BALLET AND CONTEMPORARY CHOREOGRAPHY CREATION:

A RELATIONSHIP TO BE REVEALED

By

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the Masters of Arts degree in

Teaching Dance in the Professions: The American Ballet Theatre Pedagogy

to the Steinhardt School of Culture, Education and Human Development

New York University

Spring 2014
Abstract

This research work involves delving the relationship between ballet and contemporary choreographic creation in Western concert dance. The objective is to discover the role of ballet in the choreographic process, and determine whether or not it facilitates this process. This has been done within the conceptual framework of modernism and postmodernism and references aspects of the movements such as semiotics and dance, modern and avant-garde dance, and contemporary choreographers' work which have been influenced by ballet. After analyzing the bibliography, the importance of the choreographic process as a way of defining an artistic work as contemporary is highlighted as well as how contemporary dance creations are constantly producing and re-inventing signs and meaning. All of these support an understanding of current ballet practice not only as a classical tradition but also as a source of inspiration for new artistic practices.

Keywords: ballet, contemporary dance choreography, modernism, postmodernism, semiotics
Introduction

Contemporary dance practice undoubtedly belongs to modernism. Being an artistic product of Western modernity, it has been influenced by different theoretical views and concepts such as postmodernism and avant-garde. In the same way, contemporary dance aesthetic and thought have interacted with diverse artistic practices, such as ballet. The development of ballet technique, choreography and repertoire has been affected by contemporary dance philosophy. However, this interaction has not been unidirectional; there has been a reciprocal exchange. Contemporary choreography has used dancers, who are highly trained in ballet and its aesthetic, to create artistic products. This fact could lead to a discussion of whether ballet training facilitates dancers’ learning of contemporary styles. However, this literature review is concerned with a completely different discussion: does ballet—meaning ballet trained dancers and the technique itself—facilitate contemporary choreography creation? In terms of exploring and creating new movements, deconstructing and reinventing ballet, and criticizing its classical tradition, ballet could seek new meanings for modernism through the contemporary artistic practice.

A ballet artist, trained and polished in the classical aesthetic, should be aware of other ways of conceiving dance, choreographic productions and the artistic and
political relevance of his/her dancing in modern society. Sometimes, dancers overlook the philosophical and social influence of concert dance in current times due to the large number of hours dedicated to training and rehearsals that keep them from theoretical reflection. Their performance is not only important for the audience but is also influential for the other arts and society itself. “Dance is a social fact,” (Blacking, 1983, p. 89). Ballet artists are constantly producing new ways of significance and meaning, especially when they work against pre-established classical cannons, as happens in contemporary creations. Some contemporary choreographers like Jiří Kylián have used highly trained ballet dancers’ artistic experience to produce new pieces through improvisation (Semperoper Ballett, 2012). However, there have not been studies—at least the researcher could not find any—about whether or not the use of ballet has facilitated contemporary choreography creation, not only as a way of making technique performing easier but also in how the choreography process is re-thought. For all the preceding reasons, this literature review is justified as a means of gathering information about the theoretical and artistic practices of ballet and contemporary dance.

Another reason to conduct this research is the researcher’s personal interest in addressing the influence of ballet in contemporary dance practice. Since she was a professional ballet dancer and is currently a ballet teacher and contemporary ballet choreographer, there is a desire to shed light on theoretical and conceptual aspects that have motivated her own artistic practice in the search for a choreographic style definition. Furthermore, it is also imperative for her to understand contemporary choreography practices, as influenced by ballet, which have been a source of inspiration for her work.
Limitations, Delimitations and Conceptual Framework

This extended literature review has been limited to Western Contemporary Choreography which has been produced in the United States and some countries of Western Europe in a specific period of time under the conceptual lens of modernism, Postmodernism and Semiotics. In accordance with the definition of Modern Dance, the period analyzed will start with the avant-garde, which is central due to significant changes produced in choreographic creation at the time and its transdisciplinary influence in England, the US and Europe. Additionally, the analysis of choreographic works in this research has been limited to those artists who are internationally well-known as innovators because of their creative ways of addressing choreography. In other words, these artists have seen ballet as an art full of possibilities to be deconstructed and re-thought for producing new meaning and significance for the art of dance. This investigation has also considered the relevance of some choreographers’ work as a way to question and to transcend the boundaries of modern society.

