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## Somaesthetics and Dance

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## **Abstract:**

Dance is proposed as the most representative of somaesthetic arts in *Thinking Through the Body: Essays in Somaesthetics* and other writings of Richard Shusterman. Shusterman offers a useful, but incomplete approach to somaesthetics of dance. In the examples provided, dance appears as subordinate to another art form (theater or photography) or as a means to achieving bodily excellence. Missing, for example, are accounts of the role of dance as an independent art form, how somaesthetics would address differences in varying approaches to dance, and attention to the viewer's somaesthetic dance experience. Three strategies for developing new directions for dance somaesthetics are offered here: identify a fuller range of applications of somaesthetics to dance as an independent art form (e.g. Martha Graham); develop somaesthetics for a wider range of theatre dance (e.g. ballet, modern and experimental dance); and relate somaesthetics to more general features of dance (content, form, expression, style, kinesthetics) necessary for understanding the roles of the choreographer/dancer and the viewer.

**Keywords:** aesthetics, dance, expression, photography, somaesthetics, style

## **1. Dance and Somaesthetics**

Richard Shusterman's *Thinking Through the Body: Essays in Somaesthetics* continues his exploration of somaesthetics found in his previous writing on this topic. This volume, published in 2012, includes applications of somaesthetics to such areas as the humanities, education, cultural politics, sexual aesthetics, everyday living, soma style, and the arts. In this work, Shusterman draws upon the rich cultural practices of both the East (China, India, and Japan) and the

West (Ancient Greece), as well as his personal experiences as a practitioner and teacher of somatic training and aesthetics. He locates the discussion of these issues especially in the context of the pragmatist theories of John Dewey, William James, Richard Rorty and Eastern sources including the writings of Chinese philosophers Mencius and Xunzi.

The main thrust of Shusterman's aim throughout this work is the argument for humanistic study and cultivation of the body. The body, understood as "purposeful subjectivity," according to Shusterman, is to be treated not merely as a means to higher ends. Rather the body belongs to the realm of ends. "In the same way, the dancer's body belongs as much to the ends as to the means of the dance work."<sup>1</sup> Shusterman makes noteworthy contributions in *Thinking Through the Body* and his previous writings by showing through somaesthetics the importance of dance and the other arts in both personal and societal life. Throughout this volume there are continuous references to applications of somaesthetics to the arts including architecture, dance, theater, and photography. For our purposes this essay will focus mainly on the place of dance in Shusterman's understanding of somaesthetics. Early on, he refers to dance as "the most paradigmatic of soma arts."<sup>2</sup> In support of this claim he offers frequent references to dance both in *Thinking Through the Body* and also in his previous writings including *Performing Live* (2000) and *Body Consciousness* (2008). For example, he champions the role of dance in everyday life, as in popular culture (rock and roll and hop hip music and dancing). Dance's roles in social performativity extend even to erotic sexuality as in Indian and other cultures.<sup>3</sup> Similarly, Shusterman recognizes the role of dance in the maintenance of bodily care and the creation of bodily excellence. His discussion includes commentary on F. M. Alexander's (Alexander Technique for bodily improvement) objections to dance in education.<sup>4</sup> In these earlier writings, he has taken care to

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<sup>1</sup> Richard Shusterman, *Thinking Through the Body: Essays in Somaesthetics* (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), p. 45

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 279–287.

<sup>4</sup> Richard Shusterman, *Body Consciousness: A Philosophy of Mindfulness and Somaesthetics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp. 17, 24, 46, 48, 53, 89, 209–211.

show the importance of dance in everyday life. In the present volume, Shusterman offers a fuller picture of his views on applications of somaesthetics to dance in two different arts: Nō theater and photography.

