

OPPONENT'S ASSESSMENT OF A WRITTEN DISSERTATION

Dissertation title:	The Recontextualization of Visual Elements in Dance Narrative
Dissertation author:	Ji Eun Lee
Programme of study:	Art of Dance, Choreography and Theory of Choreography
Programme type:	doctoral

Definition of objectives and their fulfilment:

The objectives of the dissertation are multiple and challenging. Ji Eun Lee aims to

- "re-consider dance narrative through visual components" (p. 8)
- "recontextualize her own choreographic work and emphasize self-referential proliferation to seek potential room for various expressions" (p. 9-10)

with two research questions:

1. How does the choreographer examine the variability of movements along with the object?
2. How do the recontextualized visual elements add a new layer of meaning to form a narrative?

I feel that these questions emerged from an ongoing practical research and have been intuitively answered prior to being posed and researched. As for the first question, from what is stated, it was the choreographer's ultimate choice to examine the movements of her previous pieces from the perspective of quality and character which she probes functional in the form of suddenness, sustainment and rapidity. Neither we can call it a research conclusion that she has proceeded to examine the meaning of objects based on three metaphoric expressions she has chosen.

As the author defines the whole process as a "rhetorical tool", the written dissertation describes a choreographic composition approach used in this specific case. It offers an interesting insight into the creating process in the context of poststructuralist analytical concepts, rather than present a. Nevertheless, the author doesn't offer deeper theoretical research with conclusions generally applicable conclusions.

Topicality of the dissertation topic and relevance of the selected methodology:

The philosophical and theoretical concepts used to support the creative process ideas are relevant and well researched. They are used more in the context of inspiration than systematic methodology to the either practical or theoretical research.

However, in many theoretical concepts dealing with interpretation the side of perceiver is omitted. This is the case of semiotic analysis, and narratology studies – these theories are based on the full triangle and cannot ignore the audience's perspective. Here the candidate states that

"in poststructuralist context, the line between the creator and viewer is blurred and interpretation can occur at each stage of creation. I limit my research to the choreographer's perspective, who builds the architectural form of the dance work – therefore this study does not examine the spectator's reaction to the choreography nor evaluate spectatorship".

This stated, the process of reinterpreting own work through the so called short semiotic circle is very challenging and tricky. And it is broken once the choreographer steps out and opts to watch the work performed by a different dancer, thus becoming a spectator.

Scholarly contribution, originality of the dissertation, and its utilisation in practice:

The idea of analysing own work for creating a new piece in different perspective is definitely opening new creative possibilities for an artist.

Yet the risky pitfall is the lack of a distant focus, due to the fact that the decisions made during the analysis, fragmenting and reconstructing are very subjective during the whole process, as *"it is the choreographer who begins as reader of his previous work"* (p. 28). The argumentation of the choices is never objective but mainly intuitive.

"I chose to extract movements based on degrees of dynamics for anatomical and physiological reasons rather than artistic or social ones" (p. 26)

Choices of movement *"suddenness, sustainment and rapidity were made in consideration of the other elements of creation"* (p. 27)

"I aimed to avoid showing clear developmental process in the choreographic structure" (p. 40)

This starts with the choice of two specific works and props to be used in the new piece (in what metaphor or intention have they been used in the previous works is not described, yet I think that for the choreographer who used them before they already do bare a specific meaning.) I cannot agree with the statement that *"the objects did not reveal a specific meaning before creation and can be fully understood within the entire choreographic context"*, as I think that from any view, a blue helium balloon, translucent scotch tape and ceramic clay do bare their meaning to our social reality and trigger interpretations by themselves.

Logical construction and structuring of the dissertation:

While the first pages offer interesting insight into the visual semiotics and interpretation theories, the practical tasks are following a simple self-made structural analysis chart.