Time was the biggest limitation because the researcher was not able to work on this literature review full time. Otherwise, this research would have been done under Human Subjects parameters and interviews with choreographers based in New York would have been conducted. Another limitation was the lack or inexistence of published literature about contemporary choreography which uses ballet as motif or literature about contemporary ballet itself. Therefore, the researcher broadened the investigation spectrum by including videos and non-scholarly articles.
Methodology and Research Technique

This extended literature review was done following standard procedures to find secondary sources of data collection (Kumar, 2011), there were established key words/topics—ballet and contemporary choreography—according to the research question: Does ballet facilitate contemporary choreography creation? Using library search engines, the resources were located in dance databases, publications, research reports, online articles, symposia and audiovisual media. After gathering all the written sources, an annotated bibliography was completed, followed by a textual analysis with an approach of content analysis in an attempt to systematically identify common characteristics, and analyze specific occurrences in the texts (Frey, Botan & Kreps, 1999). Using this methodology, the data—written sources—were classified under themes which show a correlation between the two main topics of this investigation: ballet and contemporary choreography. Some sources were discarded because they did not contribute substantial information to the research objectives. On the other hand, it was necessary to find new sources for some categories that emerged, especially for those themes which are within a conceptual and theoretical framework and are not common in dance practice and bibliography. Once all the written bibliographic resources were exhausted, the search for videos containing interviews with contemporary choreographers about their creative process was done. Videos which just show sample of choreography were discarded. This information was placed under one of the seven themes that arose. No sources
which explicitly talked about ballet as a tool for creating contemporary choreography were found.

The sources were classified under the following themes:

a) Modernism and Postmodernism (five sources)

b) Semiotics and Dance (seven sources)

c) Modern Dance (three sources)

d) Postmodernist Dance (five sources)

e) Contemporary Choreography Creation (six sources)

f) Contemporary Choreographers’ Work (four sources)

g) Contemporary Choreographers’ Videos (two sources)

After sorting the sources, a data analysis was conducted attempting to find a direct relationship between the production of contemporary choreography and ballet. After this, the videos which show interviews with contemporary choreographers who use highly trained ballet dancers in their artistic work were reviewed in search of information which could fit into the categories previously described or information which could fill in the gaps of the written sources.
**Literature Review**

**Modernism and Postmodernism**

Modernism belongs to Western civilization, and it refers to the rejection of classical and traditional ideas of aesthetics. Accordingly, art should be based upon new forms, practices and values derived entirely from the contemporary moment of society, and it should be oriented towards the future. It has been said that there is not an exact definition of the beginnings and endings of modernism; it does not have clearly defined historical boundaries (Nicholls, 1995). In fact, the meaning of this movement is outside distinct historical, aesthetical or ideological categories. However, the term has been used to embrace different artistic movements which include Impressionism, Futurism, Imagism, Vorticism, Dadaism and Surrealism. Clearly, all of these movements differ greatly in their semantic and artistic production but all of them are part of traditional artistic and cultural foundations of Western civilization which shows how modernism has a strong empathy with the past (Nabholz, 2007). Nevertheless, at the beginning of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century, modernists believed that they could lead the Cultural Revolution through transforming modern society and political life (Walz, 2008).
Like the term ‘modernism’, the term ‘postmodernism’ has been part of the critical discourse and has hardly been defined due to different theoretical positions about its meaning (Svebor, 2013). The term postmodernism originated in 1979 with the publication of “The Postmodern Condition” by Jean-François Lyotard, which suggested a new philosophical period after modernism. This stage is characterized by ambiguity since it is not completely distinct from modernity but attempts to re-think it. Postmodernism would be a continuation of modern thought but with a different approach which takes into consideration the rules of current communication, understood as production and decoding of meaning and significance. Lyotard explained the condition of postmodernism as the transformation of modern speech, palpable in science, art, and literature due to a high influence of new ways of coding information. These new ways of communication, such as using computers, stand out as modifiers of the way of receiving knowledge and producing significance in which the messages are encoded in a system of quick transmission and communication which follow specific rules (Aylesworth, 2013). Years later, Lyotard emphasized the legitimacy of postmodernism as a product of modernity, characterized by western rationalism, and not as a cultural movement which breaks with modernism’s parameters (Lyotard, 2001).