Shusterman's analyses of the role of "thinking through the body" in reference to the actor-performer in Japanese Nō Theater draws upon the theory and practice of the Japanese master of Nō Theater, Zeami Motokiyo. In this context, for example, he cites the "Five Skills of Dancing" included in training of performance skills for the actors. Briefly, "The first is 'the Skill of Self-Conscious Movement,' which involves an explicitly conscious attention to the body in technique 'placing the various elements of the body into motion, moving the hands in appropriate gestures, controlling the performance so that it will fall into the proper structure of *jo*, *ha*, and *kyū* (the rhythms of movement). The second skill is described as 'The skill of Movement beyond Consciousness,' which is not a matter of the particular movement the actor makes, but rather 'the creation of an atmosphere'" guided by constant self-reflection focused on inner control of the body in action.<sup>5</sup>

These concepts based on the principles of Nō highlight Shusterman's views on somaesthetics of dance. Yet the limits of this approach to dance are implicit in the same discussion where a differentiation is made between dance and the Nō actor's art. Quoting Zeami, Shusterman notes that, "if an actor really wants to become a master, he cannot simply depend on his skill in dance and gesture. Mastery seems to depend on the actor's own state of self-understanding and the sense of style..."<sup>6</sup>

In the chapter titled "Photographs as Performative Process" in *Thinking Through the Body*, Shusterman offers an account of the dynamics operative in the relationship of photographer, subject, and camera. Shusterman's first-person experience of posing for the Parisian photographer artist Yann Toma, and then writing about the experience, illustrates this process. Both the subject's pose, the camera work, and the photographer's bodily movements are

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<sup>5</sup> See *Thinking Through the Body* for details of the role of dance to Nō theater: pp. 209–212.

<sup>6</sup> Richard Shusterman, *Thinking Through the Body*, pp. 211.

considered essential parts of the aesthetic process in creating the resulting photograph. Of particular interest for our purposes here is the account of the dance element that emerged as the photographer engages the subject in a “performative dance” with his lamps and camera. Toma [the photographer artist] needs to move swiftly, not only to catch the moving, changing flow of the person’s auratic energy but also to ensure that only the stationary posing subject and the tracing of the lights (but not the artist’s body or the lamps tracing them) will be captured on film. He relies on his background in dance to perform the art of rapid and proximate twirling, with both aesthetic grace and attentive care.<sup>7</sup>

## **2. New Directions for Dance Somaesthetics: Dance as an Independent Art**

Despite his not infrequent references to dance, there remains a question as to whether his account sustains the claim that dance is “the most paradigmatic of soma arts.” Missing from the discussion is a consideration of dance as an independent art form. Dance appears in a role subordinate to another art form, in this case Nō Theater and photography, or is treated as a means of bodily development and care. Although dance shares some elements with Nō Theater, and may contribute to the photographer’s engagement with his subject and his equipment, dance is not treated as an independent art form in either instance. In the first example, dance is subordinated to a means contributing toward the creation of the actor’s performance. In the example featuring the role of dance in Toma’s photography, dance though it is contributory to the photographer’s creative process, again fails to receive explicit attention as an art form in its own right.

In the interest of exploring new directions for a somaesthetics of dance, I will suggest various aspects of dance, which might be addressed in a fuller account of dance aesthetics. First, additional cases to show concretely somaesthetic applications to dance, especially ones where dance functions as an independent art form, are needed. This process might begin again with another example involving the relation of photography and dance where dance is viewed as an independent art form. For example, the collaboration of photographer Barbara Morgan and choreographer Martha Graham seems well

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<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 255.

suitied to showcase important aspects of the somaesthetics of dance. Graham explains succinctly her view of the art of dance in these words: "A dancer's instrument is [her] body.... Every true dancer has a peculiar arrest of movement, an intensity of attention, which animates [her] whole being. It may be called Spirit, or Dramatic intensity.... It is the activity produced by the Spirit-of-body that is Dancing."<sup>8</sup> Graham affirms her belief concerning the autonomy of dance as an art in these words: "Dance is an absolute. It is not knowledge about something, but is knowledge in itself.... It is independent of service to an idea, but is of such highly organized activity that it can produce an idea...The inner quality of the dancer is inherent in all that he does."<sup>9</sup>

Commenting on the importance of photography to dance, Graham once remarked, "Photographs when true to the laws that govern inspired photography, reveal facts of feature, bodily contour, and some secret of [the dancer's] power."<sup>10</sup> Graham's perfectory note in the introduction to *Martha Graham: Sixteen Dances in Photographs* references the relation of dance and photography. "It is rare that even an inspired photographer possesses the demonic eye which can capture the instant of a dance and transform it into a timeless gesture. In Barbara Morgan I found this person.... Barbara Morgan through her art reveals the inner landscape that is a dancer's world."<sup>11</sup> The benefit of the Graham/Morgan collaboration, unlike the role of dance in Toma's photography, is that it preserves the independent integrity of both art forms, thus allowing for appreciation of the somaesthetics of dance as an independent art form with its own understanding of the body. Both dance and photography participate equally in the creative process as developed by Graham and Morgan as independent art forms.

