

20th & 21st Century Dance History – fall 2013 -- Analysis of a Videotaped 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 & VHS tapes are on 3-hour reserve in Crumb Library or available on line through Crumb Library. Do some preliminary viewing and choose the dance you want to research. You are required to submit your top 3 choices of dances in class on Tuesday Sept. 17. Do enough preliminary work so you know that there is ample information available about the dance and the choreographer. I suggest you speak with me about your choices so I help you make a decision. We will meet in the library on Thursday September 19 to work with librarian, Carol Franck on research methods for your paper.

Format

You must type the report and use double spacing, font 10-12. Margins will be 1 inch. In a footer (at the bottom of the page) write your last name and the page number. Content, grammar, and spelling are extremely important. Eliminate *widows* and *orphans*. Widow -- A paragraph-ending line that falls at the beginning of the following page/column, thus separated from the rest of the text. It will look as if there are a few floating words on their own at the top of the page.

Orphan -- A paragraph-opening line that appears by itself at the bottom of a page/column.

Dances are works of art. Therefore, the titles of sections of dances should be enclosed in quotation marks (e.g. "Pas de Deux" from *Don Quixote*). The names of modern dance works and ballets are printed in italics, such as *Strange Fruit* and *Swan Lake*.

Use APA format for citations, with a list of references at the end of the paper. Use the sample paper "Pearl Primus' *Strange Fruit* (1943)" to help you with the format of your paper. However, do not replicate content or sources from the sample paper: Do your OWN work. Each term or phrase below with (*) means that you will use the words as a heading. This paper will be a minimum of 10 full pages. Approximate page lengths are noted below to give you a general idea.

Content

Write in a narrative form using a first-person point of view. When writing about dance, use kinetic words to describe the dance and include specific examples of movement from the dance. You must follow this outline in order for the assignment to be evaluated. Required Sources are listed below.

I. Background Information

A. *Choreographer: A biographical summary that includes dates of birth and death, choreographer's nationality, and other significant works by the choreographer. (1 page)

B. *Performance of the work: (1) Company and place of the performance you are observing. (2) Performance space or theater and date of premiere performance. (3) Important dancers in the premiere performance. (1 paragraph)

C. *Composer and Music or Sound Accompaniment: Identify and describe the (a) music/sound accompaniment, (b) composer, and (c) the composer's body of musical work. (1 page)

D. *Historical Context: Create a portrait of the time in which the dance was choreographed. When considering context, these are just a few of the questions you could 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? How do you feel the choreographer's life and work relate to these events? Since you cannot focus on everything going on in the world, pay particular attention to the events that you believe may have influenced your choreographer in the creation of the dance. (2 pages)

E. *Importance of the work in relation to the choreographers' other contributions.

Also include the role or importance of this piece in relation to the history of dance. (2-3 pages)

II. Choreography

A. *Choreographic Concept: What is the Dance About? Fully describe the mood, idea, theme, or story of the dance, as you understand it from the performance. Compare your ideas with those of the choreographer, dance critics, performers, or dance historians. Include the ideas of at least 3 people/writers; quote or paraphrase them. 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. (1 page)

B. *The Dance Itself: Description, Interpretation, and Evaluation. (3 pages)

Description: Describe how the choreographer uses the following elements of in the dance:

1. Space and spatial relationships of dancers
2. Movement qualities and dynamics. If you have studied LMA, include weight, space, time, and flow
3. Types of movements or body actions
4. Form of the dance: Reflecting on the dance, explain how the following elements contributed to the dance. Choose 3 out of the 6 that you feel are the most pertinent or interesting aspects of the dance.
 - a. Unity: How did the dance hold together considering its overall concept?
 - b. Contrast: The use of opposite qualities or elements in the work.
 - c. Variety: The use of the same or similar qualities or elements in different forms.
 - d. Repetition: The manner in which the choreographic elements are restated.
 - e. Transition: The way one movement, phrase or section of the dance connected to the next.
 - f. Climax: The point to which the dance builds, follow by a resolution. The climax normally occurs close to the end of the dance.
5. Music or sound accompaniment: How is it used and how effective is it?
6. Lighting design, costumes, sets, and props: How are they used and how effective are they?

Interpretation: Briefly note how some of the above elements contribute to your interpretation of the dance. (You have already addressed the meaning of the dance in the "big picture" in **II A**. Here, comment on how a few specific movements, qualities, uses of space, or form lead you to particular meanings.

Evaluation: Evaluate the quality of the dance. Drawing on your description and interpretation—what are the strengths and limitations of this dance?

C. *Concluding Thoughts: Restaging the Dance: Imagine that you have the opportunity to restage the dance for public performance. You want to make it the strongest performance possible. To ensure a strong performance you will utilize the research you have done about the choreographer, historical context, choreographic concept, and the dance itself. How will you apply everything you know to the process of restaging the work? (1 page)

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	Thursday October 10	Choreographer, Performance of the Work, Composer
(In class)	Thursday October 31	Historical Context
	Thursday November 14	Choreographic Concept, The Dance Itself, Concluding Thoughts

(The course schedule has Tues. Nov. 12 as the due date, but let's change it to Thursday.)

Be prepared to share your writing with others in class.

Please note:

- Your writing will be returned to you with feedback for rewrites, and you will be given due dates for your rewrites.
- You are required to hand in ALL earlier drafts when you hand in a new draft. Otherwise your current draft will not be read. All drafts are due by 4pm on the due date. Late work will receive a grade deduction.

Required Sources

You are required to choose a minimum of 4 different categories of sources from the 6 categories below. (For example, you might choose:

- New York Times (Category 1)
- American Decades (Category 5)
- My Life, by Isadora Duncan (Category 3)
- *Dance Scope* (Category 6)

It's very likely that you will want to use more than 4.) You may peruse Wikipedia to get a general idea, but neither depend on it for the truth nor quote or paraphrase Wikipedia.

Category 1. *New York Times*

Category 2. *The New Yorker* Magazine

Category 3. Book (non-reference)

Category 4. *International Encyclopedia of Dance* (hard copy in library)

Category 5. Reference Books (other than #4), such as *The Encyclopedia of World Biography* or *American Decades*

Category 6. Substantive article from one of these Magazines or Journals: *Contact Quarterly*, *Dance Magazine*, *Dance Teacher*, *Dance Research Journal*, *Dance Scope*, *Dance Chronicle*, *Journal of Dance Education*. (If you have another journal in mind, talk to me so I can see if it is suitable.)

In addition to the 4 required sources, **you may use online sources of merit**. Determine merit by the qualifications of the writer, as well as the recentness of the posting. Some reliable websites are listed below:

- Dance Heritage Coalition: America's Irreplaceable Dance Treasures (essays on major dancers, choreographers, dances and companies)
<http://www.danceheritage.org/treasures.html>
- Free to Dance (African-American dancers and choreographers)
<http://www.pbs.org/wnet/freetodance/>
- Great Performances Dance
<http://www.pbs.org/wnet/gperf/category/episodes/by-genre/dance/>
- Internet Broadway Database
<http://www.ibdb.com/>
- Jacobs Pillow Dance Festival
<http://jacobspillow.org/>
- New York Public Library for the Performing Arts
<http://www.nypl.org/locations/lpa>
- Politics & the Dancing Body (Library of Congress collections)
<http://myloc.gov/exhibitions/politics-and-dance/Pages/default.aspx>
- Dance Company and Choreographer websites, such as:
Merce Cunningham Trust: <http://www.mercecunningham.org/history/>
Martha Graham: <http://marthagraham.org/>
- American Ballet Theatre Library (ballet terminology) <http://www.abt.org/education/library.asp>