

DANCE AND CHOREOGRAPHIC DESIGN IN THE BODY AND SPACE: AN INTERDISCIPLINARY EXPLORATION

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Abstract

This study examines the rich interdisciplinary interface between dance and design, focusing particularly on the interplay between body, space, and time in choreographic practices. It posits that dance is not merely a performance art but a dynamic system of embodied knowledge and spatial intelligence that intersects with the conceptual and practical frameworks of design. Drawing from both theoretical and practical perspectives, this paper emphasizes how dancers and choreographers use the human body not just as a medium of expression but as a site of emotional, cultural, and spatial negotiation. This paper begins by exploring four core elements common to both disciplines—body, space, time, and —and how they serve as foundations for both dance expression and design formulation. It investigates the body not only as a physical entity but also as a symbolic and narrative agent capable of transmitting emotions, cultural values and social ideologies. Citing influential scholars such as José Gil, Margolis, and Hanna, this study describes how the dancing body forms and reforms space, becoming both the subject and object of aesthetic experience. Spatiality in dance is then examined not only as a background but also as an active participant in meaning-making. From stage layout and scenography to costume design and digital projections, this paper analyzes how space is choreographed and designed to influence movement, evoke emotions, and heighten audience engagement. The performative space, in this context, becomes a canvas for embodied storytelling, where design scaffolds the motion and emotion of dance. Additionally, this study reflects on how costume design contributes to the readability of performance, affecting both audience perception and the dancer's expression. Costumes are framed not as decorative elements but as integral to the storytelling function of dance, identity communication, cultural context and character differentiation.

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Introduction

It is perceived, within some quarters, that learning dance is just to turn into an entertainer, a choreographer, or an instructor. Some believe that the results and act/art of dancing are restricted to the space of dance alone. The discipline of dance is not as narrow as one will in generally assume. One can learn or study dance to foster new bits of knowledge in other non-dance disciplines too. One such non-dance discipline is design. Today, scholars at undergraduate and postgraduate levels seek dance and design within the sphere of dance practices. This indicates that the point of interaction between dance and design should be fully researched and consequently undeniably less examined.

Moreover, the interdisciplinary data among dance and design do not appear to be used as much top to bottom as is conceivable in the educational practice of both disciplines. Dance and design share a ton for all intents and purposes, and this article focuses on something very similar. In the first place, it recognizes four center ideas that are normal to both dance and plan. These are: body (material), space, time, and feelings. Then it examines the interrelations among those ideas in terms of movement and stillness, the two of which are used in a choreographed dance as well as an improvised piece. Next, it investigates further shared traits such as creation, passing on, and gathering stylish experience, followed by a delineation from each discipline. The researcher accepts that the interdisciplinary research conducted in this article will open new experiences of hypothetical and reasonable information and will help stimulate the need for further research in both disciplines. Additionally, this article will help scholars investigate how to apply it imaginatively in their singular fields of work.

Basic Concepts of Dance and Design

There are different dance genres such as traditional, folk, modern, and postmodern. Every sort incorporates various dance-structures. Each structure, like a creative dance, has its own tasteful qualities. is reflected in the forms and structure of the dance form, and furthermore somewhat, in its general way of articulation and correspondence. Similarly, in the discipline of design, there exists a wide variety of specializations, such as product, interior, apparel, and industrial design. If any of these specialized designs has to be accepted by its users, it requires to have aesthetics quality notwithstanding its different viewpoints like usefulness, effectiveness, cost-effectiveness, and sturdiness. Accordingly, emotion is a significant element that connects dance and form. In dance and in form, sensation is communicated through three components: body, empathy, and reality. Logically speaking, these three components generally coincide, and neither dance nor design can exist without them. The fourth component of style, which carries imaginative sense to a dance-thing or a planned item, can be used in differing degrees and sorts, relying on the laborer and the work attempted. In this way, the interface between dance and design can be perceived with the assistance of these four center ideas. The following is the clarification of how each plays a role in dance and design.