For this research, it is especially important to address the semiotics of modernism, due to inevitable meaning production incorporated into any art and especially in dance. Modernism embraces dialectical discussions about the production of significance in modernity. This is so called the crisis of modernity. Modernism represents a rupture but at the same time an ineludible relationship with...
the past. “The adjective 'modern' designates a new regime, an acceleration, a rupture, a revolution in time. When the word 'modern,' 'modernization,' or 'modernity' appears, we are defining, by contrast, an archaic and stable past.” (Latour, 1993, p.10) This is why modernism hardly defines rules in the production of significance. There is a continuing rupture/relationship with the past and with its own existence that explodes in a crisis. This crisis of significance in modernism facilitates the emergence of postmodernism as a moment of modernism, which is driven by the imperative to innovate. As a result, “every innovation is rendered obsolete by the next one so that modernism is constantly distancing itself from its own most recent manifestation which then slides into the past,” (McHale, 2007, p. 13). This is the way in which the postmodernist artistic production is seen as well: every piece of art is rendered obsolete by the appearance of the next one. Every meaning encoded is killed by a newer one. This is the premise that should also be taken into consideration in understanding choreographic production in the era of modernism/postmodernism.

**Semiotics and Dance**

“I make choreography because I cannot say things with words…”

(Jiří Kylián, 2012)

The term semiotics, meaning the science of signs, was introduced by the linguist Ferdinand de Saussure at the beginning of the 20th century. This science
analyzes the systems of signs which allow people to understand how meaning—words, sounds, images, language, etc.—is produced and conveyed. De Saussure described the sign as having two core components: signification—concept—and the signal\(^1\)—sound pattern. Furthermore, what is called sign (signification and signal) does not refer to an actual object; it is just a mental representation of the object, an abstraction of it. Using these criteria, dance is a complex language capable of signifying; it is a complex signifying system, in Roland Barthes’ words. Moreover, dance performance is related to kinetic material where the body is the major signifying element (Bannerman, 2010). This means that every single movement, action, image, interaction, etc., in a dance creation, is able to produce its own signs and meanings whether or not the communication process ends with a final recipient. According to Bannerman, dance is constantly using signification to make its argument. For instance, a dancer could be “an icon of a dramatic character in terms of costume, make-up and so forth, he or she does so according to the conventions of a particular historical period as well as satisfying the demands of that role within a dance context” (2010, p.19). However, the visual representation of the dancer is not always understood in the same way by the recipient (the audience).

On the other hand, John Blacking said that dance, being part of social life, is an invention within a specific time and space. Thus it is a social product derived from specific human abilities to interrelate with others. Therefore, its importance is based on being a way of communication which has not been overtaken by verbal language. Dance has an evolutionary value as an effective mode of non-verbal

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\(^1\)In the case of dance, the signal is much more complex, compared to language, due to the complexity of the sound produced in dance: music, breath, body sounds, feet against the floor, and others.
communication (1983). Blacking also mentioned how the fact that dance plays with actions that are essentially non-verbal makes it susceptible to not being properly understood outside the context in which it’s used and the conceptual worlds of its users. Dance implies conscious and subconscious human intentions and behaviors; human intentions and behaviors are social components of a culture and every culture in the world has its own social context which necessarily influences these intentions and actions. Consequently, research which attempts to understand dance meaning must do cross-cultural studies “through the everyday ‘languages’ of different cultures” (1983, p. 92).

