The Development of the Concept and Content of Screen Dance

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Abstract: With the development of technology, in the field of performing arts, the reformation of the aesthetic system has undergone wide ranging changes. The traditional concepts about space and time have been broken, and the order of art has been deconstructed and reorganized. With such a reformation moving to the screen, live dance collides with other media, resulting in a new evolution. This complex entangled duet, which refers to the appearance of the old and new revolutions, takes place inside the movement. Within the boundaries defined by the camera lens, dance practice and image technology, forms a cross-border cooperative art work, which refers to the screen dance. As a multi-faceted contemporary art practice, screen dance includes the dynamic image of the moving body, choreography art and film art (Boulegue & Hayes 2015, p.24)[1]. It spans the visual arts, performing arts, media science and other fields, organically integrating body and video audio-visual language, and realizing the interactive dialogue and creativity of body, image, space and time. The hybridity and interdisciplinarity of screen dance contrasts strongly with traditional theatre dance creation. The German Cologne Dance Film and Video Festival divided screen dance into stage recording, camera re-work, and screen choreography. This paper defines the scope of screen dance as works that describe new choreography practices specifically for film screens, emphasizing the special movements of dance or choreography at various levels of film production. Dance and moving images are both time-based arts, which produce new movement effects through the cooperation of the nature and quality of movements with the effects of body, venue, lens, object, camera, editing and post-production. This creates the camera choreography which constitutes the performance of dance images, which is also the main basis for defining the concept of dance images in this paper.

Keywords: screen dance, arts, development

1. Introduction

With the development of screen dance the definition of the art form has been accompanied by wide ranging discussions about what is and what is not screen dance. With the development of such a form of art, people's definition of it began to be more complex. Also, as a relatively new form of art, screen dance got increasingly mature, and in 2010 the first edition of *The International Journal of Screendance* was published. Editor Claudia Kappenberg suggested that screen dance was an art form that was still to be invented (Kappenberg 2010, p.1)[2].

2. The development of the concept of screen dance

In a broad sense, screen dance refers to the field of activity which is different from traditional theatre space and contains dance and motion images. Its content might include Hollywood singing and dancing movies, dance movies introducing dance genres, dance in music TV, rehearsal images in dance rehearsal halls, dance video notes for choreography, dance documentaries of dancers' work and life and so on.

According to Noel Carroll, everyone complains about labeling, but sooner or later most people feel compelled to invoke some favorite definition of their own. For human beings, categorizations are unavoidable, even if we like to pretend indifference to them. And most of us can feign indifference only for so long; most of us have a breaking point. Thus, it seems to me a good idea to get this issue out in the open and to discuss it abstractly — to compare and contrast the various categorizations in play and to develop dialectically from them a comprehensive framework that makes sense of our practices and that resonates with our intuitions about its compass. (Carroll 2001, p.47) [3]

Some theorists were trying to find a conceptual vocabulary that could encompass and explain various forms of dance images. For example, in the book named *Dancefilm: Choreography and the Moving Image*, Erin Brannigan (2010) interpreted the dance film as a comprehensive term, incorporating all aspects of film production, so that the choreography quality of dance films could be combined with film material, with a particular common approach to focus on posture or close-ups. Philosopher and film critic Carroll drew an ontological description of moving-picture dance, which was broad and inclusive enough to deal with the confusion of forms and the evolving forms of media technology. Through aesthetic

and historical lens, Carroll provided an interdisciplinary critical analysis and guidance model, including considering the various backgrounds and historical developments surrounding the exercise to see the overlapping way of dance movies. Screen dance should be an all-embracing term that can include any combination of dance and sport and allow video artists to find their own ways and influence in its historical development. Writer and screen dance maker Douglas Rosenberg (2016) puts forward in his book named *The Oxford Handbook of Screendance Studies* that the current concept of dance image is mainly screen dance, which broadly covers all dance images based on the screen developed by digital media. It is a recording of dance and technology, and a supplement to the body of the technical subject. Screen dance is a mixed form of dance and video production, as well as the meeting between the eyes of the choreographers and the eyes of the film producers. This synergy is a kind of cooperation, which is conceived and arranged to improve the audience's experience of watching dance performances through the screen, rather than as part of the live theater performances. There are different opinions on the use of the terminology of screen dance.

According to Rosenberg, screen dance, then, though not a perfect term, implies that the method of apprehension (the screen) modifies the activity it inscribes (dance); in doing so it codifies a particular space of representation and, by extension, meaning. Those other terms — videodance, filmdance, dance for camera, and so forth — should instead be considered as specific subcategories of screendance and will be excavated further in the pages that follow (Rosenberg 2016, p.3) [4].

In this way, screen dance will be a concept with a wide range, which includes some subcategories. In addition, according to Norman, screen dances create, encounter, and are read through layers of space. We might include here the architectural, social spaces of the shoot and of the screening, the various spaces created by the camera and through the edit, the spaces of and between bodies (Norman 2018, p.14) [5].