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<sup>8</sup> Martha Graham, "Dancer's Focus," in Barbara Morgan, *Martha Graham: Sixteen Dances in Photographs* (Dobbs Ferry, New York: Morgan & Morgan, 1941), p. 11.

<sup>9</sup> Martha Graham, "Dancer's Focus," p. 11.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.

<sup>11</sup> Barbara Morgan, *Martha Graham: Sixteen Dances in Photographs* (Dobbs Ferry, N.Y.: Morgan & Morgan Inc. Reprint of 1941 edition of Duell, Sloan and Pearce edition, 1980), p. 8. Richard Shusterman, *Thinking Through the Body*, pp. 210–212.

Neither Morgan nor Graham had access to the concept of somaesthetics that has more recently emerged in Shusterman's writings to explain their ideas concerning photography and dance. They might well have welcomed somaesthetics as a means of further accounting for their respective understanding of dance. Morgan recalled in a conversation with me the bodily process that the two shared, is based on the Japanese esthetic concept of *esoragoto*. *Esoragoto* requires that the artist psychologically become one with whatever was being created.<sup>12</sup> Their experiences with photography and dance correspond nicely with the aims of somaesthetics.

Secondly, a fuller development of somaesthetics of dance will benefit from considering its application to a wider range of different kinds of dance. How, for example, might somaesthetics address the variations in the types of experiences offered by different forms of dance, say ballet, modern dance, contemporary dance, ethnic dance, hip hop, and other innovations in recent dance? A starting point could be to relate somaesthetics to dance studies such as Sally Banes' *Terpsichore in Sneakers* (1980) and *No Fixed Points: Dance in the Twentieth Century* (1980) by Nancy Reynolds and Malcolm

McCormick.<sup>13</sup> Their research examines recent developments in western ballet, modern and Avant-garde dance as well as popular show dance such as jazz and tap. Also useful for exploring how somaesthetics might contribute further to understanding differences in various forms of dance is Francis Sparshott's earlier studies in dance aesthetics. For example, he examines different types of dance in *Off the Ground* (1988) and *A Measured Pace* (1995).<sup>14</sup> Both of these

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<sup>12</sup> Curtis L. Carter *Faces of Modern Dance: Barbara Morgan Photographs* (Haggerty Museum of Art, 2004), p. 11. See also, Curtis L. Carter, "Discussion With Barbara Morgan," *Arts in Society, Summer-Fall, 1976m Vol. 13, and No.: 273*. Barbara Morgan, "Dance into Photography," *Martha Graham: Sixteen Dances in Photographs* (Dobbs Ferry, New York: Morgan & Morgan, 1941), pp. 14–150.

<sup>13</sup> Sally Banes, *Terpsichore in Sneakers* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1980), Nancy Reynolds and Malcolm McCormick, *No fixed Points: Dance in the Twentieth Century* (Yale University Press, 2003).

<sup>14</sup> Francis Sparshott, *Off the Ground: First Steps to a Philosophical Consideration of the Dance* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), pp. 180–187 on meaning, pp. 269–312. Also *A Measured Pace: Toward a Philosophical Understanding of Dance* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995) chapters 6–8, 10, 11.

studies will provide information useful to a further development of somaesthetics of dance.

### **3. Registration**

A third approach aimed toward expanding the application of somaesthetics to dance would be to view somaesthetics of dance with reference to more general features of dance. One way to proceed in this direction is offered in the application to dance of a schema first introduced by Perlmutter and Perkins for analyzing the components of aesthetic responses to the visual arts.<sup>15</sup> Perlmutter's and Perkins's concepts of registration and construction are useful here to identify important general aspects of dance that would warrant attention in a fuller development of dance somaesthetics.

In the broadest sense, registration characterizes the features of dance works as constructed on and through the body by the choreographers and dancers, while construction refers to the reception of dance in the body of the viewer.<sup>16</sup> Together, registration and construction address the bodily experiences necessary to making and interpretation of works of dance. This includes both overtly bodily as well as stylistic and other environmental features contributing to making and experiencing dance.