This research is interested in the value that dance has a creator of signs since contemporary choreography is re-ordering and re-thinking the different dance elements, including ballet. “The processes of moving and giving meaning to movement are the source of dance experience, of which the dance product is but the visible sign” (Blacking, 1983, p. 93). Following this argument, the dance product has a central importance as a semiotic symbol for choreography; the dance product is a thoroughly complex sign, which embraces intricate meanings. Dance falls into the category of modernist discourse when it is re-inventing the logic and parameters of producing meaning. It shows a direct relationship with its past through previous signs and significance but at the same time is challenging this past through creating new meaning within social contexts. This reaffirms the importance of semiotics for dance studies in the context of modernism and postmodernism. “There are coherent, structured languages of dance and that the transfer from verbal to non-verbal discourse constitutes the core of the dance experience.” (Blacking, 1983, p. 97)
Modern Dance

It has been hard to define modern dance because it is not a system or technique; it has been said that it is an attitude towards dance, a point of view that encourages artistic individuality and different personal choreographic choices (Anderson, 1992). For these reasons, this research will use the term modern dance to talk about those forms of dance which appeared during the modernist period—at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century—and which break from classical tradition. Modern dance mainly arose in the United States and Germany at the same time when the vanguard movements emerged in Europe. The work of artists such as Isadora Duncan, Ruth Saint Denis, Doris Humphrey, Mary Wigman, Martha Graham, Merce Cunningham and José Limón among others will also be considered modern dance in this investigation. It is necessary to mention that some of their work could fall into a previous category called avant-garde.

According to Martin (1965), the term “modern dance” would be inadequate to encompass the previously mentioned kind of dance. Also, modern dance is not a synonym of contemporary dance, which is concerned with contemporary dance praxis rather than with formal technique practice, as modern dance tends to be. This author also states that modern dance includes expressionism, absolutism, futurism, creativism and other “isms.” On the other hand, modern dance neglects classical and romantic ballets and excludes folk dancing and popular theatrical forms such as tap, acrobatic and jazz.

For Martin (1965), modern dance manifests a position against that of classical ballet. Modern dance is an artifact to express inner willing and compulsion
using vivid forms of expression. This makes it the perfect vehicle to articulate personal experiences within individualism, which is understood as a way to separate from standardization. This praxis was developed for many years by modern artists such as Wigman and Graham who agreed their dance is not a system of specific codes as ballet is. Simply, modern dance varies from classical tradition in the way that physicality is worked differently, the muscles are trained by a new kinetic memory, there is diverse dynamism, and the rhythmic system is more highly varied. All of these make modern dance a completely different system for artistic praxis.

The described period is important for this investigation as far as it is a medium to compare and contrast contemporary dance practice with ballet, modern dance, and postmodern and avant-garde dance.

Postmodernism in arts: the avant-garde movement and dance

“Postmodernism would not exist in dance because it is just modernism which interminably repeats itself from the nascent and dead states.”

(Brandstetter & Ulvaeus, 1998)

Postmodernist art does not represent the death of modernism; it represents modernism’s crisis of significance (Lyotard, 2011). In other words, postmodernist art is a view of modernist art, which constantly innovates, but each innovation becomes obsolete by the birth of the next one (Svebor, 2013). This crisis is manifested in a semiotic relationship: the signs produced in artistic works could be
considered minimal units for the space and representation of an artistic event. These signs are deconstructed by producing new works, which could be understood as the death of the signs (Pavis, 1982). It follows that a postmodernist artist acts like a philosopher who is constantly trying to recreate the significance of signs through the creation of works which are not governed by pre-established rules or judged by specific categories (Lyotard, 2011).

The relationship between sign and significance is essential in choreography because every single movement and its relationship with the music, audience or dancer’s body becomes a sign. The avant-garde movement took into consideration this fact to conceive of itself beyond modern significance. Consequently, the avant-garde tries to free itself from modernist meaning. For instance, the experimental performance that emerged in the 60’s sought this liberation (Lyotard 2011; Pavis, 1984). According to Banes (1994), avant-garde movement incorporated everyday actions into dance in an attempt to produce new significance through breaking the classical tradition.\(^2\)

Thus choreographers found the beauty of the natural body of the untrained dancer in the 60’s and then shifted their search to find pure movement during the 70’s. Later, these concepts were replaced by the notion of “superbly trained dancers with multiple performance skills” (p. 99), which led to the model of dance as a multimedia event.