To conclude, the definitions have been changing constantly. On the one hand, it is related to the translation of words and usage habits. On the other hand, it is due to the continuous updating of media technology and media form, which has led to the fact that some previous definitions are no longer applicable to the concept, category and characteristics of the fast-developing dance image, thus bringing about the corresponding misunderstanding and misuse of concepts, and ambiguous definition. But all of the above statements about the concepts include dance and images, which focus on the relationship between different arts and media. The use of the terminology and concept revision of screen dance are also related to the differences of its media and carriers in different periods and the emphasis of practices.

3. The development of the content of screen dance

From 1840 to 1860, the advent of photography changed people's understanding of the body based on morphological and anatomical analysis, and initiated a series of technological revolutions. The emergence of photography enabled people to quickly capture human movements and produce images in accurate details. Maya Deren, a pioneer of experimental films, was a significant figure in the field of screen dance. In 1958, she filmed The Very Eye of Night, a ballet-themed film. In this silent dance image work, dance art and film art were highly integrated. This work makes full use of the means of film montage to switch and jump freely between dance scenes and time and space, and fully expands the content and artistic tension of dance performance. The different display of movie lens to the angle of dance viewing brings new visual enjoyment of dance to the audience (Lü, Cong & An 2007, p.72-73)[6].

It can be seen that the intermittent images obtained by continuous cameras set the human body as a rhythmic fragment, and established the aesthetic characteristics and spectacular nature of human motion based on scientific knowledge. This kind of capturing and shooting of human body dynamics laid the foundation for shooting dance image, for it realized the combination of dance and images. By the end of the 1990s, many avant-garde artists made use of the latest computer digital technology, such as three-dimensional animation, the capturing of human movements and other digital technology to create virtual dance art. Traditional dance art was facing a huge impact in front of digital virtual dance works (Lü, Cong & An 2007, p.72-73).

With the development of visual technology in the 20th century, people's perception of physical movement was further deepened. The film aesthetics of the 20th century echoes the understanding and development of human motion in experimental science before. The dance movement, materialized in the images by various scientific and technological means, regarded the human body as a thinking and perceptive material, and participated in the turning of modernity (Smart 2001, p.37-47)[7].

4. The narrative function of screen dance

The core function of cameras is mainly recording, which provides technical support for recording and archiving dance (Lee, Ravizza & Lee 2009, p.36-41)[8]. At the beginning of the 20th century, people did not excavate the new aesthetic features behind the image, but regarded the image device as an extension of theater art (Smart 2001, p.37-47). Its role was mainly reflected in two aspects. On the one hand, through the shooting of theatre dance performance, it enabled dance works to be duplicated, thus realizing the recording, classification and collection of dance works. Additionally, the camera also enabled some folk dances to be preserved as one of the elements of the film at that time. For instance, ballet choreographer Michel Fokine choreographed his classic ballet "The Dying Swan" (1907), performed by dancer Anna Pavlova. Its image technology provided valuable information for future generations to understand and study the development of theater dance. People began to think about the various visual possibilities of the shape and rhythm of body in time and space. The symbolism interpreted the transformation process of dance movement pattern as a kind of behavior with physical and mental transformation and fluid flow.

Gilles Deleuze quoted "Modern Movement Theory of Henri Berson" to explain the viewpoint of "deconstruction of posture" and reconstruct the idea that "the existence of life is an endless flow" (Rodowick 2010, p.416)[9]. Film directors began to use elements related to dancing to promote the unfolding of the film plot or convey the theme of the film through dancing, to meet the film's narration. For example, Charlie Chaplin parodied Niljinsky's dance masterpiece Afternoon of a Faun (1912) in his (1919), and Sergei M. Eisenstein used fast montage in his film "October" to show three soldiers dancing in three different styles. The concepts of these works were still limited by the traditional aesthetics. They did not break through the performance category of dance or film, and they could still be independent in their respective fields which mean dance and films.

This situation did not change until Sherman Durac's short film Theme and Variations (1929) appeared (Cheng 2018, p.88-96)[10]. This took the cross-editing between ballet actresses and machines as the structural basis of the film. In addition, although there was no substantial dance action in this film named (1924) of Fernand Leger, it used mechanical parts with actors irrelevant close-up overlapping kaleidoscopic images, with dynamic pictures and fast cutting montage to reflect a visual, analogous body movement, so as to explore the relationship between human behavior and the surrounding world. All of these have become the form of expression for later screen dance to draw lessons from Sunnyside Ballet Mecanique.

5. Conclusion

Screen dance is a relatively new form of dance art, which is the product of the combination of digital technology and dance performance. Under the influence of interaction, video and dance ushered in a new presentation platform for dance creation, and also made video technology change its nature and be given new meaning.

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