The Body

While discussing dancing, we implicitly, or at least effectively, discuss bodies and space. The presence of one or multiple human or non-human bodies may be present, and the performance might occur in a conventional space as well as a cite-specified, or within a city or other natural environment. In any event, both are compulsory to anything that can be adequately referred to as a dance performance; anything that is deemed to, favour them is welcome. This place, be it conventional or modern, public or private, is the 'physical space', in which body dancing produces the 'meta space' of that dance by writing a breakdown of meaning and signification. Following this, dance researcher José Gil has coined the "space of the body", a hidden and interior space. Consequently, José Gil, a scholar involved in dance research, slightly navigates the course of the term 'space of body' inasmuch as "body in making the space; space as the body" (Gil 2006, 21). The space may not be that of the body, that is,

the space of its existence, the space of envelopment; instead, it is the planning of the latter and its evolution; the body does not dwell in the space, and the skin is not a boundary but a boundary post of the territory.

The space that belongs to the body is not that in which the body exists and is contained; it is the feminization of the latter and its differentiation; the body does not reside in it, and the skin, a border, is an extension of the border. This is in contrast to closure and openness, which are posited as the polarities of the analytical construction, with the space of the body posited as the space of openness that is simultaneously confined. This by itself and with the elimination of the frame gives a clear indication that space is inside and outside and that dancing in space is not a 'being space'. The body is 'other' to physical space because of this feature, but it is intertwined with it that they cannot be separated or defined apart from each other. For this reason the body's space has no bound. That is why it seems important to point out that the term mobilization concerns anybody in any situation, not only the body of a dancer; by way of example, the paradoxical body and the space of the body. Therefore, what qualifies as a body that dances? Gil defined dancing as the ability to move 'with the internal map', and 'with,' 'in possession of,' or 'in submission to the rhythm' of the music (2006:23).

The human body is central to dancers' practice. Dance is a human activity that relies solely on the body for projecting dance movements as learned or perceived. Martha Graham (1998) emphasized the significance of the human body in dance, asserting that it serves as both a medium for expression and a means of living. Because the human body serves as the medium for dance, it impacts how dances are perceived and understood. These changes are caused by the human body's temporality and are influenced by spatial and time dynamics. Dance practices are not stable but are susceptible to significant alteration processes associated with social development and exchange. The human body is completely oriented toward itself. It stands free in space. Its only resource, if we can call it that, is its environment, the spatial sphere surrounding it, and into which it can reach with its limbs.

Because dances are performed using the body, the physical aspects of staging and performance must be carefully considered. It is important to consider how dances reflect historical and cultural body ideals and practices. For dances to be successfully planned and performed, individual knowledge of the body and awareness of how dancers relate to each other are required. Dances are cultural performances that help societies represent and express themselves, and the physicality and materiality of individual bodies create a collective (dance) body that is multifaceted and has an effect on the audience. The body contains three main planes: physical, emotional, and mental. Dance requires all three planes to function properly.

The Body as a Medium of Artistic Expression

"Art has been a powerful way for self-expression in human civilization, reflecting individual identities and social histories." Before the natural body encountered dance, it had always responded to the habitual human-animal forms that sustain its existence. Margolis posits that the natural movement of the body is expressive by virtue of its human nature and its enculturation in a particular group, and "dancers use their personally and culturally idiosyncratic selves as the very medium of their art — not steps, movements, positions, or styles primarily focused on denotative and symbolic import" (1981: 425)

The body has always interacted with the world around it. Therefore, when the human body moves in dance, it portrays an inherent nature that tacitly impacts the quality of movement. Dance is inherently embodied; it relies on the physical body to convey emotional, narrative, and values. The body in dance is both the medium and the message; it is "a canvas for artistic expression" (Shaikh & Thackersey 2023:378. According to dance scholar, Hanna, dance can be seen as "a way of knowing and communicating" through the body (2006: 15). The physicality of dance allows for direct and visceral engagement with audiences, making the body a crucial element in artistic expression. The body forms the of all human activities; hence, according to Kayser, "the body is the storm, the

origin of co-ordinates, the constant place of stress in all that it experiences -train. Everything circles round it, and is felt from its point of view. (...) The world experienced comes at all times with our body as its centre, centre of vision, centre of action, centre of interest" (2024: xxv).