Hence dance became central in postmodernist discourse since it constitutes an alternate world of significance beyond language and rationality (Klein, 2011). This relevance for postmodernist discourse makes postmodern dance ambiguous due

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\(^2\)The work done by the Judson Church Company in New York as an off-Broadway venue is a clear example of this (Banes, 1994).

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to the modernist fiction of discontinuity, heterogeneity and pluralism (Copland, 1983). As a result, the postmodern choreographic approach takes apart the topic and expands the boundaries of the artistic vocabulary, but it tends to be more formal in its way of choreographing. For this reason, the postmodernist period shows a variety of contemporary dance pieces, ballet re-staging and hybrid choreographies highly influenced by theater (Svebor, 2013).
Presentation of the Data

How the contemporary dance product is constructed and defined

Postmodern dance in the 60’s and early 70’s also represented a physical immediacy, a potency, a liberation from the world that was sought by artists from many disciplines as a way to achieve multiplicity of focus and music and movement independence (Jordan, 2003). This period propelled the subsequent appearance of contemporary dance which attempts to interrelate arts by researching new ways to produce choreography beyond postmodernism’s parameters. Even though this dance is a sub product of postmodernism, which at the same time is a sub product of modernism, it tries to free itself from its own meaning (sign and significance), but this is not possible because contemporary dance, like *avant-garde* movement, maintains a relationship of attraction and repulsion with its own sign (Pavis, 1982).

In addition, post-structuralist thought has also left a mark on contemporary dance writing, questioning the basis of its aesthetic approach (Klein 2011). Does dance have autonomy or is it just following the principles of modernity: equality, self-fulfillment and emancipation? This premise has influenced the way of creating contemporary dance products which arbitrarily construct this autonomy through
their own relationship with movement in order to speak to the audience using new and different mediums (Foster, 1986).

Currently, many inquiries endeavor to determine what kind of artistic product the contemporary dance performance is and what its theoretical discourse is. As a result, choreography would be a translation or transposition of different choreographic components on stage (dancers, technique, bodies, props, lighting, stage, costumes and others). These are signs of contemporary choreographic significance through the lens of “self reflection: the role of contemporary choreography when the expert practitioner meets the expert spectator” (Protopapa, 2012, p. 107). Furthermore, relationships between dancers’ physical experience, consciousness and environment are important in contemporary choreographic practices to understand how the dancer’s body is used in terms of proprioception, perception and perspective and how dance movements are perceived in daily life and outdoor environments. In this way, self-reflection will help to understand new meanings for a dance piece (Sweeney, 2012). Consequently, deconstruction is useful to identify the full significance of a dance piece in order to promote the development of a new contemporary dance philosophy (Svebor, 2013).

Contemporary choreographic methods such as improvisation, chance procedure or collaborative work are still used by choreographers in uncertain political and economic environs for writing choreography and breaking away from traditional means of producing significance. The choreographer Jiří Kylián has made reference to this way of working. “… I don’t come into the studio with pre-conceived ideas, it is impossible. So, I try to create an atmosphere in which
everybody participates in the creation rather than me imposing them saying do this, do that…” (Opéra National de Paris, 2008). “…you should absorb it [sic] all the things and then have the dancers participate in the creation by asking them to improvise, by asking them to give me their own experiences, their own emotionality, their own way of understanding things” (Semperoper Ballett, 2012). However, the human body is constantly producing significance and constructing immediate worldviews and cultural identities. As a result, choreographers can control their creative process using the mentioned methods in rehearsals but not the dancer’s and audience’s perceptions and reactions to signs and meanings which were initially used in the choreography (Kloppenberg, 2010). Again, Kylián’s words help to understand the inability of choreographers to control the significance of their artistic work: “…trying to say, trying to communicate, but impossible to communicate, impossible. You can’t, you’re just honest in trying to convey something in honesty but it will never be received in the way it was conceived, it’s always different…[the audience] all receive the messages in a completely different way” (2012).
Analysis of Data

