

- Forcier, Michael W. and Michael Nuwer. 1979. "In Defense of Labor and Monopoly Capital: Comments on Szymanski's 'Braverman as a Neo-Luddite?'" *Insurgent Sociologist* 8, 4:56-57.
- Littler, Craig R. and Graeme Salaman. 1982. "Bravermania and Beyond: Recent Theories of the Labour Process." *Sociology* 16, 2:251-269.
- Smith, Vicki. 1994. "Braverman's Legacy: The Labor Process Tradition at 20." *Work and Occupations*. 21,4: 403-421.
- Szymanski, Albert. 1978. "Braverman as a Neo-Luddite?" *Insurgent Sociologist* 8, 1:45-50.

Bio Notes

Clifford L. Staples is Associate Professor of Sociology at the University of North Dakota. His research interests include social inequality, work, and family. He has published research articles in a variety of journals and co-founded, published, and edited *Writing Sociology* from 1992-1997. He is the author, with William G. Staples, of *Power, Profits, and Patriarchy: The Social Organization of Work at a British Metal Trades Firm, 1791-1922* (forthcoming).

William G. Staples is associate professor of sociology and Director of Graduate Studies at the University of Kansas. He has interests in social control, work, politics, and historical sociology. He is the author of *Castles of Our Conscience: Social Control and the American State, 1800-1985* (1991), *The Culture of Surveillance: Discipline and Social Control in the United States* (1997), and, with Clifford L. Staples, *Power, Profits, and Patriarchy: The Social Organization of Work at a British Metal Trades Firm, 1791-1922* (forthcoming).

Dance as Experience Pragmatism and Classical Ballet*

JEAN VAN DELINDER
Oklahoma State University

Social Thought & Research, 2000, Vol. 23, 1&2

Abstract

This essay examines the experience of classical ballet and its relationship to everyday life by drawing upon Dewey's emphasis on the importance of integrating the consummatory experience into everyday life, and the necessity of removing any limitations that prevent it from occurring. How can a regimented, formalized dance form such as classical ballet create a consummatory experience for the artist? How can such a structured art form as classical ballet be ephemeral or related to experience? It might be argued that classical ballet's structure is too rule bound, thus limiting the possibility of experience, vis a vis, modern, exploratory dance. The regimen of classical ballet by its very nature is criticized for limiting the freedom of expression that contributes to a consummatory experience. My analysis will focus on the assertion that classical ballet does not limit experience for the artist. Classical ballet is based on logical patterns and once these patterns become recognizable they express experience. By understanding the individual movements that comprise the patterns we achieve consummatory experience. Traditional or "classic" arts can provide a road map to consummatory experience.

*Direct all correspondence to Jean Van Delinder, Department of Sociology, Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, OK 74078 (jlvand@okstate.edu). My thanks to Robert Antonio, Dan Krier, and Brad Rickelman who provided thoughtful and useful comments on earlier drafts.

Aesthetic Experience and Everyday Life

Dewey argues that one problem in Western thought was the lack of value attributed to the aesthetic experience in a world dominated by a rationalized framework. Dewey's critique of the spectator theory and inherent dualisms of Western philosophy inevitably led him to a problem first introduced by Nietzsche. Nietzsche's characterization of the Apollonian and Dionysian tension was similar to Dewey's: was it possible to value the ecstatic within a context of rationality?² Intrigued by the power of the arts to evoke "simply [the aesthetic] experience itself, having experiences at their best and at their fullest,"³ Dewey focused on how to use them to achieve a balance between the conscious and the unconscious, reason and emotion and thereby unify the human experience.