The forms of dance that I have in mind here are variations of artistic theater dance, although not all forms of dance take place in this context. Dance intended for performance in the theater requires that the dancer's bodily movements be further shaped by choreographic form and other external factors. Theatrical dance such as ballet, modern, and much of contemporary dance, takes place in a complex cultural setting with additional features. Each form of dance has its own "art culture" that determines choices concerning movement style, lighting, costumes, stage design and stage sets. Story and music contribute additional features to dance experiences. Some modern and contemporary dance styles are based on abstract formal movement with no intent to tell a story.

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<sup>15</sup> Michael Loren Perlmutter and D. N. Perkins, "A Model of Aesthetic Response," *A Model for Aesthetic Response in the Arts*, Eds. Michael Loren Perlmutter and D. N. Perkins (St Louis, Missouri: cemrel, Inc. 1982), pp. 17, 18.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 2, 3.



The space where the dance is taking place defines the relation of the dancers to the audience, and is also an important factor in generating the aesthetic responses to dance. For example, the proscenium stage establishes a formal distancing of performers and audience, while theater in the round invites closer engagement. Much of modern and contemporary dance takes place in open, sometimes intimate spaces with fewer barriers between performers and audience. Contemporary dance performances also happen on the street, and in other non-traditional spaces. For experienced viewers, aesthetic responses to dance may receive additional enhancement based on the knowledge they might possess of viewing dance, dance history, criticism, and aesthetics. It would be of interest for somaesthetics to examine how different spaces affect the somaesthetic experience. Key elements in the environment of the dance performance, sometimes overlooked in aesthetics of dance, are the presence of viewers, and the interactions taking place between the performers and the audience members. A fuller account of these features than is currently available from somaesthetics is needed.

Registration is divided into different stages including the stimulus factor, content, formal, and expressive qualities of the dance. The bodily movements and other aspects of a performance supply the primary stimulus. Bodily motion consists of space, time, and energy. These elements, when given form according to the choreographer's style, constitute a vocabulary of bodily shapes, steps, phrases, and creative processes linking together these items. Of course, bodily attributes of the individual dancers individualize each role in a given performance. Bodily attributes including size, shape, height, energy level, profile, and length of legs, muscularity, posture, presence, carriage, and charismatic presence are all part of the stimulus. Less overtly visible are the kinesthetic aspects of the dance stimulus. Kinesthetics consists of the orderly flow of muscular energy as the body executes the dance movements.

In a dance performance, stimulus may include not only human bodies in motion, but also the environment in a theatrical or a natural setting. In the theatre, the artistic environment may include music-sound, stage sets, lighting, costume, and various multi-media such as slide projection, film, and video. The music is related to the bodily movement in various ways. For example, the choreographer may

structure the dance movements to follow rhythmic patterns as defined by the music, or else set the movement in opposition to the musical structure. While it is useful to think of the separate visual, kinesthetic, and auditory components that comprise a dance stimulus, it is also important to take note of the holistic character of a dance performance. The spectator is experiencing all of these elements and processing them simultaneously. The chemistry of such elements is not merely additive, as a perceived stimulus comes to the viewer as a unity, and then links with other elements of the viewer's experiences.

Stimulus is further broken down here into content, formal qualities, affective expression, and style.

Content for dance encompasses all features of the dance that a performer or a viewer might register or construct in creating or interpreting a dance, including the various aspects of the stimulus as noted in the previous section. Sensations consisting of phenomenal entities having no external physical existence are the data of immediate bodily awareness. Kinesthetic sensations corresponding to those taking place in the bodily movements of the dancers may also be experienced in the muscles and other bodily receptors of the viewers. Sensations are part of the chain leading from bare, un-interpreted registrations to perceptions, and then to more fully developed stages of cognition. The sensations associated with dance can be described in terms of pre-perceptual light-sound-kinesthetic awareness generated by the interaction of the sensory- motor system of the viewer and the dance stimulus. Shape and motion are the primary sensations in dance, while Color and sound function as secondary sensations for dance. Both assist the viewer in marking the delineations of shape and motion necessary to experiencing dance. The sensations of dance are both spatial and temporal. For example, shape is spatial, while motion is both spatial and temporal. Narrative references, such as the stories embedded in the plot of a dance, also impact the meaning of the dance for the viewer.

