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The communicating dance

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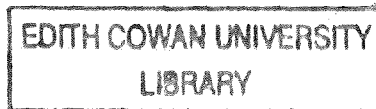
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The Communicating Dance

by

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Bachelor of Arts (Dance) Honours

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Perhaps nowhere else has man ever expressed himself so directly and completely as through dance. (Lange, 1977, p. 241)

USE OF THESIS

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Abstract

Does dance have the ability to communicate universally to all observers at some level of human engagement? This paper discusses theatre dance as a human communicative medium, the characteristics of how it communicates and to a certain degree why and what it communicates. In doing so the intentions of the communicating dancer and choreographer are considered alongside that of the receptive and responsive audience. The thesis compiles a survey of textual sources pin pointing the unique communicative abilities of dance, as an artistic, expressive and meaningful form of non-verbal communication establishing suggestions of the ways it may be universally communicable.

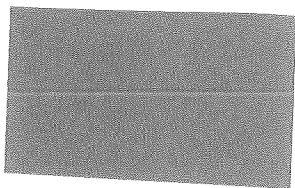
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Dated

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Acknowledgements

Thank you to Dr. Maggi Phillips for her intuitive and inspiring guidance.

To the memory of my indescribably wonderful Grandmother, Mardi.

A wondrous spirit

Hair curled

Primped

A squeeze

4 Litres

Stitch in line

Considering

A cow pad

Slice of heaven

Woollen warmth

From love, laughter

Rogues on the wall.

Nothing, ever

Negative

Millimetres fall

Hands blemished

Bruised

Blue birds

Whistle

Soul subsists

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Introduction

As a person I communicate, as a dancer I too communicate. Through dance, I engage with an idea and express an element or abstraction of that idea in movement. Dance acts as a means of human expression but also one that enlivens my perception of my own existence. As an audience member I observe, receive and perceive my own thoughts and images in response to dance, yet rarely do I consider this process as part of the communicating dance. This study will encapsulate perspectives of the communicating dance, how it is effective and distinguishable as a communicative medium.

As an individual with a high level of interest and significant experience in the field of dance as a practice, art form and study area, an investigation into dance and communication presents an exciting, yet challenging area of inquiry. The main obstacle lies in defining clear boundaries for the study, within which to provide adequate analysis of relevant textual opinions of dance as a communicative form. Within this area, I am more specifically interested in investigating opinions and forming my own ideas of the unique communicative exchanges occurring between choreographer/performer(s) and audience members particularly through kinaesthetic and emotional experiences of dance, and as such, linking these findings to a discussion of possible aspects of universality in dance communication.

Delving into the subjects of dance and communication has revealed a multitude of areas of inquiry, including the human body as the instrument of non-verbal communication, dance form/technique, context of performative event, human communicative and interpretative processes, choreographic content and subject matter, performers and observers' cultural influences and so forth. A refined topic within this large field of research, will avoid tendencies for the study to engage in an exponential, ever broadening practice of research.

The principal question of this research is therefore as follows:

What makes dance in its context as a performing art unique as a form of human expression and communication?

Subsidiary focus questions driving this study include:

- How does dance communicate?
- What is the importance of and the unique characteristics of dance as a communicative form?
- Can dance be considered a universal language or 'lingua franca'?

Intrinsic to these focus areas are questions that serve to delineate, direct and guide the research for the purposes of this particular study including:

- What is dance?
- What is communication and language?
- What is a universal language, or 'lingua franca'?
- What is/are the purpose/s of dance?
- How do responses to theatre/concert dance differ in varied social/cultural contexts?

Initially inspired by the rather gargantuan notion of considering dance in the broad sense, as a 'lingua franca' or a common language, the study has been narrowed to an examination of dance performance as a unique medium of communication with subsidiary discussion of the concept of universality. Similarly, dance has been limited to performance in theatre, concert and spectacle, (or 'pure' dance events) for the purposes of the study. The enquiry therefore aims to present views of dance as a form of human expression and communication in a concert and theatre context. The thesis compiles an interpretative textual analysis of historical, anthropological, cultural, artistic sources as well as referencing scientific and biological studies concerned with the communicative powers of dance.