In *Art as Experience* (1934), Dewey argued that aesthetics had become an experience separated from the daily living, or what Dewey terms "the practical." To approach the problem of integrating the aesthetic experience into everyday life, he undertook a historical analysis of the arts (Dewey 1929, 1930, 1938, 1939).⁴ His analysis led him to the conclusion that the arts were a collectivity which shared in creating an aesthetic appreciation derived from the dual experiences of the artist and their art as well as the art object and the viewer. The first was achieved by creative expression and the second by witnessing that expression. Dewey thought that the arts had the capacity to evoke a consummatory experience with "the characteristics of the human experiences that have the quality...we call esthetic".⁵ The value of consummatory experience, in this sense, is in its ability to create an understanding between the artist and the spectator that the aesthetic can be shared between the artist and the audience. This essay will only examine the first relationship of the artist to the art form. The relationship of the art as object with the spectator will be the subject of future work.

Dewey sought to engage the individual into the pleasure of the journey, and not just focus on the delayed gratification waiting at the end of the journey itself.⁶ Reality must include experience, according to Dewey, which simultaneously incorporates reason and emotion. Reason being exclusively associated with "logical processes" while emotion consisted of "moments of intense emotional appreciation when...the beauty and harmony of existence is disclosed in experiences which are the immediate consummation of all for which we long" (1929: 241).

Consummatory experience is characterized by Dewey as having two aspects: the immediate and the consequential. The immediacy part of experience is at the level of the individual artist's creative energy (1929: 188-189). The other aspect of experience—which is consequential—provides a relationship between the individual artist to some type of continuum beginning with the past and leading forward into the future. Consummatory experience is the vehicle through which the artist's power captures for a moment—if only fleeting—the integration of the definite (finite or immediate) with the indefinite (infinite or illimitable). Dewey suggests that to resolve this "problematic situation... [of]...incompatibility between the traits of an object in its direct individual and unique nature and those traits that belong to it in its relations or continuities" was to incorporate individuality suggested by the consummatory with the consequential (1929: 189). By considering the individual techniques associated with classical ballet and modern dance allows for a consideration of how they can be reconstructed while retaining both their unique technical aspects and relational properties as a form of dance. This argument will focus on the interior dance aesthetic as the dancer experiences it.

The formalized technique of classical ballet and the less regimented and potentially more expressive one of modern dance suggest that these two different art forms would lead to different levels of consummatory experience by the dancer. The barriers set up

by classical ballet would presumably inhibit the dancer from approaching the level of immediacy associated with consummatory experience that one might expect with modern dance. One might falsely conclude that Dewey would have preferred modern dance over classical ballet. Dewey's writings on dance and creativity belie this conclusion. He was concerned with the power of dance to generate a consummatory experience of the mind, senses, and emotions. The power of this aesthetic experience was something Dewey sought to bring down to the level of everyday life and integrate it into the consequential order of experience. The method by which Dewey sought to do this was one that bypassed reflection and differentiation between particular techniques within forms of dance.

Consummatory Experience

Dewey sought a way to integrate reason and emotion by means of the consummatory experience. Dewey's attempt to collapse these dualisms led him to use inquiry to define the aesthetic as a "problem" and thereby be able to devise a "solution." The problem remains of how to define a "solution" while at the same time being relevant to the human experience or perception of reality. A similar problem arises in the relationship between dance and the other performing arts such as music and opera (Dewey 1934: 4).⁷ The instrument "utilized" in dance—no matter the form—is the body. In contrast to dance, music is made with an "artificial" instrument such as violin or piano, making it associated primarily as an intellectual pursuit.⁸ Each art form considered separately represents the dualism between the real and the abstract. However, when the aesthetic of music is combined with the physical rhythmic movements of the body in dance the result has the potential of being a consummatory experience. The process by which the barriers to consummatory experience are eventually broken down will be considered below.

Dewey claimed that the "classic" status of a painting prevents it from being viewed critically.⁹ A similar critique has been made of classical ballet that as an art form it is too "artificial" and tradition-bound to be accessible to consummatory experience by either the dancer or the audience. The form of classical ballet as it is known in the West today originated in European court dance in the 17th century influenced by folk dances. The stylistic etiquette of the body, including the five positions of the feet were derived from fencing. These innovations all contributed to the exaggerated, noble carriage of the body, along with the artificial turning out of the legs and feet at the hips characteristic of classical ballet today. This "turnout" allowed the dancer to perform physical feats such as jumps, turns and extension (lifting).