In contemporary dance, choreographers often experiment with the body's capacity to express complex ideas and emotions. For instance, Pina Bausch's works often feature raw, intense physicality to explore themes of human relationships and societal issues. Bausch's approach exemplifies how the body can transcend traditional aesthetics to become a conduit for deeper narrative and emotional exploration (Bausch, 1984).

Body and Cultural Symbolism

The body in dance is also a cultural symbol that reflects and negotiates societal values and norms. Dance historian Foster argued that dance practices are embedded within cultural contexts and often serve to reinforce or challenge cultural ideologies (1996). For example, traditional dance forms such as ballet have historically been associated with ideals of grace and discipline, often reflecting and reinforcing social hierarchies and gender roles (Manning, 1993). The body tells ancient stories that cannot be adequately captured in word, but through the acts of 'doing' Thomas posits that "dance provides a rich sense of resources for exploring the histories of bodies by examining technical shifts and transformations of dance styles in relation to the dancing bodies that perform them over a period of time." Furthermore, it provides a site for examining the limitations and the extraordinary abilities of the physical body" (2003:93).

By contrast, dance forms emerging from marginalized communities frequently challenge dominant cultural narratives. Hip-hop dance, for instance, originated in the Bronx and has become a global phenomenon that often critiques social injustices and celebrates resilience (Forman & Neal, 2004). The body in hip-hop dance embodies both resistance and empowerment. Furthermore, within African cultural dance forms, Bata dance reflects a dynamism of energy and illustrates how dance can serve as a platform for cultural expression and political commentary.

Body and Identity Formation

The body in dance plays a significant role in the formation of identity for both the dancer and the audience. Dance offers a way for individuals to explore and express their identities, whether through personal experiences or broader social affiliations. Banes explores how dance practices enable individuals to negotiate their identities and connect with cultural communities (Banes, 1994).

For dancers, the physical experience of dance can lead to a profound sense of self-awareness and self-expression. This is particularly evident in forms such as contact improvisation, where the body's spontaneous interactions facilitate a deep exploration of identity and connection (Hanna, 1988). The improvisational nature of this dance form allows for a fluid and dynamic exploration of the self, thus highlighting the body's role in shaping personal and collective identities.

The Physical Body

The dancer's body emerges from life by replicating, modifying, and absorbing natural movement forms. The functions of the dance body include not only transmitting emotions but also a comprehensive form of expression for various aspects of dance art. Dance is an art that requires a huge level of physicality, and it can be very challenging with a variety of movements ranging from fiery, jostling movements to slow soft movements (Angioi et al., 2009). These movements require expertise and an exceptional ability to create and maintain balance and symmetry (Armstrong & Relph, 2018), and core stabilization, which is generated from the core depth of the body within the network of the human muscular structure (Watson et al., 2017, Mistiaen et al., 2012).

The persona of the natural body is different from the artistic body. The natural body responds to survival, being, and expression within a given space of habitual existence. However, within the artistic enclave, the body assumes a different role: that which is a means to an end. It becomes a conveyance of artistic competence that can inevitably mask the natural body and leave the audience. The dancing body in a performance is fictional, nonexistent, and objectified to project ideology or concepts.

Inma submits that:

In the theatrical tradition, the performing persona brings the artwork to life, including aspects of his or her professional persona, such as a personal style, grace, or movement virtuosity, and, if appropriate, aspects of his or her real persona, such as ethnicity, gender, and shape. Other aspects of the real and professional persona such as his or her own sweat, physical and psychological tensions, exhausting muscular activity, and emotional states are usually concealed in the magic of the scene to make it look easy, comfortable, painless, enjoyable to execute on the one hand, and agreeable to character on the other (2010:6).