Artistic work of various contemporary choreographers

During this research it has been somewhat difficult to identify the “ballet presence” in contemporary choreography because choreographers have not spoken explicitly about this. However, some artists—not all contemporary—and their critics have addressed the use of technique. Technique has impressed and astonished audiences because of its virtuosity, and it has influenced the development and creativity of any kind of dance. The same has been done by interpretation—which may seem completely separate from technique—because of how it has moved and touched audiences. If both of them, technique and interpretation are used as complementary processes in choreography, they are helpful to achieve artistic objectives and produce simple and complex movements and significances (Blacking, 1983). Therefore, the way choreographers have used ballet and its expression throughout time is the first place to look for a relationship between ballet and contemporary dance practice.

There are several choreographers whose work does not exactly fit in the category of postmodernism or avant-garde dance, and they have been considered contemporary creators. According to Van Praagh and Brinson (1963), John Cranko with his philosophical themes, Keneth McMillan with his mixture of classical and
contemporary vocabulary, and Kurt Joss’ German expressionism all showed this characteristic. On the other hand, George Balanchine is not considered a contemporary choreographer, but the way he used neo-classical ballet and incorporated movements of modern dance and jazz agrees with the precepts of contemporary dance practice and its search for new significances (Scholl, 1994). According to Scholl, Balanchine’s work is a ballet response to acmeist poets, which made his choreography a kind of “contemporary ballet” which clearly influenced later choreographers’ dance composition.

On the other hand, Sally Banes (2011) considers Paul Taylor’s work as balletic, modern or avant-garde, which is versatile and not stylistically defined with a limited neutral vocabulary. This choreographer has played with levels of meaning rather than with formal movement inventions, creating delimitations of significance for each one of his choreographies according to his own movement vision. In contrast, Pamela Gay-White (2006) describes how Maurice Bejart employed classical technique which rebels against its conventional classicism and restrictive system of codes. Using innovative and experimental fusions of sound, movement, stage montage and technology, he made his works “multi or virtual theatrical events.” He created a new aesthetic for ballet which is stylistically versatile, corporally expressive and culturally diverse. Therefore, his works are not only visual forms of art; they are co-dependent within different systems of meaning (literary, semiotic and psychological). His choreography undeniably represents the eclectic fusion of the contemporary moment.
Furthermore, Twyla Tharp’s work belongs to the contemporary scene since her motives and style are casual. Her works use movement which confronts the meter of the music, not following the melody, and employ an abstract usage of the movement vocabulary which includes ballet, pedestrian movement, modern dance, computerized stick figures, and more (Foster, 1986). Similarly, William Forsythe has incorporated daily movements into dance (Klein, 2011) as he has questioned the code of classical ballet in the process of rejecting and restoring it as a "pure" movement. Hybridization would seem to be a characteristic of his work using multiple codes that have undergone myriad transformations. However, his choreography refuses to be classified and brings spectators to the debate about "the crisis of representation" in the modern discourse. Thus choreographer and dancers become open figures, transforming themselves without giving up the idea of identity or representation—signs of performance. Consequently, Forsythe’s work is at the edge of “impossible” representation where irrepresentability is possible in dance performance appealing to modernist and postmodernist paradigms (Brandstetter & Ulvaeus, 1998).

All the preceding examples, rather than being explicit declarations of the use of certain techniques to favor the creative process, are points of view of spectators, understood as the audience who de-codifies meaning and aesthetic in dance. Certainly, there are scholars who have written about choreographers’ work, but they have not addressed the direct or indirect relationship between ballet and the creative process in contemporary dance. The choreographies of Balanchine, Cranko, Bejart, Twarp and Forsythe have used ballet as a technique medium to communicate creative ideas, but has ballet facilitated their choreographic creation? Would they
have had more difficulty in creating choreography if they had used another technique?