Within the dance world, this formalized, regimented technique distinguishes classical ballet from modern dance. Modern dance came about in the early 20th century when the artifice of classical ballet was abandoned for the "free-er" but more intellectual forms of modern dance. The removal of pointe shoes, velvet costumes, and silly stories about swans while replacing them with barefoot dancers in flowing robes, sometimes without musical accompaniment, does not smash the dualism. "Ballet is an art because it has rules" and if the use of a technical device, such as dancing on pointe, seems artificial, it is the result of abuse of the device and not the thing in itself (Haskell 1942: 7-40). "Value" is determined by its proximity to the spiritual or intellectual and by its disconnection with the everyday. The "everyday" to the modern dancer is classical ballet, or an opposite from which to be different. Modern dance, on the other hand, which denies the existence of a formalized technique, relies on strong personalities such as Martha Graham and Merce Cunningham. "Dance improvisation with no technical basis may be temporarily interesting in itself so long as the performer is interesting as a personality, but it cannot survive through being handed on and cannot interest us...since it has not rules as an art to be studied" (Haskell: 6-7).

Dewey asserts that any art's separation from the everyday experience is a result of the social culture and not a property of the actual objects themselves. In other words, it's not the fact that ballet's use of velvet in costumes and modern dancers' preference of chiffon that makes them different. It is what the mediating culture *ascribes* to these differences that makes them different in significance (Dewey 1934: 9-11). To not see beyond the material dimensions of these two art forms is no different than not noticing any other dualism endemic to western thought: emotion versus rationality, ecstatic versus logic, etc. The differences between classical ballet and modern dance are not situated so much in terms of technique and style (physical dimensions), but in their ability to free up the individual dancer to their own consummatory experience. Modern dance criticizes ballet for being too caught up in perfecting a standardized technique that it suppresses any individuality or creativity a particular dancer might want to express. Classical ballet, on the other hand, criticizes modern dance as being too caught up with the idiosyncratic personality cults of individuals such as Martha Graham or Merce Cunningham. In the absence of a formally regularized modern technique as there occurs in classical ballet, the particular choreographic and performance styles of these artists are deemed impossible to replicate once they are gone.

To respond to the assertion that freedom of expression is limited in classical ballet, I argue that the more rigorous training of the ballet dancer allows for greater freedom of expression than the modern dancer, who does not have the reference point of standardized technique. There are three major schools of ballet technique: French, Italian, and Russian.¹⁰ All these schools of ballet use the same French terminology of steps. The only differences are the angle and placement of the arms, head and legs. A person can take a ballet class anywhere in the world and be able to understand what to do without knowing the language.

Modern dance has no such foundation. There are numerous "schools" and "styles" of modern dance that it is bewildering and nearly impossible to move from one company to another. Rejecting the standardization of ballet technique each "school" of modern dance is associated with a certain teacher. At the turn of the century Isadora Duncan founded her own school of technique, some of which was later copied by Ted Shawn and Ruth St. Denis. They of course considered themselves the "founders" of a distinctive style of modern dance. Until the last thirty years, most modern dancers pretended they never had any formal training, but just somehow developed their own technique and style without practicing and developing muscles. Martha Graham, who founded one of the first "modern" dance companies, insisted she never consciously "learned" to dance.¹¹