In the main chapter it seems that we read a description of a video filmed while the choreographer improvised in the space with objects and her interpretation of her own doing (I just suppose so, the methodology of choreographic notes and work with them is not described here). In the next chapter we read her own thoughts about the actions performed by a different dancer. But we never get the information how this dancer was put in the process, what instructions or explanation she got, how much her actions were choreographed or improvised.

The interpretation of the perceived performance by the "choreo-viewer" is also a subjective exercise, as we never get information whether the dancer has communicated or analysed her intentions.

"the dancer was showing the balloon was beyond the dancer's control" (p. 57)

"indicating the clay and the dancer had the same identity" (p. 59)

"dancer created by sitting and arching back so as to resemble the form of the balloon" (p. 62)

"but then started to question herself about the meaning of this equal identity, experience an internal crisis, and became confused" (p. 66)

The conclusion in *"adding layers of meanings to a narrative through metaphoric expressions"* is minimally challenging in the case the creator of a metaphor and receiver is the same person. We can understand this whole process as sending letters to yourself, hoping that reading them in other person's handwriting would get us to a different level of understanding. This rhetorical process can be a valuable exercise but the risk of getting trapped in the semantic loop is high.

Formal requirements and requisite contents of the dissertation, including its length:

The formal requirements and length are adequate to the chosen topic.

Work with information sources:

Work with information sources is detailed and profound. However, the choice of the source material is too selective only to support the hypothesis without critical discourse. I miss some other aesthetic theories or phenomenology perspective, artistic research theories or wider research of other choreographic compositions.

Level of language and terminology:

The thesis is written in high level academic English. The used terminology seems to be the main issue while dealing with all the philosophical categories and using them in the objective. I appreciate the effort to work with such complicated terminology. Although well defined in the introduction, in the later text it is used in different or even contradictive sense.

p.e.

"Jooss' narrative choices and dramatic ideas were abstract" (p. 2)

"Forsythe left no space for narrative." (p. 4)

"Dance is an art form characterized by the two contrasting characteristics of abstractness and direct description, especially when it encompasses narrative. ... This way, choreography can be clear and abstract." (p. 77)

"Movement holds no meanings in a plotless dance. Thus the plotless dance... comprises abstract movements." (p. 2-3)

"Plotless is not the absence of narrative ... plotless choreography does not limit the narrative to meaning." (p. 3)

"To reach this goal I conceptualize dance narrative as a visualized metaphoric expression that can trigger interpretation." (p. 8)

"Metaphors can come into play and potentially replace the theme itself." (p. 18)

"Metaphors enable quality and character to develop and create meaning." (p. 22)

"Invisible meaning and interpretation are created by the fragmentation and integration of invisible abstractness (non-perceptible objects)." (p. 22)

Evaluator's overall summary:

The thesis offers an interesting insight into the choreographic process. The recontextualization of narrative in dance composition by decomposing the elements of previous works and putting them back together with new added objects to offer different interpretation and meaning can be an inspiring tool for creators to exercise their composing abilities.

The theoretical concepts of visual semiotics are well questioned and explored in the creative process of dance. They tend to support the artistic process rather than challenge it with a critical discourse.

However, questioning the meaning, interpretation and reading of these structures without admitting the role of a third person (receiver of the communication process) leaves the question of the effect of this process to the future spectator of the show and their possibility of decoding the meanings sealed in the metaphors.

Questions and topics for discussion at the oral defence:


1. What was the role of the dancer in the composition process? Was she following choreographic instructions or were her actions based on her own intentions or improvisation and if so, to what level? Were her thoughts and interpretation included in any stage of the process?

2. As the first two choreographies were made with the intention to public demonstration, is the result of defragmenting and reconstructing these also meant to be presented in public? If so, to what level are the metaphors or intentions transmittable to the audience, who might not know the previous works?

Recommendation of the dissertation for the oral defence: Recommended

Date of elaboration of this assessment: 19. 8. 2024

doc. Mgr. MgA. Lucie Hayashi, Ph.D.

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