

Metamorphoses of dance: live dance, video-dance and transmedia practices

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1. Live-dance

I will consider dance as a system involving at least one dancing subject as sources of sense and an audience as a receiver.

The sense of dance evolves from the mutual interaction of audience and dancers.

It is constructed moment by moment. Choreography unravels in time as an interface connecting a subject moving and an audience observing.

The rhythm of the eyes watching is regulated and moved by the movement choices. Physiologically, choreography addresses the use of the audience senses.

More over, each action seen by the audience has a direct impact on their nervous system, on emotion, on the brains. On a scale of brain mechanisms, probably when we watch a dancer moving we activate mirror neurons.

A mirror neuron is a premotor neuron that fires both when an animal acts and when an animal observes the same action performed by another (especially conspecific) animal. Thus, the neuron "mirrors" the behavior of the other animal, as though the observer were them-selves acting.

Viewers watch a specific and trained use of the mechanisms of a body, a body shaped by the activity of spreading energy and wishes through it.

An open body is a body open to space, time, direction, a body that keeps an integrity and poise but can move in all directions, as a mirror of a flexible but still rigorous mind.

The eventual existence of mirror neurons suggests that the audience might have a feeling of being in the dancer's body somehow, but at the same time is in the privileged position of seeing action from outside: the viewer would be an hybrid ? Varela would say ? between first and third person.

And this has important consequences.

From dancers point of view, in fact choreography is laid down as a challenge to freedom. Even in improvisation, good improvisers are those who are able to self regulate their freedom, to keep alive the game between structure and intuition.

When dancers dance, they play with shadows and lights of a structure, hiding and coming out of the score. Self-expression happens within a very limited zone, but its power is such that makes choreography disappear. When choreography is no longer recognizable as choreography, because life has been brought in to it, what the audience can see is a stream of thought in action.

Dancers pass through forms, live within them till the point that they are no longer doing, or producing shapes but they are them-selves a whole in a transformation that involves the entire being. It is this is what makes dance accessible to anyone looking as it has to do with energy, dynamics, volume and layers.

Choreographies are trajectories traced on the cross points between body and mind, intention and realization, potentials and facts and carry the audience with them. Dancers have a faculty of making choices about what to do, where to go, and are those choices that provoke human emotions. According to Varela (Mulder, 2000) in every trajectory you have a point that moves, and this moving point has a trail which is the immediate past states of the trajectory. This trajectory is in a context, a landscape, and you know where it is heading. It is like seeing a ball rolling down a mountain: although it has many options, you can see that is already geared to go this way and not that way, and ? he says - that is why the metaphor of the trajectory is such a beautiful one. Every research for freedom evokes emotions, feelings, and holds attention and it is transmitted through the senses to the senses.

2. Video- dance and video films

In live dance dancers open up the depth of now, open up coordinates of space to which spectators relate to in order to create their own dramaturgy. Potential time-framing are held by the dan-

cers body, left unexpressed unrealized as they are in constant transformation and evolution. The audience create extensions/restrictions of meaning to what the dancers do, but they are taken back from the movement of dancers. Dramaturgy keeps its transparency as in fact in front of physical vibration dramaturgy gets lost, and it will be found only at the end of the story, when that vibration is gone.

The dancer's world is the world of metamorphosis, the audience's world is that of metaphor. The separation and the pressure between these two worlds create a tension. The two worlds keep intangible and they resonate one in the other. What happens in new dance developments such as video-dance, dance movies, and transmedia practices? What happens when the presence of the body is filtered through lenses and screens?

If live dance suggest the idea of a transparent dramaturgy, video-dance does the opposite: it develops those fantasies that the audience mind produces while watchin a dance. Video dance explores those areas excluded from the continuity of time and space of the stage. It carries the audience into those time retentions or pro-tensions and develops them into imagery. In videos, what you can see is dance's opacity and the dancers absence. And you perceive the presence of a narrating subject who choose the cut, the perspective on the body and on dance.

In video the movement belongs to the camera, time is created by the speed of the editing. I will consider a performance called "When Gene Kelly Smiles" by Roberta Marques/Ronald Burchi -<http://www.robertamarques.com/english/index.html>- and begin to shift attention to the presence of video in live performances, to then move gradually to video-dance practice and dance movies examples.

Roberta Marques (1) is present on stage as a sort of cyborg entity, half-dancer/half-audience as she simply rolls on the stage floor filming in real time a dancer dancing. The images she produces are projected on a screen immediately behind the dancer, generating a psychedelic landscape. The effect of vertigo is strong and makes Roberta's movement have more impact than the dancer's movement as she is filtering those movements and amplifying the audience perception. In a way, the women with the camera is at the same time an extension of the dancer's body and of the audience eyes.

Roberta Marques is containg and being contained by the performance, guiding the audience and influencing strongly the dancer as well.

What the dancer does, appear much more remote than it is, the beauty of movement becomes evanescent and is enhanced by as human in its sparkling energy..

In Video-dance, artists may create dances with objects, lights, or manipulating completely digital materials.

Eileen Standley (2), American dancer and video artist, says:

"In most of my video work, the dance is created without a body.

Instead, I allow imagery to enter into the field of the frame and change over time by spontaneous alterations in the environment, such as forces of wind, organic shifts of light/shadows, appearances and disappearances. Rhythms.

Thus the environment becomes the dancer dancing.

For me, the hybrid form of dance-video offers the possibility to also amplify this belief and thereby invite an audience to receive and perhaps experience transformation or transportation over extended time. "

Extentions and inversions of time, micro and macro perspectives, manipulations. Video offers the chance of compressing and expanding space and time.