Narrative elements of dance emerge from bodily movements as well as other sources. The philosopher Nelson Goodman's ballet *Hockey Seen: a Nightmare in Three Periods and Sudden Death* uses images choreographed directly from the bodily movements of the players in a game of hockey, as well as drawings of artist Katherine

Sturgis based on her viewing live hockey on a tiny black and white tv screen.<sup>17</sup>

The viewer's responses to dance may also benefit from previous dance experiences known as former registrations. For example, the aesthetic responses of a viewer who has experienced two different performances, of the same work, say José Limon's *Moor's Pauvane*, one by the Limon modern Dance Company and another by the American Ballet Theatre dancers. Variations in the body language and movement style of the two different companies, and a shift in the performance space, for example, enhance the richness of the viewer's experience. Again the question arises, how might somaesthetics account for these aspects of a viewer's experience?

Given Shusterman's claim that dance is the most somaesthetic art, one might expect a discussion of the formal qualities of dance to receive greater attention in his development of somaesthetics of dance. The formal qualities of dance are comprised in part of the somatic qualities of the body, which are then shaped into meaningful experiences for the viewer. At their most abstract level, formal qualities of dance reflect the choreographer's uses of time, space and energy. Time exists in dance as duration, rhythm, phrase, pulse, tempo, accent, speed, and syncopation. Space factors include direction, focus, line of motion, body position levels (high, low, medium), range or distance, planes (horizontal, vertical, diagonal), body facing (forward, side, back), shape, and groupings.<sup>18</sup> Energy, also referred to as force, concerns the quality or dynamics of movement. Battu (beating), fouette (slashing), and glisse (gliding), as used in characterizing ballet movements, designate energy/force qualities of the dance movement, as do such terms as pressing (pushing), wringing (pulling), floating, punching, flicking, and dabbing.<sup>19</sup> Here, perhaps in the account of formal qualities is

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<sup>17</sup> Curtis L. Carter, "Nelson Goodman's Hockey Seen: A Philosopher's Approach to Performance," *Congress Book II Selected Papers: XVII International Congress of Aesthetics*, editor Jale Erzen (Ankara, Turkey: Sanart, 2009), p. 51.

<sup>18</sup> Margaret H'Doubler, *Dance: A Creative Experience* (New York: Appleton Century Crofts Inc. 1950).

<sup>19</sup> Rudolf Laban, *The Language of Movement: A Handbook to Choreustics*, editor Lisa Ullman, (Boston: Boston Plays Inc., 1966).

justification in support of Shusterman's claim that dance is the most somatic of the arts.

The formal qualities of dance can be described more generally by reference to principles of composition: variety, balance, climax, repetition, contrast, sequence, harmony, transition, rhythm, and clarity. These formal principles, when related to body shape, time, space, and energy constitute the structural patterns of dance movement. They provide the materials employed in choreographing and performing dance.<sup>20</sup> An awareness of the formal properties of a dance aids the viewer in configuring an aesthetic response to dance.

Another important issue in developing a more robust view of dance somaesthetics will be a clarification of the role of affective expression or emotion. While Shusterman touches upon the role of emotion in education in reference to discussion of this topic by Alexander and Dewey, the role of expression with respect to dance is left mainly insufficiently developed.

Expression refers to feeling or mood such as sadness, joy, or mystery and excitement. Choreographers imagine and conceptualize the movements that the dancers shape and present in the forms of bodily images to express a particular feeling or sentiment. Expression became a dominant theme in theater dance, especially in the dance as developed by Loie Fuller, Rudolf Laban, Mary Wigman and other modern dancers during the early part of the twentieth century. Feeling and mood appear in the dance in various forms. For example, a mood of impending tragedy pervades Limon's *Moors Pauvane* as the plot unveils the scheme of the evil character Iago to deceive his friend Othello into believing that Othello's wife Desdemona has been unfaithful.<sup>21</sup> In contrast, a scene from the *Nutcracker* ballet calls for movements that express playful joy and delight.

David Levin has proposed another form of expression in dance based on the experience of attending to the formal aspects of dance movement. Levin cites the modern abstract ballets of George

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<sup>20</sup> Margaret H'Doubler, *Dance: A Creative Experience* (New York: Appleton Century Crofts Inc. 1950).

<sup>21</sup> Nancy Reynolds and Malcolm McCormick, *No Fixed Points: Dance into the Twentieth Century* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2003), pp. 80–94.