The primary driver for this research and writing task is to enliven interest and offer thoughtful perspectives concerning dance as a communicative form and to establish a dialogue that may contribute to the ongoing development of ideas within the experiences of and study of dance. It is perhaps a subconscious choice, for me as a dancer and dance observer, to discover how dance and dancers can connect with

audiences and perhaps how audiences may seek to engage in communicative experiences of dance in a more receptive way.

Communication

Communication is a form of human behaviour that is derived from a need to connect and interact with other human beings. (Samovar & Porter, 1994, p. 7)

The focus of this study centres on communication; the ways that dance can communicate and 'speak' in a sense to audience members or observers. However, before concentrating specifically on the communicative exchanges that occur in dance performance, the basic human communication processes of both dancers and non-dancers ought to be explored.

Communication is a complex area of study, a field that encapsulates the multitude of ways that humans interact with the world and, more specifically, with other humans. Humans communicate through two main behavioural streams manifested in verbal/linguistic forms, such as speech and text, and nonverbal forms, such as body language and facial expression. In order to become communicative messages, these verbal or non-verbal behaviours must be observed by and elicit a response from someone else (Samovar & Porter, 1994, p. 7). In other words either consciously or subconsciously behaviours must be heard, seen or felt by the receiver, and be followed by an exchange of thought or action.

When someone perceives our behaviour or its residue and attributes meaning to it, communication has taken place regardless of whether our behaviour was conscious or unconscious, intentional or unintentional. (Samovar & Porter, 1994, p. 8)

The above mentioned idea of behavioural residue in communication is particularly interesting in terms of dance, as in my experience often times the dance performance does not elicit an immediate and observable physical or verbal response, due to the nature of the conventions of the performance venue. It is largely after the experience, when the overall impact of the dance production can be processed, that the residue, the

feelings and thoughts are expressed, by way of conversational discussion, body/facial expression and overall mood.

Specialists in intercultural communication Larry Samovar and Richard Porter (1994, p. 9) identify eight key ingredients for the making of any communicative exchange, including: behavioural source (desire to communicate), encoding (creation of message), message (behaviour connecting source and responder), channel (physical means by which message is transmitted), responder (receive message), decoding (internal processing of a message), response (decision about the message), feedback (information about the effectiveness of communication). It is important to note such components in order to analyse how physical movement messages of a dance may be encoded, channelled, received and interpreted by audiences.

Before focussing purely on physical, nonverbal communication, that is dance, it is relevant to note the perceived connection between verbal and non-verbal communicative channels.

Non-verbal communication cannot be studied in isolation from the total communication process. Verbal and nonverbal communication should be treated as a total and inseparable unit. (Knapp, 1972, p. 8-9)

It seems evident that communicative processes may simultaneously integrate elements of both nonverbal and verbal behaviours, as “the instant these [non-verbal] behaviours are interpreted by another in terms of words, they become verbal phenomena” (Knapp, 1972, p. 3). The influence of verbal/textual sources on dance in the communicative sense may therefore be undeniable, as the process of decoding physical messages, produces an automatic association of symbols, signs, sensory experiences or visual images to words (Knapp, 1972, p. 3).

This connection is curious in terms of dance, as traditionally dance performance communicates primarily through movements of the body, with little or no textual expression. It must be noted however that many tribal dances, ballets and even modern choreographies have been (and continue to be) inspired by or guided by verbal forms such as stories and song, and textual sources, such as narrative or poetry. With the advances of technology, textual influence may extend into visual, auditory or theatrical

production elements of the dance. Never-the-less, the formal presentations of these works are, except in the case of dance-theatre genres, largely expressed through physical movement as the primary communicative medium.