Modern dancers maintain that the diverse techniques associated with particular teachers and choreographers helps them maintain their "individuality." Since ballet dancers all learn the same technique, this forces them to conform to a standardized norm of dance. On the surface this would appear to be the case, but if one never learns a basic technique that everyone shares, how are they able to achieve their own individuality as artists? Learning ballet is much like mastering a language or an academic subject. In the case of learning a language, one must first understand what the grammar and vocabulary of a particular language is before they can create their own sentences and unique way of expressing themselves. What is seldom realized when considering the differences between classical ballet and modern dance is that the rigorous discipline of ballet, once mastered, sets the artist free to pursue the emotional expression that is a result of dancing. In classical ballet where the technique is already developed and standardized, it is left up to the individual dancer to develop their own artistic interpretation that comes from within. Ninnette de Valois, founder of the English style of ballet¹² commenting on the importance of technique, stated that "[p]ersonality is allied to the mind. When a dancer's mind is working with her body

she shows personality" (Haskell: 20). As an interpreter of numerous dramatic roles in ballet, the early twentieth century Russian ballerina Tamara Karsavina remarked that "[t]he dancer can only express herself when technique becomes second nature" (Haskell: 20). By emphasizing the emotional side modern dancers are forced to adopt the technique/style of the particular teacher as their own if they are to "belong" to that company. They are forever trapped inside Martha Graham or Doris Humphrey.

It is rare for a great ballet dancer to also be a great choreographer or teacher. Anna Pavlova, Vaslav Nijinsky and Margot Fonteyn were all great artists as ballet dancers. They did not choreograph nor were they particularly good teachers. Marius Petipa and George Balanchine are two of the greatest choreographers, but neither of them were exceptional performing artists. In the world of modern dance, four of the more famous companies—Martha Graham, Doris Humphrey, Merce Cunningham, Paul Taylor—were all exceptional dancers, artists, teachers, and choreographers. Anyone who wanted to develop their own artistry distinct from them were forced to leave. It should be no surprise, then, that Doris Humphrey, Merce Cunningham and Paul Taylor all danced at one time with Martha Graham before leaving to eventually form their own separate companies and own distinctive style.

Conclusion

Dewey does not occupy himself with the stylistic differences between classical ballet and modern dance, but simply combines them together as dance. In an address to the Washington Dance Association on November 13, 1938, John Dewey remarked that dance was an art form that "was hardly recognized to be an art."¹³ The irony in his remark was in ancient times, dance was the "source of all of the arts:" music, drama, and poetry. Dewey sees the importance of dance as not a distinctive art form but rather as a very important vehicle toward consummatory experience: the integration of the abstract with the physical. Dance as a

physical expression is also tied to the rhythm of music, which was once thought of as a separate and intellectual realm, perceived as more "demanding" to produce because of the presumed necessity of using the brain instead of the body.

One contributing factor to the relatively low place of dance in the performing arts hierarchy was dance being "dependent" on music to accompany its expression. The late 19th century Russian composer Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky was criticized by his colleagues for composing ballets (*The Nutcracker*, *Swan Lake*, *Sleeping Beauty*) instead of focusing exclusively on more serious music such as opera and symphonies.¹⁴ Another Russian composer, Igor Stravinsky, faced similar criticism when he composed *The Firebird*, *Petrushka*, and *Rite of Spring* for Sergi Diaghilev's Ballet Russe in 1909.¹⁵ Professional musicians who play in pit orchestras for dance companies today are still considered to be "hacks" who are not good enough to play in a "real" orchestra. The "devaluing" of those musicians who accompany dance companies stems from the fact that they are a contributor to an inferior art form (dance) rather than playing or composing music for abstract pleasure and being the main attraction.