Balanchine as one form of dance in which expression derives from the form of the dance itself.<sup>22</sup> Expressive qualities associated with pure bodily movement include virtuosity and grace. Virtuosity epitomizes the dancer's mastery of the ordinary impediments to human movement. Grace, the spiritual counterpart of virtuosity, is experienced when the body transcends its merely physical aspects through weightless, effortless, timeless movement performed beautifully.

Theorists differ over the application of expression to dance. Rudolf Arnheim and Max Wertheimer before him, argue that the perception of expression is much too immediate and compelling to be explainable merely as a product of learning. "When we watch a dancer, the sadness or happiness of the mood seems to be directly inherent in the movements themselves."<sup>23</sup> Opposing the view that expression in dance is literal, Nelson Goodman argues that artworks metaphorically possess expressive properties.<sup>24</sup> Both Goodman and Arnheim agree that expressive properties embedded emblematically (whether literally or metaphorically) in the moving bodies of the dancers are in some important sense properties of the dance. In both views the dance as a form of expressive symbol participates in cognition and thus functions as a part of the aesthetic response to dance.<sup>25</sup> Judging from the characterizing of somaesthetics in Shusterman's writings, it seems that he may find favor with Arnheim's understanding of expression in dance than with Goodman's metaphorical view of expression. Perhaps he will find useful Arnheim's discussion of expression in dance for expanding his development of the somaesthetics of dance. Again, attention to the role of expression in the works of Arnheim and others would be useful in providing a fuller account of the role of expression in a somatic understanding of dance.

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<sup>22</sup> David Levin, "Balanchine's Formalism," *Dance Perspectives*, autumn, 1973, Vol. IV, pp. 29–48.

<sup>23</sup> Rudolf Arnheim, *Toward a Psychology of Art* (Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 1974), pp. 403–409, 449.

<sup>24</sup> Nelson Goodman, *Languages of Art*, (Indianapolis and New York: Bobbs Merrill Company, 1968), pp. 91–93.

<sup>25</sup> See for example, Nelson Goodman, *Languages of Art*, pp. 91, 93 and 248. Rudolf Arnheim, *Toward a Psychology of Art*, pp. 406–409, 457–461.

“Somatic Style” which occupies chapter 14 of *Thinking with the Body* is to me one of the most interesting discussions in this volume apropos of dance. This chapter relates style in general to bodily style and bodily movement and is thus important for understanding social roles for the body. Here, Shusterman addresses bodily style in relation to personality, physical qualities, and the spiritual with salient references to the views of philosophers including Confucius, Thoreau, Wittgenstein and others. Yet, somewhat surprisingly, there is little if any reference to dance style here. Since style is so important to the creation and experience of dance in all forms, here is an issue where Shusterman might well address how his somaesthetic discussion of style applies to dance. For example, Susan Foster’s discussion of dance style in *Reading Dance: Bodies and Subjects in Contemporary American Dance* begins a conversation on movement quality and dance styles, which might offer a starting point on this topic.<sup>26</sup>

Style provides the language like features that give order and cohesion to particular dance practices, which in turn benefit the viewer’s aesthetic responses. Historical style labels follow national groupings: Danish, Russian, Italian, and French ballet offer distinct approaches to the art of ballet. Each represents a particular deployment of the body in a particular culture, resulting in variations of movement style. Among the historic western dance styles are these: *ballet de Coeur* (court ballet featuring codified technical movements of ballet), *ballet d’action* (emphasizing expression in character and bodily movement) romantic ballet, and classical ballet.<sup>27</sup> Corresponding variations take place in the dances of other cultures such as India and China. For example, a classical Indian dancer uses the body to symbolize the universal as codified in the Vedic texts.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Susan Foster, *Reading Dance: Bodies and Subjects in Contemporary American Dance* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London, 1986), pp. 76–91.

<sup>27</sup> Selma Jeanne Cohen, *Dance as a Theater Art* (New York: Harper Collins, 1974, Princeton: Princeton Book Company, 1992).

<sup>28</sup> Kapila Vatsayan, “Philosophy of Indian Dance,” in *International Encyclopedia of Dance, Vol. 3* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998) p. 463.

