythmic form, the material essence of a value is apprehended through its qualitative rhythm.

### 4.2 Cognitive Affectivity and the Invariance of the Value-Form

The phenomenological-emotionalist framework developed here finds a substantive contemporary parallel in the work of Martha Nussbaum. In *Upheavals of Thought*, Nussbaum challenges the tradition of "simple emotivism" by arguing that emotions are essentially cognitive—what she defines as "appraisive" value judgments.[51] For Nussbaum, emotions are intelligent responses to the world, saturated with beliefs about what is significant for the subject's flourishing.[52]

While Nussbaum's work offers a substantive defence of the cognitive nature of affect, the kinetic framework proposed in this inquiry provides the pre-reflective, embodied grounding for these "appraisals." The kinetic intelligence that intuits the sheer dynamic form of a situation constitutes the phenomenological first step, the immediate "getting it," that makes a more complex, propositional value judgment possible.

This synthesis of Schelerian axiology, Sheets-Johnstone's kinetic intelligence, and Nussbaum's cognitive-evaluative theory offers an alternative perspective beyond the traditional impasse between objectivism and relativism. By distinguishing between the empirical good and the essential value, it is possible to propose a standpoint of non-relative universalism.

In this framework, the relativist position accurately accounts for the contingency of Scheler's "goods."[53] The specific actions, rules, or social gestures that count as generous or courageous are indeed culturally relative and vary across historical contexts. However, the universalist claim is preserved through the invariance of the dynamic form, the Schelerian value. This sheer dynamic form is a

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[51] Martha C. Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought: The Intelligence of Emotions* (Cambridge University Press, 2001), 19–22, https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511840715. Nussbaum argues that emotions are not mere "pushes" or "impulses" but are intentional and evaluative.

[52] Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought: The Intelligence of Emotions*, 27–30.

[53] For a discussion on how the "good" is historically situated while the "value" remains a pure quality, see Max Scheler, *Formalism in Ethics and Non-Formal Ethics of Values: A New Attempt Toward the Foundation of an Ethical Personalism*, 21.

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phenomenological universal accessible to all feeling beings. The felt, qualitative presence of a value is cognised by a kinetic intelligence shared as a fundamental condition of our embodied, sentient life.[54]

Furthermore, this framework must account for the fallibility and corrigibility of kinetic-emotional intuition. A potential critique concerns how a felt, kinetic "form" distinguishes genuinely virtuous action from an aesthetically compelling but morally repugnant one—such as the well-documented kinetic power of authoritarian spectacle.[55] Because pre-reflective felt intuition is not infallible, the perception of value-form requires reflective and intersubjective corrigibility. In Schelerian terms, a dynamic form may feel kinetically persuasive at a sensory level while misaligning with the objective hierarchy of moral values (*Wertrangordnung*).[56] Kinetic-emotional intuition thus serves as a primary, immediate mode of moral perception, but its claims remain subject to critical evaluation to distinguish authentic ethical attunement from manipulative aesthetic spectacle.

Ultimately, while the cultural "language" of an act changes, the underlying "melody" of the value remains invariant. By shifting the axiological focus from the measurable object to the qualitative rhythm of the act, a ground for value is established that is transcultural, embodied, and pre-reflectively certain.

## 5. Conclusion: Axiology and the Lived Body

The preceding analysis has demonstrated that the entrenched dichotomy between rational objectivism and simple emotivism in value theory represents an unnecessary impasse. This tension is largely predicated on what Husserl described as the "mathematisation" of the lifeworld: a process that mistakes the measurable, describable action for the lived quality of the act itself.[57] In place of this reduction,

[54] Sheets-Johnstone, *The Primacy of Movement*, 445–450. Sheets-Johnstone argues that kinetic intelligence is an evolutionary and universal feature of human sentience.

[55] Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (Schocken Books, 1968), 241–242.

[56] Scheler, *Formalism in Ethics and Non-Formal Ethics of Values*, 86–90.

[57] For the foundational critique of the "mathematisation" of nature and the lifeworld, see Edmund Husserl, *The Crisis of European Sciences*, 23–59.

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this paper has proposed a phenomenological-emotionalist framework grounded in an overlooked but vital source: the phenomenology of dance.

By drawing on Sheets-Johnstone's work, it has been shown how dance, through a process of "dual abstraction," brackets the situational content of feeling and the utilitarian function of movement to reveal the "sheer dynamic form" of emotion.[58] This "import" is cognised not through disembodied reason, but by a "kinetic intelligence" rooted in our corporeal consciousness, a faculty that finds its philosophical bedrock in Merleau-Ponty's *corps propre*.[59]

This aesthetic framework aligns with the principles of Max Scheler's material value ethics. The distinction between "form" and "content" in dance directly parallels Scheler's ontological distinction between the *Wert* (Value) and the *Gut* (Good).[60] Furthermore, the concept of "kinetic intelligence" serves as a functional mechanism for what Scheler termed "intentional feeling" (*Fühlen*).[61] This synthesis refutes the "mathematisation" of value by returning axiology to the *Lebenswelt* and the body-subject. It validates emotion as a primary, non-rational—though certainly not irrational—faculty of axiological cognition.