Dewey argues against devaluation of any art form (both within and between particular forms) on the basis of technique. Rather, he urges that an art form (musical score, or particular dance) should only be measured by its ability to permit entrance into the consummatory experience. In this typology, both the artist and the participant are fully included. Neither is complete—nor can exist—without the other. Therefore, the technical differences between classical ballet and modern dance would not matter as long as they constituted a consummatory experience.¹⁶

References Cited

- Denby, Edwin. 1986. *Dance Writings*. Edited by Robert Cornfield and William Mackay. Knopf: New York.
- Dewey, John. 1934. *Art as Experience*. Perigee Books: New York.
- Dewey, John. *Later Works: 1925-53*. 1988. "The Quest for Certainty: A Study of the Relation of Knowledge and Action." Vol. 4: 1929. Southern Illinois Press: Carbondale.
- Dewey, John. *Later Works: 1925-53*. 1988. Vol. 2: 1925-27. Southern Illinois Press: Carbondale.
- Dewey, John. *Later Works: 1925-53*. 1988. "Individualism, Old and New." Vol. 5: 1929-30. Southern Illinois Press: Carbondale.
- Dewey, John. *Later Works: 1925-53*. 1988. "Experience and Education." Vol. 13: 1938-39. pp. 1-62. Southern Illinois Press: Carbondale.
- Dewey, John. *Later Works: 1925-53*. 1988. "Freedom and Culture." Vol. 13: 1938-39. pp. 63-188. Southern Illinois Press: Carbondale.
- Dewey, John. *Later Works: 1925-53*. 1988. "The Philosophy of the Arts." Vol. 13: 1938-39. pp. 357-368. Southern Illinois Press: Carbondale.
- Graham, Martha. 1991. *Blood Memory*. Doubleday: New York.
- Grant, Gail. 1967. *Technical Manual and Dictionary of Classical Ballet*. Dover: New York.
- Gray, John and G.W. Smith. 1991. *John Stuart Mill "On Liberty" in Focus*. Routledge: New York.
- Haskell, Arnold L. 1942. *Ballet Panorama: An Illustrated Chronicle of Three Centuries*. B.T. Batsford, Ltd: London.
- Jowitt, Deborah. 1988. *Time and the Dancing Image*. University of California Press: Berkeley.
- Nietzsche, Friedrich. 1954; *Twilight of the Idols*. Translated by Walter Kaufmann. Viking: New York.
- Sokolova, Lydia. 1960. *Dancing for Diaghilev*. Richard Buckle, Editor. Mercury House: San Francisco.

Notes

¹The dancer Isadora Duncan was influenced by Nietzsche's suggestion that "dissonance in music might express Dionysian Frenzy" by incorporating "idsonant images as clawed hands, crouched body, the upward fling of the head" into her choreography (Jowitt, 1988: 87). By adopting a pseudo-Greek technique into her movements, Duncan believed she was expressing a "purer" form of dance. Duncan also mistakenly interpreted Nietzsche in *The Birth of Tragedy* as literally calling for the elimination of soloists in favor of the chorus. "When I have danced I have always tried to be the Chorus...I have never once dance a solo" (Jowitt: 89).

²See "The Philosophy of the Arts" in *John Dewey, The Later Works, 1925-1953. Vol 13: 1938-1939*. p. 368.

³In *Individualism Old and New, Quest for Certainty and Freedom and Culture*.

⁴See "The Philosophy of the Arts" in *John Dewey, The Later Works, 1925-1953. Vol 13: 1938-1939*. p. 358.

⁵"What Coleridge said of the reader of poetry is true in its way of all who are happily absorbed in their activities of mind and body: 'The reader should be carried forward, not merely or chiefly by the mechanical impulse of curiosity, not be a restless desire to arrive at the final solution, but by the pleasurable activity of the journey itself'" (p. 5).

⁶Dewey goes on to comment on the "social dishonor" experienced by manual labor in Western culture and his comments hold true for what has happened to the "social dishonor" associated with dancers in relationship to "more" intellectual artists such as musicians and opera singers: "For work is done with the body, by means of mechanical appliances and is directed upon material things. The disrepute which has attended the thought of material things in comparison with immaterial thought has been transferred to everything associated with practice" (p. 4). See also p. 16: "Practical action, as distinct from self-revolving rational self-activity, belongs in the realm of generation and decay, a realm inferior in value as in Being."