Judith Hanna also sees a connection between verbal/written forms of communication with that of the physicality of dance, a reciprocal relationship which, one may argue, furthers its communicative powers:

Dance communicates ideas, stories, emotions, and moods, much like prose and poetry. Literature often inspires dance, and dance in turn inspires literature. (Hanna, 2001, p. 40)

The very fact that we utilise these two streams of communication in our everyday interactions ought to be recognised in terms of how and what humans can connect with in the experience of and responses to a dance performance.

Language

A language acts to facilitate communication, a mode by which to send, receive and interpret messages. It may be commonly understood that to communicate effectively, a level of mutual understanding of the medium of communication, or language, must exist.

The term quite often attracts the assumption that speech and linguistics are inadvertently involved, associating the spoken or written language to a particular culture, nation or geographical location. Yet language, in a broad sense is not limited to strictly textual or vocal form, and is defined as “any set or system of such symbols as used in a more or less uniform fashion by a number of people, who are thus enabled to communicate intelligibly with one another” (Macquarie Dictionary, 1998, p. 228).

It is true perhaps that language most obviously exists in the form of speech or text, but we often neglect the idea of language extending beyond verbal or textual expression to include the language of visual symbols, signs, physical/body motions, which also includes dance. The physical movement language of the human body acts as a means

for the exchange of information and a non-verbal mode of communication. As with verbal forms, the 'how' of the physical language, that is, the "modes of delivery, accents and nuances are as essential to understanding and communication, as content (vocabulary) and form (grammar and syntax)" (Stock, 2001, p. 2).

It seems pertinent here in the discussion of language, to introduce the issue of form, the broad field of dance, versus style or dialect within the dance form, such as ballet, dance theatre or contemporary dance. As with the spoken word, dance too has multiple dialects or languages and as such may communicate to audiences variably depending on their own understanding or experiences of the body.

Dance 'defined'

In establishing key aspects of the enquiry, the 'dance', also ought to be clarified for the purpose of this particular research endeavour. Identifying dance within the limitations of the study enables practical analysis and discussion of communication processes and issues of universality within a definite context.

For this scholarly purpose therefore, it includes purely the concert/theatre dance performance or event. Here dance is not simply any human movement or social behaviour, as some theorists argue, but pertains to selected physical actions within the context of spectacle, including elements of form, style, ideas, and human relationships, engaging a communicative event between performer and audience member. Intended for audience reception (communication), the dance performances are usually embedded with meaning or intention. As mentioned formerly, in such 'dance', a diversity of stylised and refined human movement languages or techniques may be employed or abandoned.

Though dance expression manifests in many other contexts, in ritual, ceremony, social dance, theory, notation, film etc, the limitations of this small scale inquiry has dictated a need for narrowing of subject matter to focus specifically on the communication occurring in dance as a formalised discipline, art form and performative event.

Anderson, reflecting on Martin's ideas, speaks of categorising dance into three types including recreational, spectacular and expressional (Martin, 1965, p.xi). However, in

the case of theatre dance, of which I am concerned, it is unavoidable that categories may overlap and the lines between what defines such types become blurred especially when communication is added to the equation. Martin however believes that how the dance looks, the aesthetics of the work, and what the dance 'says', define in which category it may lie.

Of similar importance therefore in defining the 'dance', is the consideration of the purpose/s of which can undoubtedly vary in each performative event, especially in differing social and cultural settings. However in the performer/audience scenario of concert and theatre (and in fact most other cases), usually the purpose is to communicate, establishing a connection or exchange between performer and audience member, whether realised or unintentionally conferred. Hence, it is my belief that from performance to performance, the means (ie. style, composition etc) by which the dance communicates and the content (meanings) embedded in the dance, are the elements that may vary in achieving such purposes. Choreographic intention must be considered as a significant motivator in the creation of the dance, infiltrating the overall dance piece during the performative and communicative stage.

