

Invited Paper presented at the
Annual Meeting of the Dance History
Scholars, Columbus, Ohio,
February 20, 1983
Published--Proceedings, pp. 105-110

PROCEEDINGS

DANCE HISTORY SCHOLARS

SIXTH ANNUAL CONFERENCE
The Ohio State University
11-13 February 1983

DANCE HISTORY SCHOLARS
 CONFERENCE PAPERS, AVAILABLE AS A PROCEEDINGS *
 Sixth Annual Conference, Ohio State University
 11-13 February 1983
 Christena L. Schlundt, Compiler

Table of Content

1. Sparshott, Francis. <i>The Missing Art of Dance</i>	1
2. Brainard, Ingrid G. <i>Modes, Manners, Movement: The Interaction of Dance and Dress From the Late Middle Ages to the Renaissance</i>	17
3. Wagner, Ann. <i>Dance As Virtue: An Analysis From the Sixteenth Century Courtesy Literature</i>	37
4. Shifrin, Ellen. <i>The Mystery of the Danse a Quatre: An Analysis of Selected Iconography From Quebec</i>	48
5. Prevots, Naima. <i>American Pageantry and American Modern Dance</i>	59
6. Applegate, Joan S. <i>English Cavalier Dance-Songs: Henry Lawes and Robert Herrick</i>	71
7. Chadima, Helen Gower. <i>The Use of Castanets in Baroque Dance</i>	84
8. Marsh, Carol. <i>Fishing For Basses: Finding Musical Concordances For English Country Dances</i>	95
→ 9. Van Camp, Julie. <i>Some Philosophical Problems of Dance Criticism: The Multiple Media of Dance</i>	105
10. Alderson, Evan. <i>Metaphor In Dance: The Example of Graham</i>	111
11. Shelton, Suzanne. <i>Jungian Roots of Martha Graham's Dance Imagery</i>	119
12. Foster, Susan Leigh. <i>On Dancing and the Dance: Two Visions of Dance's History</i>	133
13. Accocella, Joan R. <i>Symbolism and Modernism: The Response of European Intellectuals to the Fin-de-Siècle Element in the Prewar Diaghilev Ballet</i>	142
14. Garafola, Lynn. <i>Toward a New Interpretation of Diaghlev's Ballets Russes</i>	152
15. Horwitz, Dawn Lille. <i>Two Bacchanales On Broadway--Choreographed By Fokine</i>	166
16. Hammond, Sandra Noll. <i>A Meeting of the Masters.</i>	176
17. Brainard, Ingrid. <i>Court Dances of the 15th Century</i>	177
18. Daniels, Margaret. <i>Passacaille D'Armide</i>	178
19. Feves, Angene and Hammond, Sandra Noll. <i>La Bacchante: Alternate Performance Style</i>	179
20. Téten, Carol. <i>Social Dance Suite 1911-1915</i>	181
21. Thomas, Emma Lewis. <i>Report on Dance in a University Setting in Germany</i>	183
22. Ries, Frank W. and assisted by Hammond, Sandra Noll. <i>Rediscovered Dances of Anna Pavlova 1913-1916</i>	189

SOME PHILOSOPHICAL PROBLEMS OF DANCE CRITICISM: THE MULTIPLE MEDIA OF DANCE

Julie Van Camp

My purpose today is to examine the ontological status of dance -- the nature of the existence of dance, what it consists of. Is a dance solely the physical bodies of the dancers, moving in time and space, at a particular performance? Is a dance the total of all bodies that have ever performed the dance? the choreographer's mental concept of the choreographic design? the written notation for the choreography? the perceptions and thoughts of the audience? the collection of all perceptions of all audiences who have ever seen a performance of the work?

These are important questions. We must know what dance is in order to explain how we can know anything about it, how we relate to it, how we can talk about it, describe it, refer to it, evaluate it. The primary test for the adequacy of an ontological theory is whether that theory reflects and helps us to better understand the way we actually talk about the existence of dance as it is performed, appreciated, and criticized.