In video-dance a dramaturgy is given to you, and you can imagine the dancers and the dance. In video-products the audience looks at the choices made by the director, dramaturgy is a director's choice. The audience has no dramaturgical choice. The eye of the director goes either on the legs of the dancer or to the face, with a certain speed and effect. Editing images, choosing the details, being already the audience eye. What is there is the vibration of a mind that tells a story.

"Blush" is a dance movie by Wim VandeKeybus (3) and it is already and example of transmedia practice: a dance piece converted into a video dance product. The dance film translates drama-turgy into a narrative, amplifying imagery, memories and fantasies, but most of all natural and artificial landscapes.

<http://it.youtube.com/watch?v=CywPfvq4Y1c>

An interview with the producer Bart van Langendonck reveals a simple but interesting detail,

" ?The dancers got used to certain movements and were frustrated because they could not do the same in the video, they were dancing barefoot on rocks, in rivers, climbing mountains?"

<http://it.youtube.com/watch?v=pNsvuZbYYUE>

Specifically in this movie, but often in video dance and dance movies the real protagonists are the landscape/context and the camera?the work of the eye on the body, and the revelation of impression of movement through the insistent use of relativity processes.

The dramaturgical quality offered by video comes from the struggle of the subject behind the camera to impose a sense of continuity to discrete events, to produce a simulation in which the mirror of representation is no longer the subject, rather the totalizing movement of the camera and the complex editing process.

As Baudrillard would say, though, the quality of cinema is that of images which are both complicit with and apparently foreign to narration - having their own static intensity, though fired with all the energy of movement, crystallizing a whole course of events in a still image by a principle of condensation.

The eye of the director is dancing together with the dancer. The body of the camera-man is dancing together with the dancers.

Going back to the mirror neuron activities, it is no longer the nervous system, or the neuron connections to be stimulated, rather conceptual categories of integration between body and landscape, culturally evolved concept such as fiction and reality, and most of all the ability of unwrapping bi-dimensional condensed objects such as movie images into inner representations.

The ability required to the audience is that of undoing, of disintegrating the image.

3. Transmedia practices

In transmedia practices audience is transformed in community. Reproduction of art happens through different channels, art is mixed up with design ? web-design, graphics, animation and so on. In fact, cultures converge and promoting art according to marketing and a social values such as share of resources and human connections.

An evolving non-linear narrative develops out of that, web-sites, My-Space pages, You Tube promos, and so on are menus where you can find and share samples of products, and besides this, are products them selves. Different channels are used to communicate different, self-contained elements of the narrative that build to create a larger world. Consumers then pull different parts of the story together themselves. The dramaturgy of the events is all in the hands of the audience.

I'll take as an example a YouTube Promo from the Minneapolis band Buckets & Tap Shoes(4).

<http://it.youtube.com/watch?v=E7XXYLhTsPo>

In the promo all those elements that you perceive by seeing the band live, you can read them through a narrative. The Promo gives the context, the provenience of the group, it reconstructs its history, humus, geography so that we can have a picture which invites us to check it out in reality. The promo is linked with a MySpace page ? or vice versa, the promo is contained in a MySpace page and in YouTube - on which you find a presentation of the band

"Buckets and Tap Shoes," original music, improvisation and choreography derived from roots of funk, soul, jazz, classical, hip-hop, blues and rock. "Buckets and Tap Shoes" is a journey through rhythm, music & tap dance. Every show is a unique and organic entity. Part dance company, part band. All rhythm. The multi-talented cast of performers create music with 5-gallon paint buckets, metal cans, found objects, tap shoes, as well as traditional instruments including electric guitar, bass, keyboards and drums. 10 Foot 5 Productions continues to astound audiences from age 5 to 105 with mind-blowing rhythms, precision footwork and powerful groove-based music. " and many pictures of their tours, their agenda, and comments left by fans and friends. Generally speaking, My Space, You Tube and other are relatively closed circuit in to which one may flow as a lost molecule by accident, but usually are strictly addressed to certain categories. In every page you are classified in terms of identity limitations.

The esthetic quality is not the main issue of this objects, rather it is appealing as an invitation to play with informations: pictures, agendas, video , mp3. A possibility offered to the audience, to make it short, of creating their own total dramaturgy around virtual simulacra.

Conclusions

In performing arts the interest of the observer (considering an ordinary one and not an expert) is not focused on the relations about the inner components of the system/opera but on the impact that it has a whole on the observer. The actual purpose of the observer in dance is that of being touched by passions and creativity. It is about having "another" experience about our-selves as humans.

Technology is there to create/multiply/deconstruct frames. Without a technological frame (a simple stage) dance would not even exist as an artistic fact.

Each environment is influenced by technological development, and this fact happens in theater as well, and technology is so popular that it is easy to experiment with it. This fact opens possibilities to the manipulation of the language of the body and dance changes as well. It becomes in fact an object that can be reproduced in virtue of the fact that the technological eye has captured it: even if it has captured just its shadow.

Notes

1. Roberta Marques is Brazilian video artist based in Amsterdam and Fortaleza. She has won several prizes and she participated in many festivals all over the world.
2. Over the last 20 years Eileen Standley has been working as video artist, performing and making dances which have been produced in theaters and festivals throughout Europe.
3. Wim Vandekeybus is a director, choreographer, actor, and photographer. After working for two years with Janbre, he created his own working structure, Ultima Vez, a company of a dozen young artists and actors, and several artistic, technical and administrative collaborators.
4. Buckets and Tap Shoes performance company: Andy "Andaone" Ausland- taps, buckets, keyboards, guitar, vocals Rick "Organik" Ausland- taps, buckets, percussion, vocals Giselle Mejia - taps, percussion CJ Vanderpoll- drum kit Dan "Iron Thumbs" Ristrom - bass, percussion, vocals Aaron Wiener- trumpet, percussion.

References

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