⁷Even though opera uses part of the human body—the vocal chords—they are trained to make sounds similar to a mechanical musical instrument. Singing has a unique place in Western art since the human voice is thought of as the ultimate expression of musical notes, and is used as the starting point of pitch. When Beethoven wrote his final symphony, The Ninth, he had exhausted every possible type of sound that could be elicited from an orchestra by the end of the third movement, he introduces the sound of the human voice in the fourth movement. Using Schiller's "Ode to Joy," he composed an exultant choral finale in appreciation of his discovery that manmade instruments were limited in their scope of sound and that the next level of musical sound in a symphony orchestra could only come from the human voice.

⁸This stance that Dewey takes is not unlike that of John Stuart Mill in *On Liberty*, where he discusses the relationship of religious dogma to blind acceptance from society. Mill is arguing for the right of individuals to practice their freedom to think and speak. "To what an extent doctrines intrinsically fitted to make the deepest impression upon the mind may remain in it as dead beliefs, without being ever realized in the imagination, the feelings, or the understanding, is exemplified by the manner in which the majority of believers hold the doctrines of Christianity." Although Mill is not ultimately concerned with building community as is Dewey, he is sensitive to the importance of renewing spiritual bonds within society. Mill goes on to discuss how Christians have "a collection of ethical maxims which he believes to have been vouchsafed to him by infallible wisdom as rules for his government; and, on the other, a set

of everyday judgments and practices which...[become]...a compromise between the Christian creed and the interests and suggestions of worldly life." Not only is there a break between the realm of religious ethics and everyday life, there is also the false assumption in the inner life of Christians that their conduct and those of the state are guided by religious values that have no "real" foundation except in the delusion of "religious" men who assume (and blindly accept) that they are real. See John Gray and G.W. Smith, Editors. 1991. John Stuart Mill "On Liberty" In Focus. Routledge: London. pp. 58-59.

⁹This statement does not diminish the contribution of the Royal Danish Ballet in its distinctive style as interpreted through Auguste Bournonville. Bournonville trained at the Royal Opera in Paris and therefore his technique was French.

¹⁰"People have asked me why I chose to be a dancer. I did not choose. I was chosen to be a dancer, and with that, you live all your life...My technique is based on breathing. I have based everything that I have done on the pulsation of life, which is, to me, the pulsation of breath." This words are from Martha Graham's autobiography *Blood Memory* (1991) Doubleday: New York. p. 4.

¹¹Ninette de Valois founded the Sadler Wells Ballet which eventually became the Royal Ballet, the national ballet of England (Haskell 1942: 100-102).

¹²See "The Philosophy of the Arts" in *John Dewey, The Later Works, 1925-1953. Vol 13: 1938-1939.* p. 357.

¹³In a recent article on Tchaikovsky, David Brown stated "Musicians still, I fear, too often assume that 19th-century ballets must be lesser creations than operas, which have words and are therefore more thoughtful, more profound. Yet in *Swan Lake* Tchaikovsky had already shown how ballet could be elevated to true tragic drama (and how much more might we appreciate this if we were ever allowed to see this ballet as Tchaikovsky intended, and not in one of the hideously mutilated forms in which it is invariably given)." *BBC Music Magazine*, November 1993, Vol. 2, No. 3, p. 26 (pp. 26-290). The "hideously mutilated forms" of *Swan Lake* that the author refers to in the article refer to inept attempts to modernize and shorten the ballet by eliminating large (significant) parts of the score.

¹⁴The arrival of several artists from St. Petersburg's Maryinsky Theatre Ballet billed as "Ballet Russe" revived the art of classical ballet in the West. Two of the more famous artists were Anna Pavlova and Vaslav Nijinsky.

¹⁵See "The Philosophy of the Arts" in *John Dewey, The Later Works, 1925-1953. Vol 13: 1939-1939.* p. 358.

SPECIAL ARTICLE ON PROFESSIONAL SOCIALIZATION