Several media are involved in some way in dance: movement, music, scenery, costumes, lighting. Analysis of only one of those media does not completely explain dance, nor do analyses of single-medium or so-called "pure" artforms necessarily explain the mixed or "impure" artform of dance without distortion of either the theory or the artform.

I will argue that the medium of dance is not purely physical movement, but that neither is the medium of dance a "fusion," "assimilation," or "amalgamation" of physical movement, auditory images, and visual designs. I will also reject the view that dance has a purely mental existence in the minds of performers and audiences. Dance is more adequately explained as consisting of what I call the primary media of movement and music (or, more generally, auditory images, including rhythm), and the secondary media of costumes, scenery, and lighting. Even so, dance is a distinct artform, not merely a collaboration of several pure artforms.

Dance is often identified for convenience as the artform of human movement, and no one would disagree that movement plays an important role in the artform. However, the interest in distinguishing dance from other artforms seems to have led some to wrongly characterize dance as an artform consisting solely of human movement, or at least to ignore everything but human movement. Haig Khatchadourian, for example, has argued that dance wholly consists of or includes physical movements, although not bodies in motion.¹ The important dimension of music in dance performances is obscured in his analysis, in which he acknowledges only that rhythm must be present "in some degree" in dance.² Rhythmical dances without music do exist, but these are rare, a fact not without significance. Especially in the masterful collaborations of Balanchine and Stravinsky, the music is as much a part of the performance of "the dance" as the movement. If the choreography for Balanchine's Concerto Barocco were performed to a Sousa march instead of to Bach's Double Violin Concerto, it simply would not be a performance of Concerto Barocco.

Copyright Julie C. Van Camp 1983

although a performance using a piano transcription of the Bach would probably still be considered Concerto Barocco. "Rhythmical" qualifies and characterizes movement, but "musical" does not. It does not make sense to describe movement performed in silence as "musical," although it does to describe it as "rhythmical." A characterization of movement as "musical" is used, instead, to describe the relationship between the media of movement and of music, both of which are primary media of dance.

There is disagreement about how important music is to dance, or what things about music are most important ("mood," rhythm, etc.), but music clearly plays a major role in dance performances, second only to the movement itself. The examples of dances without music are, I would contend, highly rhythmical works which are parasitic on music and the audience's familiarity with the use of music in dance. They are often experiments designed precisely to show the possibility of dance without music, but despite the long history of dances-without-music, they remain isolated examples. One need only look at the history and current practice of the artform to confirm this. Those examples are not sufficient to show that music should be excluded from consideration in the ontological status of dance. To explain and understand dance, philosophy must look to the artform as it is actually performed and appreciated.

The view that the medium of dance is solely human movement (or human bodies) relegates music to the status of a mere dispensable accompaniment excluded from any proper or important role in the evaluation or identity of dance performances, like the pedestal for a sculpture or the frame and wall hooks for a painting. This is the unacceptable consequence of Khatchadourian's analysis and also of Virgil Aldrich's view ". . . that the material of the art of dancing is the body-in-action of the dancer."³ Although Aldrich says this medium will be "elaborated" by the "involvement" of "temporal and rhythmic elements,"⁴ he does not consider these elements to be the material (or one of the materials) of dance, nor does he so consider music. ("Dancing is usually done to music, and is then an impure art, a mixture of two arts."⁵)

George Beiswanger suggests a more integral role for music when he says that

musical accompaniment builds into the dance's designs, providing in some cases the dance's initial inspiration and basic framework, adding to others a supplementary contrapuntal pattern, and affording still others a tonal floor upon which the design's dynamics can securely play.⁶

Movement designs are intentional patterns, structures, and formalities, both in the sense of visual designs perceived at one moment in time (relationship of limb to torso; relationship of dancer to dancer) and designs which can be perceived only through a period of time (relationship of one body position to subsequent body position and relationship of dancer to dancer in location in space at succeeding moments in time). Thus, it is clear, building on Beiswanger's observation, why music and rhythms are so integral in dance, as they provide, reinforce, highlight and focus through aural patterns the relationships of the visual patterns.

