

20th & 21st Century Dance History -- spring 2011
Extended Analysis of a Choreographic Work--Research Paper

Choreography is at the heart of understanding the history of dance.
And understanding the surrounding "times" of this work of art deepens one's appreciation of it.

You may be asking yourself: Why is writing about a dance in an in depth way useful for me? If you are engaged in dance, or in any art form, you need to be able to talk about it in public. This is how you help the public appreciate art; this is also how you get funding. If you are not personally involved in dance, this is excellent practice in writing a clear report on a work of art--the skills for which you can transfer to any topic. Learning how to draw on "what the experts say" in dance will make it easier for you to do so in other settings. This paper may also serve you as a writing sample for a graduate program or a future employer.

You have been provided with a list of important videoed choreographic works to choose from for your research. All DVDs and VHS tapes are on 3-hour reserve in Crumb Library. Do some preliminary viewing and choose the dance you want to research. You are required to have this choice and know the title and choreographer's name by no later than class time on Tuesday February 8. We will meet in the library that day and work with librarian, Carol Franck on research methods for your paper.

Part 1: Historical, Cultural, and Social Context -- The World in Which the Choreographer Created

Create a portrait of the time in which the dance was choreographed. When considering context, these are just a few of the questions you should ask yourself: What was going on at the time the dance was choreographed? What was going on in the world, country, and city of the choreographer--what major events? Was a war going on? In what type of society did the choreographer work: Urban, rural, rich, poor, educated, or uneducated? Was there an economic depression? How was society structured? What were current beliefs, practices, values, and traditions? What kinds of attitudes did people have regarding race, sex, art, civil and human rights, and other issues that may be pertinent to this choreographer's work? These are just some of the questions you can ask yourself when researching the larger context of the dance. During our library session you will be introduced to a number of encyclopedias and other sources that will be useful for researching this section.

Part 2: Choreographer's Intent and Critics' Responses

A. Who Is The Choreographer & What Did The Choreographer Write Or Say About The Dance?

Introduce the reader to the choreographer by providing pertinent biographical information--a brief biographical sketch. What were the choreographer's philosophies on art, life, and dance? Did s/he develop a specific technique? What was unique about this person's creative work?

What does the choreographer say--in interviews--or write about this dance? What was her/his intention in creating the dance? What did the choreographer say about the success or failure of the dance?

B. What The Critics/Dance Writers Wrote About This Dance

Of primary interest here is what critics said about the dance when it premiered. Secondly, what did future dance writers have to say? Was it well received? Was it panned? Was it controversial? Why do you feel critics responded the way they did? **Important: How did the critics' responses relate to the time and place in which they lived?**

Useful sources may include, but are not limited to video documentaries, *The International Encyclopedia of Dance*, *New York Times*, *New Yorker*, *Dance Magazine*, and books by and about the choreographer. Just a few of the critics/dance writers' names you may encounter are: Richard Buckle, Selma Jeanne Cohen, Edwin Denby, Clive Barnes, Arnold Haskell, John Martin, Joan Acocella, Jack Anderson, Deborah Jowitt, Lewis Segal, David Vaughan, Deborah Jowitt, Kitty Cunningham, Alan Kriegsman, Marcia Siegel, Tobi Tobias, Sally Banes, and John Mueller. There are many more. Some of these writers published books: *The Dance In Mind: Profiles and Reviews 1977-1983* (Jowitt), *Going to the Dance and After Images* (Croce), *Mark Morris* (Acocella), *The Shapes of Change, Howling Near Heaven: Twyla Tharp and the Reinvention of Modern Dance*, *At the Vanishing Point: A Critic Looks at Dance* (Siegel), *Reinventing Dance in the 1960s: Everything Was Possible* (Banes). The ones listed are all in our library.

Part 3: The Dance Itself, and Your Synthesis and Conclusions

A. The Dance Itself: Description, Interpretation, and Evaluation

You will watch the dance numerous times so you really "see" it. First, describe all aspects of the dance: Movements, Use of Space, Costumes, Lighting, and Scenery. Bring the dance alive on the page for the reader. Second, interpret the dance: What is it about for you? What does it mean or represent? Third, evaluate the dance. Drawing on your description and interpretation, what are this dance's strengths and limitations? We will practice this process in class.

B. Synthesis and Conclusion

Imagine that you are a director of a dance company and you have been granted the rights to reconstruct this dance for public performance. Your desire, in this reconstruction process, is to embrace and incorporate as much of your current knowledge of the dance--and its surrounding context--as possible. This includes aspects of:

- ❖ Historical, social, and cultural context
- ❖ Commentary of writers and choreographer
- ❖ The dance, itself

In your process of reconstructing this dance for a new performance, what aspects of what you now know about the dance do you want to make certain to remember? Why is this important?

Pick up important points from Parts 1, 2, and 3 to create your synthesis and concluding comments: Keep looping back to what you have already stated that is pertinent to your reconstruction process.

This paper will be 8-10 pages: Typed, double spaced, 10 or 12 point font, maximum of 1" margins and top/bottom (including first page). At every stage--with each draft--you are expected to only hand in copies that have been diligently proofread for spelling, punctuation, and sentence structure. You will hand in drafts of this paper in 3 sections and receive feedback for rewrites.

Write for clarity and flow of your ideas--for ease of reading and comprehension. Summarize the end of each subsection. Start each new paragraph with a strong transitional sentence that draws a connection from what went before to what is about to be discussed. The paper should emerge as one evolving discussion that each new reader could easily follow.

Use MLA for (a) within-text citations and (b) a Works Cited list. Remember to cite direct quotes and paraphrases. Refer to the handout: *Citation Basics: Three Golden Rules for College Academics* Potsdam College Writing Center. You are expected to adhere to the SUNY Potsdam Academic Honor Code with states that plagiarism is not tolerated: Plagiarism is presenting as one's own the distinctive ideas, facts or words of another (in part or in whole) without appropriate acknowledgement of the source. Issues of plagiarism apply to any type of work including, but not limited to exams, papers, any writing or printed text, computer programs, web sites, art, music, photography or video.

Due Dates--In class:

| | |
|-------------------|---|
| Thursday Feb. 24: | Hand in Part 1: Historical, Cultural and Social Context |
| Thursday Mar. 3: | Part 1 returned |
| Thursday Mar. 24: | Hand in Part 2: Choreographer's Intent and Critics' Responses |
| Thursday Mar. 24: | Hand in Revision of Part 1 |
| Thursday Apr. 14: | Hand in Part 3: The Dance, & Synthesis and Conclusion |
| Thursday Apr. 14: | Hand in Revision of Part 2 |
| Tuesday Apr. 26: | Parts 2 & 3 returned |
| Thursday May 5: | Hand in Completed paper |

Please note:

- ❖ You are required to hand in ALL earlier drafts when you hand in a current draft. Otherwise your current draft will not be read.
- ❖ All drafts should be turned in at the beginning of class time. Drafts not handed in--in class--but placed in my mailbox in 238 Satterlee by 4:00 of the due date will receive a .5 grade deduction for the final paper. Drafts will not be accepted after 4PM unless previously agreed to, due to extenuating circumstances.