Dancers use stage performances to portray various forms of dance text, primarily using their own bodies, as well as to reflect dance concepts and physical artistic expression of the soul through creative artistic processing and re-creation. In modern times, the dance body has become the primary body of dance art and a fundamental research object in the subject of dance art. The space that the body occupies is not the same as the space that it owns; rather, the space that the body occupies is its own space, internal organization, and expansion; it is not exhausted within it, nor is it contained by the skin, which is a point of extension rather than a limit. A dancer's movement 'in space' becomes 'being space' if there is no border, which eliminates the sense of inside and outside (Barzon, 2022). The ability of the body to align with the rhythmic requirements and essentialities of the dance constitute the dancer's body.

The Emotional Body

The emotional purpose of dance is to receive the dance body and the dancer's emotional experience via the audience's visual experience, i.e., the emotion of dance. The emotions contained in the dancer's physical and mental states are transposed to the audience, reflecting changes in the dancer's mental state and ideological activity. The appeal of dance's emotional function can stimulate the audience's emotional resonance, causing the soul to tremble. It serves as the link for emotional contact between the audience and dance art. Dance performance is an expressive art in which the human body is externalized through the control of the individual's inner emotional effects. This externalized structure and magnitude of the human body has witnessed the growth process and shape of human civilization. So far, dance performance has artistic aspects representing people's complex feelings, and its strong emotional expression has reached the pinnacle of artistic performance.

Space and Dance

Space is a basic element of dance. In dance, space is recreated through motion, which unites space with the will of time. A movement creates and explores space, bringing in points in space. Space is crucial to dance because it communicates the presence of movement. What is achieved with this information extends beyond space. It is transformed into an aesthetic experience. This method is simple to execute because the object in motion is a human body. Unlike other objects, humans can experience it both internally and externally. Sympathy and empathy allow us to experience the dancer's movements. To sense the quality of a dancer's movements, members of the audience do not need to fully contract their muscles and exert themselves as much as they do. Virtual muscle motions provide the same quality of motion without the strain and effort required for dancing in a gravitational field. This is a clear advantage. Without vision and space, there would be tendencies to miss out on

experiencing the motion of a dancer or a work of art. In dance, space serves as a transition into time. The intuited quality of a motion depends on the spatial perspective relative to the dancer, but it remains independent of place. It doesn't matter if we see the dancer and the stage differently than she does. Dance's internal and outward features create a distinct counterpoint for each viewer, regardless of location.

Aesthetics of the body in Space

When the dancer moves according to the dictates of the choreographer or in improvisational routines, there is a conscious and unconscious attempt to create images, relatable bodily designs that easily communicate ideas and thoughts. The purpose of dance is not just to move. These images are termed conscious because they have been thoroughly thought of and created to give an impression with the dancers' body and unconscious because they are a reflection of an interaction with the world around the dancers. Weiss (1999) writes based on the postulations of Merleau-Ponty (1962), that the images formed by the body in dance for both the dancer and observer are largely based on the roles and subjectivity of cultural, sexual, racial, and social issues. She concludes that it is largely through the images created by the body that we situate our personified selves in a vast world that is constantly being shaped and reshaped in response to the changes that occur in the dancer's body as well as the bodies of co-dancers, the environment/society at large which ultimately creates a wholesome picture but constantly subjected to change (Weiss, 1999).

As previously stated, body image in dance is formed through constant interrelationships with the outside world; thus, no two body images are formed precisely in the same way but are the result of the specific conditions of an individual's life experience (Weiss, 1999). To be dependable, the body image must be adaptable enough to incorporate changes occurring both inside and outside the body while still seeking a certain "equilibrium" that will provide the stability required, not only for effective bodily movement, but also for a relatively unified perceptual experience.