Dance as Language

Dance ought not to be considered as a single identifiable physical language or codified system. I consider that as with spoken/textual languages, where there exists many dialects, in dance there are also innumerable physical languages of the body. Quite often overlooked in regard to communicative exchanges, no doubt as a result of their physical rather than verbal manifestation, the varying styles and dialects of the dance form created by the body, have significant value as language/s. The diversity of dance dialects or styles of the dance enable a large array of physical communicative possibilities particularly at the receptive level, as each dance language or style affects an audience to differing degrees, dependent on factors which may be larger than the creative outline of the dance work. Because the body is the primary instrument of the communicating dance, peoples of any cultural tradition can assume to ascertain a degree of engagement with it, as they too perhaps in less stylised and overt ways, use their body to communicate.

In terms of a codified and identifiable system, as exists in verbal languages, within each dialect or dance language, to some degree movement conventions or techniques may be considered to exist. The strict form of classical ballet can certainly be said to pertain to a specific vocabulary of movements and steps, and similarly with other dialects of movement such as tap dance, classical Indian dance, and modern dance contain a collection or vocabulary of attributed movements.

Dance anthropologist Judith Hanna discusses dance in its communicative context and its classification as a 'language'. Hanna points out that the channels through which dance languages can connect with an audience can in some ways supersede that of other communicative modes. She explains:

Dance, like language has directional reception, interchangeability (someone can be both a transmitter and receiver), arbitrariness (many characteristics cannot be predicted), discreteness (bound to the time continuum), displacement (reference can be to something not immediately present), productivity (messages never seen before can be sent and understood within a set of structural principles), duality of patterning (a system of action and a system of meaning), cultural transmission, ambiguity, and affectivity (expression of an internal state with potential for changing moods and a sense of situation). (Hanna, 1977, p. 214)

Clearly, such characteristics of dance enable many variations in the experience of the dance to eventuate, as the performer and receivers will differ vastly in connecting with its form, style and content. Hanna notes key differences between the nature of dance languages and spoken languages that act to further the engagement of the audience's experience of the dance.

In dance, motor/visual-kinaesthetic-auditory-olfactory-proxemic-tactile channels predominate, instead of the vocal/auditory channels. Whereas [verbal] language exists primarily in a temporal dimension, dance involves both temporal and spatial dimensions. (Hanna, 1977, p. 214)

It can be said therefore that as compared with spoken languages, dance languages can potentially offer more access points and channels through which spectators may connect

and engage with the dance. The powerful nature of dance as a non-verbal form of communication will be further explored below.

Non-Verbal Communication

Movement is so omnipresent in all aspects of life. People depend on body movement to be able to interact with others. At the basis of everything is movement. It defines us in some way. (Ferraro, 2008, p. 1)

Dance is a non-verbal form of human expression which people create, participate in and observe. In discussing dance as a non-verbal communicative medium, it is valuable firstly to examine how and what non-verbal forms communicate, and the importance of such processes in overall human interactions.

Non-verbal codification is undoubtedly significant to human communication processes, often used instinctively and unconsciously in emotional response situations to communicate instantly and powerfully (R. Williams, 1981, p. 40). To illustrate just how significant non-verbal layers of communication may be, Knapp (1972, p.12) notes American anthropologist, Ray Birdwhistell's, estimation that the average person speaks ten to eleven minutes a day, in which over 65 percent of the intention or meaning of the conversation is relayed by non-verbal/bodily components. Similarly, it has been suggested by Mehrabian and Weiner (In Samovar & Porter, 1994, p. 228) that as much as 90 percent of a message is transmitted para-linguistically or non-verbally.