At some point, the choreographic work, which uses ballet as a strong motif, technique or influence, is defined as contemporary because of the artistic approach to the choreographic process carried out by creators and dancers. For instance, how they use choreographic elements, such as music or body-mind connection to perform movements or certain step sequences is substantially influential for the final product. In other words, the deep conceptual and artistic investigation of new ways of producing movement, aesthetic and significance in dance, sometimes consciously and sometimes unconsciously, is what defines the final dance product. During a rehearsal for his ballet *Bella Figura*, a contemporary dance, Jiří Kylián explained how to perform a series of movements to his dancers in the following words “… imagine that your mind and your body is [sic] not connected. So, in your body you’re in a certain time but in your head you’re in another time, so you’re constantly not-connected to your body and to your life, something like that” (2008). These words show a particular and personal artistic way of working which makes his choreography contemporary in spite of the use of ballet technique. His work is contemporary because it is distinct from the classical cannons of making choreography. As a result, his dance is not only contemporary in conceptual terms of creativity but also in the movement and aesthetic that the audience can see on stage.
Discussion

**Does ballet facilitate contemporary dance creation?**

Has the use of highly trained ballet dancers or ballet vocabulary in contemporary choreography facilitated the choreography process? Furthermore, has ballet been responsible for new movement explorations, new aesthetic approaches, and construction and deconstruction of significances in contemporary pieces? According to Anna Kisselgoff (2011), Jiří Kylián’s choreography has been influenced by the emotional and kinetic thrust of his signature style, a highly physical fusion of ballet technique with the idiomatic freedom of modern dance. However, this choreographer has never stated that his contemporary work has been facilitated by ballet. This creator has acknowledged the talent of his dancers as a “tool” that has facilitated his choreographic process: “…and of course, [the choreographic result] always depends on the choreographer and the material that you work with. I was always very lucky to have incredible dancers… …they could translate my ideas into physicality…” (Semperoper Ballett, 2012). Consequently, confirmation that work with highly trained ballet dancers facilitates the contemporary choreography creation remains elusive because none of the contemporary artists have specifically stated that this is the case. Analyzing Kylián’s work based on written and audiovisual evidence, I say yes, ballet technique and aesthetic is a powerful source to use in the creative process for choreographers,

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who, as Kylián does, work with talented dancers who have mastered ballet and other dance techniques.

Also, some answers to the inquiry about ballet and contemporary choreography creation can be found in the past. For instance, Merce Cunningham worked with ballet dancers but challenged them to move while forgetting about ballet’s traditional way of codifying and producing movement. Cunningham used the chance procedure as a choreographic formula to liberate dancers from the rigid cannons of classical tradition. This was influential in dancers’ interpretation and became a way of staging dance works. Nevertheless, his works were completely modern because no classical movement was produced. He also used stimuli in his pieces, which was affected by the ways of perceiving information in the modern world (Franko, 1995). Consequently, in the case of this choreographer, his work was not influenced by ballet technique or aesthetic, as was Kylián’s, but rather Cunningham’s work was predisposed by challenging classical artists to branch out from traditional styles of performing and to look for new ways of contributing to the creative process. Therefore, his work was conceptually facilitated by having classical dancers to be challenged.

Both choreographers were responsible for staging and producing completely new dance works which were not ballet or balletic at all. Contemporary works by Cunningham and Kylián, show how they were innovators not only because of the new dance products that they created but also because they came up with new ways of addressing the creative process. In this sense, they fall into the category of postmodernist artists who challenge/challenged the modernist tradition each time.
that they create/created a new piece which kills old ways of producing and conveying meaning. Both choreographers addressed signs, meanings and significances in dance without being specific about this purpose but because of how they incorporated ballet into the contemporary stage. They were aware that “the classic dance has a set vocabulary of movement which for perfection of execution must be performed in a prescribed manner,” so they searched to break from ballet prescribed dance manners by using stimuli, chance procedure and improvisation in their choreography (Martin, 1965, p. 4).