Before looking further at candidates for the physical

medium of dance, an entirely different approach should be disposed of, that of Susanne Langer that dance is not physical at all, but a virtual image. Although physical materials (bodies, costumes, light, musical tone, etc.) are used to create dance, she says, dance is none of those things, nor any physical thing, but an "appearance" or "apparition of active powers, a dynamic image."⁷ Khatchadourian sums up widespread rejection of this view, which I endorse: "I do not see how such 'virtual entities' can exist independently of a perceiver."⁸

At another extreme is the view that dance consists of more than one physical medium, physical movement (or bodies-in-motion), as well as music, costumes, scenery, and lighting. But I would not go so far as to say that the physical medium of dance is a fusion or assimilation of these media.

In a brief note some years ago, Monroe C. Beardsley hinted at such a possibility: ". . . it would seem that in the dance a fusion of music and the movement of human bodies can occur."⁹ He did not elaborate on this idea, but there is a certain attractiveness to considering the medium of dance to be one thing, a fusion of movement-and-music (and perhaps other things). This approach fully acknowledges the diverse elements of dance in a way that the Khatchadourian-Aldrich approach does not, and recognizes that dance is more than merely the sum of those diverse elements. Yet the idea is troublesome, because fusion (defined in the Oxford English Dictionary as "The union or blending together of different things /whether material or immaterial/ as if by melting, so as to form one whole; the result or state of being so blended"¹⁰) suggests too much, even assuming it is used metaphorically. Two movement vocabularies can be fused (say, the classical styles of Petipa and Fokine); the music of two composers can be fused into the score of one ballet; the sound of the human voice can be fused to the sound of instrumental music. But when physical movement and auditory images are "fused," the whole produced is not really fused, but mixed, with the separate elements still clearly present. No new element is created, although a new mixture certainly is. In watching a dance performance, it is impossible to forget -- nor should it be forgotten -- that it consists of movement and music and various other things. Substituting amalgamation ("The action of combining distinct elements, races, associations, into one uniform whole; . . . a homogeneous union of what were previously distinct elements, societies, etc."¹¹) for fusion results in the same inaccuracy.

The notion of "assimilation," introduced by Langer for purposes other than characterizing the medium of dance, is equally unsatisfactory. As examples of a "principle of assimilation," she says,

Music ordinarily swallows words and actions creating opera, oratorio or song; dance commonly assimilates music Sometimes a poem may swallow music, or even dance. . . . I have never known music to incorporate dancing but it might.¹²

Langer was not here addressing the medium of dance, but these tantalizing comments are worth exploring from that perspective. While fusion is the blending of several things into a new whole, assimilation ("the action of making or becoming like; similarity, resemblance, likeness"¹³) involves changes in one or more things to become like something else, which itself remains unchanged. It is not clear how music could change

to be like dance, since music already has rhythm, mood, tempo, etc. independently. If the assimilation of music by dance just means that dance dominates the music in being more important in the interest and attention of perceivers, "assimilation" would overstate the relationship.

The problem underlying the approaches just surveyed is the apparent assumption that a particular artform must have only one medium. Langer, for example, says quite explicitly: "Every work has its being in only one order of art; compositions of different orders are not simply conjoined, but all except one will cease to appear as what they are."¹⁴ Aldrich, like many others, talks as if the complexity or "impurity" of dance is a flaw to be overcome. It is not clear why there must be a single medium for each artform, except for the usual preference for simplicity, all else being equal, and the greater familiarity with major arts which are, of course, "pure."

Thomas Munro, writing some thirty years ago, seemed to glorify the presence of so many different media within ballet, specifically in the work The Afternoon of a Faun.¹⁵ He has identified several factors which account for the preference of some for simpler, purer, single-media artforms, including greater ease in following the work, being able to "perceive all the stimuli in one way, with less distraction,"¹⁶ and the ability to appreciate the work "... without accompanying words or music, which ... only confuse and distract without enhancing the value of the whole."¹⁷ This seems to reflect disagreement, not just over the value of simplicity as opposed to complexity, but also preferable

varieties of complexity -- complexity from elements within a particular media or complexity resulting from the presence of different media. This sort of disagreement reaffirms the importance of properly identifying and analyzing the media of the artform. As long as dance is treated as a single-medium artform, the remaining media cannot be accommodated except in negative ways, as clutter, distractions, or impurities.