Why is physicality such a powerful instrument in human communication events? The answer may lie in the origins of human movement, where as an infant our first means to experience life is through movement and the co-ordination of our bodies. Experts in non-verbal communication, Ekman and Friesen, believe the origins of human movements stem from a combination of: inherited neurological programs, experiences common to the species, and experiences varied by culture, class, family, or individual (Knapp, 1972, p. 19). It is interesting to note the implication that not all non-verbal communicative transfers are culturally influenced, but may in fact be species bound and genetically determined.

Considering 'the how' of non-verbal communication processes is particularly significant in isolating how dance, falling into this category of nonverbal expression, operates as mode of communication. Non-verbal communication can be categorised into three types (or languages) that describe how the exchange occurs: sign language (codified systems), action language (movements other than recognisable signs or symbols) and object language (use or display of material things) (Knapp, 1972, p. 4). It is the isolation and integration of such non-verbal languages which may be manifest in the communicative event of a dance performance. Though not always, perhaps action language may be the most prevalent in performative dance, even if the movements may be considered to be stylised, abstracted and less recognisable.

Knapp further explores the complexity of non-verbal communication specifying distinct dimensions inherent in nonverbal behaviour including: Body Motion or Kinesic Behaviour, Physical Characteristics, Touching Behaviours, Paralanguage (how something is said), Proxemics (spatial relationships), Artifacts (use of objects eg. clothes, make up) and environmental factors (impinging on communicative relationship). These dimensions enable physical communication to be expressive and emotional as well as displaying personality traits and attitudes (Knapp, 1972, p. 5-8).

If the body communicates through these dimensions in ordinary physical communicative interactions, in dance, the body must also relay information through these channels. Modes of non-verbal communication, specifically body language and facial expression have therefore, a significant relationship in the way that dance communicates as a physical form. Though a more stylised and complex form of bodily expression, the multilayered nature of dance can undoubtedly enable innumerable human communications to occur. The question, however, of whether the communicated message is universally recognised or is in fact individually interpreted remains debatable.

Communicating in Dance

Even where dance is performed in a theatrical setting, which is the closest thing to a pure dance event, there is the crucial factor of interaction between dancers and non dancers. (Royce, 1977, p. 12)

After analysing non-verbal communication processes in the general sense, considering specifically how dance communicates and interacts, is central to understanding the exchanges occurring between the dance and the audience. As a non-verbal form of communication, dance, like any other communicative process, involves messages (meanings or intentions) conceptualised by the choreographer and encoded in a physical language, embodied and performed to the audience (receivers), who then attempt to decode and interpret the message.

The channels through which dance communicates undoubtedly link to those mechanisms previously explored in the processes of nonverbal communication. It is the combination of such dimensions that provide the audience with a particular understanding of, or connection with, the dance. Outside dance, within what Knapp refers to as sign languages (codified physical languages), the interpretation of a particular bodily position, gesture, stance, or expression, for example, is perhaps more likely to immediately and quite definitively communicate a message from sender (dancer) to receiver (audience member). In a dance performance the non-verbal exchange process involves more complex, action language systems of movement, layered with such elements as style and technique, which may erect interpretative boundaries in the decoding between the sender and receiver, or performer and audience member. Observers who may be familiar with the style (or purpose, or intention), may if perceivable, interpret the message as intended, yet those who are viewing the specific movement language from a perspective of unfamiliarity may experience the dance in their own subjective way creating their own individual meanings.

The problem here is that because of the physical nature of dance and its tendency to communicate through abstracted modes, there is perhaps more room for ambiguity of meaning. With its many stylistic manifestations, does dance assume a specific process of communication, unique to each performative situation? This question again raises the need to distinguish between the form, dance, and the dialect or stylistic language operating within that form. Susan Leigh Foster (In Doolittle & Flynn, 2000, p. 35) postulates that “past and present bodies ... configure a tradition of codes and conventions of bodily signification that allows bodies to represent and communicate to other bodies”. However, without an understanding of such codes and conventions of the

physical language or dance dialect, can the dance still communicate to a diversity of observers?