Chinese classical dancing when combined with musical drama draws its movement from daily activities and military skills.<sup>29</sup>

Twentieth and twenty-first century variations of western artistic dance styles have developed into modern and post-modern dance. Style in modern and postmodern dance follows choreographic concepts developed by individual choreographers and their dancers.<sup>30</sup> For example, Martha Graham introduced into modern dance the concept of muscular release-contraction, based on bodily inhalation and exhalation, that produces a particular kinesthetic effect in the dance movements. Dance as presented in popular culture is an important source for new developments in changing artistic dance styles. These influences appear prominently in the dances of Twyla Tharp, Yvonne Rainer and others whose choreography draws on the themes of American popular and post-modern cultures.<sup>31</sup> Prevailing societal attitudes toward the body influence what can be seen in the dance. The absence or presence of bodily nudity in the dance today reflects attitudes of the population at large or at least the views of an influential minority. Writing in the twentieth century Avant grade artist John Cage affirms a more contemporary view for aesthetic responses to dance when he writes that dance consists of "an activity of movement, sound, and light, which utilizes the entire body, requiring for its enjoyment the use of your faculty of kinesthetic sympathy."<sup>32</sup> Cage, who is best known for his experimental contributions to music and visual arts, collaborated with modern dance choreographer Merce Cunningham in the making of dances. One important question for somaesthetics is how to account for the differences that arise in the wide range of different approaches to dance. It would be of interest

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<sup>29</sup> Lu Wenjian, "Classical Dance," in *International Encyclopedia of Dance, Vol. 2* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 144.

<sup>30</sup> Nancy Reynolds and Malcolm McCormick, *No fixed Points: Dance in the Twentieth Century* (Yale University Press, 2003). Also Sally Banes, *Terpsichore in Sneakers: Post Modern Dance* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1980).

<sup>31</sup> Sally Banes offers a catalogue of innovative experimental choreographers including Simon Forti, Trisha Brown Lucinda Childs, Yvonne Rainer David Gordon, and Meredith Monk working on New York beginning in the 1980s.

<sup>32</sup> John Cage, *Silence* (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1961), p. 95.

here if somaesthetics might offer some insight into the bodily differences operative in these various dance styles.

## 4. Construction

Construction here refers to the key elements of dance active in forming the viewer's response to the registrations provided in the previous section. The viewer's perspective includes the spectator's bodily responses to a dance performance understood in conjunction with related cultural features. The viewer's perspective is mainly absent from the discussion of somaesthetics in Shusterman's references to dance. Given that the viewer's response is an essential part of dance, this is an important issue needing attention for a fuller account of dance somaesthetics. First hand viewing of dance on the part of the viewer begins the process. Taking note of the active bodily engagement of the viewer, as well as that of the dancers, lends support to the claim that dance is a somaesthetic art instead of merely a visual art or conceptual art. It is clear that the roles of both choreographers and performers in channeling physical energy, emotion and form through the bodies are primary requisites for a spectator's satisfying dance experience. From the viewer's side, a kinesthetically sensitive and active body is requisite for a fulfilling reception of the bodily images coming from the dancer's bodies. A viewer who has actually practiced dance or other bodily movement training in some form will likely have the advantage over those lacking this experience.

Construction pertains to different *modus operandi* in which the registrations present themselves. The different modes supply the contents of the various registrations.<sup>33</sup> The five modes to be considered here are the performative, phenomenal, kinesthetic, linguistic, and affective modes. Modes allow for the presentation of registrations in more than one mode.

The performance mode consists of the primary means of transferring the live experience of dance to its audience. Performance consists of dancing before a live audience or before a film or video camera. Performance frames the images of the dance for transmission to the spectator's experience. Its primary purpose is thus to provide the stimulus pattern for the principal aspects of registration. In some

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<sup>33</sup> Michael Loren Perlmutter and D. N. Perkins, "A Model of Aesthetic Response," pp. 16, 17.



situations, a performance may result in a physical or mental reenactment of aspects of a performance by the spectator. The dance critic, for instance, replays the performance in the mind while writing about it.

The phenomenal mode is the mode of ordinary visual recognition. This mode processes the dance experience as it is received through the senses. It focuses on the viewer's experience while in the presences of, and attending to a moving body or bodies dancing. Body shapes and movement patterns, as well as the attending formal, expressive, and symbolic features of the dance, are the key interests for this mode. It encompasses three-dimensional space, real time movement, and auditory registrations. Depending on the knowledge that the spectator brings to the viewing, the experience may include expressive qualities and even the movement's characteristic of individual dance styles or individual performers.