I propose, quite simply, that dance be considered a multi-media artform with media of unequal importance. A primary medium of dance is physical movement and non-movement (in the sense of "stasis") by a human body capable of such movement. This is the most obvious characteristic of dance, and the characteristic that distinguishes it most sharply from other artforms. Paintings may represent the human body, but it is not physically present in a painting. Theater, mime, and opera also use live human bodies capable of movement, but in all cases the movement is presented along with other media that distinguish them from dance.

The other primary medium of dance is music (or, more generally, auditory images), which plays a major role, but one less important than the movement. Every dance either includes music or auditory images (percussion or other rhythmic noises), or uses clearly developed rhythms in the movement, exploiting the audience's familiarity with music in other works. The vast majority of dances centrally use music, and the few experimental works which do not themselves audibly use music can be included as examples of dance because of this parasitic or dependent role. Works which have no such relationship to music (its presence or its rhythm) do not count as dance. The important role of music distinguishes dance from theater and mime, which also use movements of the human body but without any such integral role for music. Opera is distinguished by its use of music produced by the human voice. It

should also be noted that primary need not mean "sole;" there are three primary colors, for example.

Secondary media include remaining objects of visual perception (all except the movement design itself); such as costumes, scenery, lighting, and such experimental innovations as videotape. Very simple costumes, such as plain leotards, play a minimal role in importance both in perception and evaluation, but others, such as the lavishly decorated costumes for various productions of The Firebird, are (speaking colloquially) works of art in themselves and constitute a visual dimension quite distinct from the perception of the human movement. Some scenery, especially by such artists as Picasso and Chagall, constitutes a separate artistic medium presented on the same stage and as part of the same performance with the movement and music. These are characterized as secondary media, because an instance of dance could exist without them (assuming nudity in fact or in appearance through the use of flesh-colored leotards, and an unembellished performing space and lighting), because these media are shared with several other artforms and do not particularly characterize dance, and because they are of secondary importance in understanding and evaluating dance. For example, it is commonplace for critics to complain of Balanchine's shoddy or garish costumes, but this is noted as an annoyance, not as a decisive factor against the value of the work overall.

This proposal rejects attempts to identify one and only one medium of the artform of dance. But I also want to insist that dance is more than just a collaboration of other artforms, temporarily uprooted and assembled in an uneasy, impure relationship. Beiswanger suggests that "... a well-designed dance is not to be resolved into its fragmented parts."¹⁸ It is not the case that the contributions of individual media should "stand on their own" as separate works of art. It is also not the case, however, that the components must constitute an absolute fusion of those parts for they can be and are separately identified, analyzed, and compared.

The multiplicity of media makes dance more difficult to understand, but there is nothing inferior about complexity, other things being unequal. My proposal, although not as neat and simple as competitors, seems more suited to understanding dance as it is actually created and performed, the ultimate test of the adequacy of any theory.

NOTES

¹"Movement and Action in the Performing Arts," Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism, XXXVII (Fall, 1978), 25, 27.

²Ibid., 27.

³Philosophy of Art (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1963), p. 66.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Ibid.

⁶"Chance and Design in Choreography," JAAC, XXI (Fall, 1962), 15.

⁷Problems of Art (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1957), pp. 4-5.

⁸Khatchadourian, "Movement and Action in the Performing Arts," 26.

⁹Aesthetics: Problems in the Philosophy of Criticism (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1958), p. 366.

¹⁰Oxford English Dictionary, 1971, I, 623.

¹¹Ibid., 263.

¹²Langer, Problems of Art, p. 85 (emphasis added).

¹³Oxford English Dictionary, 1971, I, 510.

¹⁴Langer, Problems of Art, p. 85.

¹⁵"The Afternoon of a Faun' and the Interrelation of the Arts," JAAC, X (December, 1951), 95.

¹⁶Ibid., 111.

¹⁷Ibid.

¹⁸"Chance and Design in Choreography," 16.