Fowler (1987, p. 19) refers to the argument made by David Best whose view is that dance ought not be construed as communication. His perspective, as explained by Fowler, rests on the premise that:

The intention required for communication is a double one; whatever is done (whether verbal or not) must not only be done intentionally, but must be done with the intention that it be recognized as having being done. (Fowler, 1987, p. 20)

He explains that there are two forms of communication, 'lingcom,' linguistic communication and 'percom,' perceived communication. In regard to dance, he believes that movement only communicates under the percom banner because much of the dance movement behaviour lacks a double intention and, as Fowler asserts, "is too wide a concept to be of any use" (1987, p. 20). In other words, he recognises that dance movement communicates, but such movements are limited largely to a perceived communication inhibitor within the audience, which is almost always a collection of varied responses. As such Judith Hanna emphasises the importance of ascertaining "the coincidence of dancer (sender) intentions and audience (receiver) intentions" (Cited in Fowler, 1987, p. 23) in the communicative dance event. In assessing the effectiveness of the communicating dance experience she evaluates that,

Effective communication depends upon shared knowledge and the interplay between skilful dance expression and sensitive perception. For every performance there is a catalyst determining who dances, why, where, and how. (Hanna, 1977, p. 227)

Dance Matter and Subject

Paired with considering how dance communicates there should also be a reflection on *what* is actually being communicated in this moment of exchange. The questions: "What is there to understand?", "Is there anything to understand?" and "Are the dances intended to be interpreted the same way?" arise with a view to ascertain meaning. The

subject matter that is (or attempts to be) communicated in a dance performance in a concert/ theatre context, is of great relevance to this enquiry, for if the choreographer and dancers as artists intend to communicate, which consciously or unconsciously I consider that they do, their meanings are inherently expressed in every nuance of their body motion. Such movement therefore is of vast importance to the overall interpretation of the dance experience of the performance.

In dealing with these questions, it is important to note that the meanings embedded in dance, as in any other form of communication, are by no means fixed and definitively communicated and interpreted. There are always at least two meanings derived from any communicative event (R. Williams, 1981, p. 60). Both the sender and the receiver, regardless of their level of understanding of the communicative mode, formulate their individual meanings from the exchange. In fact usually there are more than two layers of interaction in the case of a dance performance, considering that the dancers' interpretation and expression of the subject or intent may differ from that of the choreographer. Additionally, because dance communicates through many nonverbal dimensions and channels and well as stylistic dialects, the message conveyed by the dancers/choreographer can be received and interpreted uniquely from person to person, and not just because of socio-cultural differences or individual contextual factors. Some communicative channels may resonate with some observers more than with others. For example, the physicality/aestheticism of the movement may communicate more to some, whilst the spatial relationships between the dancers may be the receptive focus of others. It is my view that choreographers and dance artists are usually aware of such interpretative variations from the audience, and deliberately aim to stimulate personal reflections and interpretations of the dance performance rather than attempt to impose a specific meaning upon the audience. The ideas and intentions instilled by a choreographer in the dance work may be highly abstracted and understated, allowing the audience to ascertain a heavily subjective response, thus making the dance a personal and intimate experience.

Interpretation relies not just on the strict physicality, the 'how' (style, technique and compositional elements) of the movement, but also on the perceived and attributed meanings of content or subject communicated by the inflections within the 'how' of the dance. Peoples of diverse socio/cultural backgrounds may consider certain themes of the

dance performance, for example, the whimsical romance themes of the classic ballets, as uncouth and uninteresting, loading the interpretative process with distaste. It may be argued that, in this example of meanings interpreted in the dance, although interpreted in a negative way, it is none the less a 'decoding' and therefore a communication between performer and audience.