From a traditional religious perspective, the body reacts to institutionalized principles and therefore acts and reacts in the same manner, having learned that through years of growing up. In this wise, there is the irreverent and the revered: "the sacred embodies all that is good and pure while the profane represents all that is harmful to the sacred, the common and impure." Objects categorized under the sacred are elevated in the eyes of the society, while those categorized under the profane were lowered and despised" Thomas (2003:18). This shapes the man, the dancer, and reflects his attitudinal reactions to what is being said or done. This is ultimately the consensual principle of societies. When a dancer dances, therefore, he merely communicates these principles in the most open or concealed manner to bring his audience into synergy with him, a myriad of his roots. Thomas further stated that the human body is viewed as a microcosm of society, "upon which order and symbolic values are imposed and in turn are rendered natural or non-social" (2003:19).

The body experiences itself through its interaction with space, which incorporates music and dance movements. It develops design ability through its movements, forming and becoming a usable instrument without becoming functional. Dance movements convey various meanings in terms of representation and expression. Therefore, within a choreographed work, which also seeks to appeal to the audience, the positioning of the objects on stage looks toward the creation of appealing images for the audience to enjoy and remember. In these, images are imagined and analysed. Dance movements shape the bodies that create them; they inspire imagination and bring them to life through repeated staging and performances. They are regular and represent order. Dance movements highlight the body's submissiveness, which manifests itself through exercises and repetitions (Resina & Wulf 2019). The movements of the dance reveal an underlying understanding with a broad scope. Depending on the genre of dance, the movements are either rooted in social power structures or, as in experimental avant-garde-style creations, are largely free of them. The use of the body tells exactly what is being communicated. Green, in

agreement with Primus, submits that “people use their bodies as instruments through which conceivable emotion or events are projected and the result is the hypnotic marriage between life and dance” (1996:6).

Design as a Spatial and Visual Framework

Design provides physical and metaphorical spaces in which dance occurs. Within the theatrical dance framework, beyond the significant design structure of the dancing bodies, the spaces being engaged by the dancer relate with objects such as scenography elements to convey adequate meaning. Panouli posits, “All these situations and emotions arise when a series of elements start to come together.” The starting point is often the relationship between objects and dancers. The scenographic elements are used or treated in a peculiar way; the dancers move around them or ‘use’ them in a way we can only describe as symbolic”. According to Sara, scenography is designed to create a space that can change according to the needs of the dance narrative. Visual elements such as digital projection and animation become an integral part of the design, which not only supports motion but also creates an emotional atmosphere. Scenography, the integrated design of performance environments, helps to shape the kinetic vocabulary of a piece by establishing visual cues and spatial constraints that dancers respond to. As noted by McKinney and Butterworth (2009), scenography in dance does not merely decorate the stage but constructs a world that dancers inhabit, navigate, and reimagine through movement to communicate adequately with the viewing audience.

In contemporary dance performances, the performance space is often considered an active phenomenon and participant in choreography. The structure of the set, the textural appearance of the materials, and the geography of the stage all offer unique interactions. These interactions, in turn, influence the choreographic process, sometimes dictating tempo, rhythm, or direction (Bremser & Sanders, 2017). In addition, digital scenography structure has been incorporated into dance performances. Dils (2002) studied “random dots and lines, that circle or flit across the stage” (96) through projection to create environment and ‘digital dancers’ in a performance.

Conceptualizing scenography for performance, Sara states that:

The scenography designer starts by creating a rough sketch that reflects the main ideas that have been agreed upon, including the stage layout, visual elements, and the potential interaction between the dancers, the space, and the technology. In this process, designers consider various aspects, such as technical (stage size, lighting, visual projection) and aesthetic (color, texture, and shape). Each element aims to support the narrative of the performance, create an atmosphere that matches the theme, and reinforce the emotions that the choreographer wants to convey. This initial sketch often serves as a communication tool to get additional feedback from the creative team before the final design is made. (2024: 303)

As soon as there is an agreement between the choreographer and the scenography designer, the designer proceeds to give a more detailed and definitive sketch, usually 3D, to allow dancers and choreographers to know the spatial framework within which they are to perform.