Contemporary choreographers who use ballet should look beyond the statement that ballet facilitates contemporary choreography creation, beyond the choreographic process and semiotics contained in it, and beyond the final dance product. Choreographers should understand how their contemporary pieces, which incorporate ballet, are playing with an entire world of sensations in dancers and audiences. Contemporary choreography practice is constantly seeking the role of senses in receiving and decoding a piece and the methodologies used to understand how sensorial stimulation works. As a result, its artistic purpose is to trigger behavior or sensorial memory (Di Benedetto, 2007). Therefore, contemporary choreography does not refer only to quality of movement. It also focuses on all aspects of the performatic experience. Consequently, a contemporary choreography could use classical vocabulary and still remain in the contemporary field. Even though one can argue that ballet uses a neutral and limited vocabulary to mean a range of different things, a choreographer can always find ways to use movement distinctively in order to match strong contemporary choreographic statements (Banes, 2011).
Conclusions

Based on the evidence, choreographic methods such as chance procedure, improvisation and collaborative work used with highly trained ballet dancers in contemporary choreography have allowed choreographers to come up with completely new and demanding steps, even though no choreographer has explicitly said this. Contemporary works by Forsythe and Kylián are a few examples of this phenomenon where the improvisation and dancer’s contribution are essential for constructing the choreography. They have a clear ballet influence, though not based on classical vocabulary, which is producing contemporary dance within new patterns of significance. These movements are not balletic at all, but they demand high level physical skills and capability of movement, which is enhanced by ballet training, as never before.

This contemporary choreography also accomplishes the prime dance objective that Blacking mentioned: communication (1983). It is constantly producing and reinventing signs which are de-coded, not only by the spectators but also by society itself. This semantic process is far from just reproducing classical cannons of ballet choreography, which have mainly a narrative purpose. As a result, it is possible to say that ballet has broadened its practice into new dimensions of artistic conception where a novel dance aesthetic is emerging as was never imagined.
before, expanding the boundaries of the dance vocabulary, aesthetic and message. Perhaps, ballet is not the only style which has ventured into contemporary artistic and conceptual schemes; other dance styles have done that, too. This is seen in the way the current dance scene encompasses intricate and complex relationships between all types of dance and it is difficult to define exact boundaries or influences between them.

All choreographic products that are being created under these parameters fall under the post-modernist category, according to McHale’s postmodernist logic and follow a logic of innovation and obsolescence since they are modernist views of dance which constantly innovate, but each innovation becomes obsolete by the birth of the next one (McHale, 2007). Contemporary dance, like conceptual dance, could be a social experiment useful to explain not only new ways of significance in modernism through movement exploration but also a possible political activism since contemporary dance practice is transforming society’s corporal perception (Klein, 2011).

This is another reason why this literature review was interested in decoding the current relationship of ballet and contemporary choreographic creation. The way in which ballet technique has evolved not only in ballet practice but also in contemporary dance movement demonstrates how society’s vision of corporal perception related to ballet and to its performers is changing. Ballet defies its own aesthetic and principles through the work of contemporary choreographers who, at the same time, use ballet as a tool to come up with new contemporary practices and meanings. There is a clear mutual relationship in which the artistic influences and
contributions go from one side to the other and vice versa. As a result, ballet will remain alive not only in current classical practice but also as a powerful tool for expressing contemporary artists’ philosophies and aesthetic of movement.

Due to the limited literature regarding ballet and contemporary choreography, further research is needed to understand more completely the conceptual, theoretical and practical instruments that are used by creators. Also, the choreographers’ and dancers’ vision and opinion regarding their creative processes are not academically documented, making this another knowledge gap that could be filled with future investigation. In fact, accordingly to Jiří Kylián, the choreographer-dancer collaborations are significant because the performers’ input is being taken into consideration by choreographers (Semperoper Ballett, 2012). Additionally, the sociological side of the creative process should also be studied since the choreographer’s way of thinking and social influences dictate his or her work. Further research would be important not only as documentation but also to provoke a reflexive work in current and future generations of dancers and choreographers. Dealing with practice versus theory is the next challenge of any investigator who is interested in continuing to determine how ballet facilitates the contemporary choreography creation.

It is also a personal desire to expand this literature review in the future under the parameters of Human Subjects in order to understand better the implications of theory, concept, dance technique, choreography and artistic production in modern society. Further research will be justified under the personal belief that political activism—understood as self artistic and cultural awareness—is core for any artist

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who has recognized the undeniable transformation that Western Art and Dance, as products of human rationality developed under the Eurocentric way of thinking, are producing and receiving in the global society.
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