Moreover, this perspective offers a grounded approach to the relativism debate. By positing a non-relative universalism, it is possible to acknowledge that while the cultural "content" of an act is contingent and variable, the dynamic "forms" of value are phenomenological universals accessible to all embodied, sentient beings. While the specific gestures of courage or generosity may differ across civilisations, the underlying qualitative rhythm remains an invariant feature of human experience.

Ultimately, this enquiry reframes the relationship to value. It demonstrates that values are not abstract propositions to be calculated or rigid rules to be followed. They are lived, kinetic, and emotional forms that are felt and, in moments of significant integration—much like the dancer who has surrendered to the dance—inhabited. By reclaiming the body as the site of axiological discovery, ethics moves closer to a framework that is as dynamic and vibrant as the life it seeks to guide.

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[58] Sheets-Johnstone, *The Phenomenology of Dance*, 25.

[59] Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 140–145.

[60] Scheler, *Formalism in Ethics and Non-Formal Ethics of Values: A New Attempt Toward the Foundation of an Ethical Personalism*, 19–21.

[61] Velázquez, "Feeling in Values," 44–46.

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Streszczenie

**„Czysta dynamiczna forma" wartości:**
**aksjologia fenomenologiczno-emocjonalistyczna w świetle tańca**

Podejmując problem doświadczeniowego wymiaru wartości, artykuł poddaje krytyce modele racjonalistyczne, redukujące aksjologię do wyodrębnionych i mierzalnych działań. Nawiązując do Husserlowskiej krytyki „matematyzacji" natury, autorka argumentuje, że racjonalistyczna aksjologia zastępuje przeżywaną jakość wartości zachowaniami mierzalnymi. Odwołując się do fenomenologii tańca Maxine Sheets-Johnstone, analiza pokazuje, w jaki sposób taniec wyodrębnia jakości uczuciowe od ich codziennych treści, odsłaniając ich „czystą dynamiczną formę" czy „znaczenie". Artykuł dowodzi, że analogicznie wartości funkcjonują jako niezmienne jakościowe formy, które są ujmowane w sposób przedrefleksyjny. Są „czystymi dynamicznymi formami", intuicyjnie uchwytywanymi w wymiarze emocjonalnym i kinestetycznym, a zarazem odrębnymi od konkretnych działań, w których się przejawiają. Ta linia argumentacji rekonceptualizuje wartość jako jakościową obecność, z którą podmiot może

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się zjednoczyć, i sugeruje, że sprawczość etyczna jest procesem kinestetyczno-emocjonalnego dostrojenia. Taka reorientacja przywraca ciału status pierwotnego miejsca odkrywania wartości.

Słowa kluczowe: aksjologia, Maxine Sheets-Johnstone, Max Scheler, fenomenologia tańca, inteligencja kinestetyczna, materialna etyka wartości, ucieleśnienie (*corps propre*), abstrakcja afektywna, fenomenologia kognitywna

## Zusammenfassung

### „Die reine dynamische Form" des Wertes: eine phänomenologisch-emotionalistische Axiologie im Lichte des Tanzes

Der Artikel befasst sich mit der erfahrungsbezogenen Dimension von Werten und unterzieht rationalistische Modelle einer Kritik, die die Axiologie auf isolierte und messbare Handlungen reduzieren. In Anlehnung an Husserls Kritik an der „Mathematisierung" der Natur argumentiert die Autorin, dass die rationalistische Axiologie die erlebte Qualität von Werten durch messbare Verhaltensweisen ersetzt. Unter Rückgriff auf die Tanzphänomenologie von Maxine Sheets-Johnstone zeigt die Analyse auf, wie der Tanz emotionale Qualitäten von ihren alltäglichen Inhalten abstrahiert und so ihre „reine dynamische Form", d. h. ihren ursprünglichen Sinn or Bedutung offenbart. Der Artikel belegt, dass Werte analog als unveränderliche qualitative Formen fungieren, die auf vorreflexive Weise erfasst werden. Sie sind „reine dynamische Formen", die intuitiv in der emotionalen und kinästhetischen Dimension erfasst werden und zugleich von den konkreten Handlungen, in denen sie sich manifestieren, getrennt sind. Eine solche Perspektive konzeptualisiert den Wert neu als qualitative Präsenz, mit der das Subjekt in eine Einheit eintreten kann, und weist darauf hin, dass ethische Handlungsfähigkeit ein Prozess kinästhetisch-affektiver Einstimmung ist. Diese Neuorientierung gibt dem Körper den Status als ursprünglichen Ort der Entdeckung von Werten zurück.

Schlüsselwörter: Axiologie, Maxine Sheets-Johnstone, Max Scheler, Tanzphänomenologie, kinästhetische Intelligenz, materielle Wertethik, Verkörperung (*corps propre*), affektive Abstraktion, kognitive Phänomenologie

*Ins Deutsche übersetzt von Anna Pastuszka*