Costume Design and Bodily Expression

Costume design plays a pivotal role in the articulation of dance. It is not merely an aesthetic layer but a tactile and functional component that liberates or restricts the body. The functionalities of costumes are captured within the performance context of a dance piece. According to Price & Pettijohn (2016), “dance are also for the audience to create better the effect of the story, the audience have a stronger sense of substitution, so that the audience can be personally on the scene, practical to follow the actors into the story, following the actor's emotional ups and downs of the continuous changes, so the dance of the overall sense of contrast can play a role in rendering aptly. It can be said that the dance costumes are very important for the emotional expression of the actors and the audience” (991). Costumes: Embody the depth of the dance art; Express contents of the dance works; Reflect characteristics of the dance role.

The concept of a dance performance can be easily communicated using costumes. The depth of artistic ingenuity is easily reflected within the framework of this art, as communication with the audience can easily be established through aesthetic influence of these costumes. Cultural emotions and affiliation. According to Schrock, “the audience can in the middle of the dancer's dress that a lot of information, both dancers’ personal characteristics, represented the dance that conveys to the audience out of spirit, and dance in national characteristics.” The audience can get a glimpse of a more accurate evaluation of the dance from the details of clothing” (2013:59).

“Dance performance is different with language performance It can only rely on the performance of the dancer's body movements to convey the central idea in the works of topics and content” (Robert, 2019:15). Dancers’ costumes help performers show their character by demonstrating outstanding differences among several performers. While expressing a dance piece so that the dance appears livelier and vivid. Professional dancers usually choose good quality clothing. Stretching is crucial in the art of dance; therefore, materials that allow for the extent to which the body can stretch become an important factor in choosing the quality of fabric to be used. Typically, the members of the audience are there for entertainment, in contrast to the dancers. Strong dance abilities, despite their movements, convey strong yet numerous emotions. What appears to be a graceful action is not something that happens naturally. Clothing can enable dancers to perform new kinds of artistic and beautiful movements.

Costumes function as a reflector of the roles the dancers play. As dance is a nonverbal art, the dancers may not have the opportunity to inform the audience in clear terms what roles they are playing. “If the actors only dressed in ordinary form clothing dancing on the stage, whether performers was how hard, actor of stage skills how solid, the actor's emotional expression how in place, audience is not well understood the actor to watch as the content, not very good into dance to bring the audience to the atmosphere.” And through the actor’s own changes in the body image of the packaging, you can play a role in the identity of the identity of the identity of the era background” opines Paterek (2014: 88).

Spatial Design and Choreography

Spatial design considers the arrangement of dancers and audience members within the performance space. When choreographers plot movements, floor patterns, and the positioning of dancers, there is always the consideration that the spatial appearance of both the dancers and the will have an influence on the audience perspective and the spatial dynamics of dance compositions (Bremser, 2017).

Meaning and aesthetics of a dance performance are not just about the dancing bodies but also about the significance of the images projected by positioning, floor patterns, totems, and the creative ingenuity of the choreographer to convert prosaic movements into artistic works. In this instance,

Dance allows us to discover the ordinary situations of the body through daily life movements in choreography. The spatial possibilities created by the body that is free on the stage reveal the transforming, changing, and moving space. By creating its own atmosphere and offering a different experience of space and time, theatrical dance enables the temporal and spatial relationships of the body. The bodies in the choreography share time and space, just like the bodies experiencing an architectural space in daily life (Tatar et al, 2021:1212)

The body becomes a metaphorical entity that speaks beyond the immediate self and conjures images that connote political, cultural, religious, and social affiliations. Modern dance, according to Thomas (2003), treats dance outside the enclaves of specificity that the dancing body initially enjoyed, which makes it rather unstable and transient. The stage layout can serve as an influencing factor for enhancement, and stage architecture and layout can facilitate or constrain movement possibilities, influencing choreographic decisions and audience engagement (Jordan, 2021).

Conclusion

The interface of design and dance in performance is dynamic and multifaceted, integrating visual, spatial, and technological elements to enhance artistic expression and audience experience. By exploring these intersections, choreographers and designers continually innovate, shaping the future of dance theatre.

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