One curious matter concerning the dance, as Rudolf Arnheim has noted, is that the dancer's performance is "created in one medium while it appears to the audience in another." In dancing the performer creates "mainly in the medium of the kinesthetic sensations using the muscles, tendons, and joints," while "The spectator receives a strictly visual work of art."<sup>34</sup> The kinesthetic sense enables the dancer to learn a movement and to execute the movement from verbal, visual, or musical cues. Physical laws of the body govern kinesthetics, relating to such forces as body weight, body proportions, gravity, inertia, and momentum; however, the dancer's awareness and actions in learning and performing a piece are guided by a feeling of the "rightness" of certain muscle-tendon-joint combinations. The dancer relies on kinesthetic feeling to reproduce the dance movements from performance to performance.

The dancer's moving image is transferred visually to the viewer where the image is connected to other aspects of the receiving body. The image created by the dancers in executing the performance provides the vehicle that enables the viewer to experience live the kinesthetic forces in the dancer's bodies with corresponding bodily responses in the viewer's own muscles, tendons, and joints. A lift

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<sup>34</sup> Rudolf Arnheim, *Toward a Psychology of Art* (Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 1974), pp. 406, 407.

executed by the dancers, for example, produces a corresponding sensation in the body of the spectator.

The features of dance represented by patterns of muscle tension and relaxation are the central aspect of an aesthetic response to dance. They provide the foundation on which other interpretive features, features of the dance such as literary associations, narrative elements, and other aspects of meaning are constructed.

The affective mode concerns emotions felt by the spectator/observer while viewing dance, as distinguished from emotive or expressive properties that are attributed to the dance itself. Emotions including joy, sadness, and melancholy in response to a performance provide examples. These responses may develop in relation to another form of registration – kinesthetic for example – or through personal and cultural associations.

Arnheim's theory of expression is useful for clarifying the meaning of the affective mode. According to Arnheim, "expression is displayed in the dynamic appearance of perceptual objects," in our case dance performances.<sup>35</sup> The qualities found in expressive behavior, which are the basis for the affective mode, reveal their meaning directly while being processed in the viewer's perceptual system.

To empathize, by identifying with the dancers' bodies while viewing a performance based on personal associations evoked by the dancers' body movements, is one of the means by which the spectator participates in the affective mode. Empathy is thus an important part of the spectator's aesthetic response. It allows for imaginative participation, enabling the spectator to find significance in the work and to integrate the work into other life experiences.

Understanding the workings of the affective mode is not a simple matter. As Arnheim has noted, the richness of expression already present in the human body creates a special problem.<sup>36</sup> Both the choreographer-dancer and the viewer must take care to diminish all the unwanted expressions in order to focus on a particular affective quality. Not all affective responses to dance have familiar labels.

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<sup>35</sup> Rudolf Arnheim, *Toward a Psychology of Art*, pp. 445, 451–453.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 406–409.

Original dance works may evoke feeling as original as the form that produces them.

A linguistic mode of aesthetic responses begins with the viewer's silent or overt speech to himself or herself in evolving a response to the dance. Speech responses reinforce memory of the dance images by providing viewers with labels for the pervasive qualities of dance. Labels aid in future contemplation of dance experiences. This mode is important for its contributions to aesthetic responses in a variety of ways. It helps bring clarity and order to the viewer's experience. It is also a necessary component of interpretation and meaning of the dance experience. Once words are assigned to an experience, it is already potentially if not actually in a linguistic domain where its meaning depends on the conditions of use assigned by the linguistic community where it is used. This mode is useful for dance critics and others whose task is to translate the dance experience into words for purposes of communicating to others their understanding of the dance being viewed.

## **5. Conclusion**

This symposium has afforded the opportunity for a closer look at dance in a larger framework of bodily actions. Shusterman credits dance as a principal means of awakening his own consciousness leading to the formation of somaesthetics as both a philosophical and a practical basis for a philosophy of life. The references to dance in *Thinking Through the Body* and his previous works offer an important beginning contribution to a somaesthetic understanding of dance. Nevertheless, a review of the treatment of dance in this recent work, as well as Shusterman's previous writings, as noted previously, reveals a pattern of limited references to dance where, given the centrality of dance to soma arts, one might expect a fuller discussion of dance.

### **Author Query:**

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