It is worth mentioning that though the physical body communicates a level of meaning and intention in dance performance, similarly the other elements of the work, outside of the physical body moving in time and space, must also be considered to contribute to the communicative process. As explained by Fowler (1987, p. 11), John Fisher, the author of the paper "Dancing In The Dark", holds that "meaning ascription in the case of dance is dependent on the bringing of schemata from other art forms", thus identifying dance as, in a sense, a multi-media art form. Though outside the scope of this research, components such as the design (set, lighting and costume), venue/theatrical environment and music/sound undoubtedly influence the overall exchange between dancers/choreographer and audience or observers. The dance performance usually draws on a multitude of visual, auditory and even sensory elements, aside from human movement, which also contribute to the creation of meaning, impression and opinion of the dance.

Postmodernist Perspective

Talk of the interpretation of subject matter in the communicating dance ushers in the idea that the truth of meaning of a work lies in the eye of the beholder. Dance, a performative art, an expressive and strongly compositional form, is obviously influenced by the ideas and context of the creator. It may be argued however that equally the audience or observer of the artistic product is responsible for the 'creation' of the work. This argument is based on the validity of individual truths and the idea of infinite possibilities in artistic interpretation. Postmodernist, Roland Barthes, in his controversial article the "The Death of the Author" has postulated that the 'author' of a creative work is, in fact, the individual who receives and interprets it, that is the observer, reader or audience member. He writes:

A text consists of multiple writings, issuing from several cultures and entering into dialogue with each other, into parody, into contestation; but there is one place where this multiplicity is collected, united, and this place is not the author, as we have hitherto said it was, but the reader. (Barthes, 1967, p. 7)

It is my interpretation, that Barthes believes that the origins of a work may lie with the author, or in this case the choreographer/dancer and their history, but the 'destination' of the work is manifested in the receiver, who creates for themselves their own interpretation which is ultimately one definitive 'reading' of the work. Without getting entwined in this debate, the relationship of this argument to this study is quite influential, as in the case of interpretation (or decoding of communicative exchange) there may and will always be alternate and multiple results of equal validity.

Dance: Ritual or Discipline?

- Dancing is certainly as old as man and his desire to express himself, to communicate his joys and sorrows, to celebrate and to mourn with the most immediate instrument at his disposal: his body. (Sorrell, 1967, p. 9)

Before attempting to delve into such issues of universality, kinaesthetic and emotional experiences of dance and, although edging outside the scope of this study, outlining the origins of dance and its prominence as a self expressive and communicative form is of relevance to this inquiry. Early in human development and evolution, dance became an important mode of self representation, as "man must have found his own body as the best instrument with which to express what moved him" (Sorrell, 1967, p. 9).

Indigenous and tribal cultures have used dance, along with other artistic forms, as a mode of ritual/cultural expression, a way of retelling stories, or to serve spiritual and ceremonial purposes.

They never danced for the mere sake of dancing. Their dancing always had meaning to all members of their tribe. They could fully translate their movements into meaning. (Sorrell, 1967, p. 17)

Such dances existed as communicative and performative events as important manifestations of culture. How then did dance develop from culturally and spiritually meaningful forms of rhythmic movement expression, to styles that became highly structured, stylised and disciplined?

Sorell offers a perspective:

It may be said that with the loss of [dances'] religious motivation, with its gradual separation from worship, dance lost some of its creative urge, meaningfulness and purpose. On the other hand it has gained refinement, stylistic variation and the stamp of individual originality. (Sorrell, 1967, p. 17)

It is at the separation point of dance from spirituality, to which Sorell refers that, for the purpose of this study of dance and communication, a brief historical investigation into dance performance will be pursued.

It can be said that the rule of Louis XIV ultimately transformed the social/courtly dance that was the ballet of the Renaissance, into such a formalised practice. With the establishment of the *Académie Royale de Danse* (Royal Academy of Dance) in 1661 (Souche, n.d.), ballet developed from being a dialect with strong French cultural influences, to a highly technical performative art. The dance as a form of spiritual, ritual, or cultural embodiment became instead an isolated and formalised study, discipline and eventually a profession. In a sense, an aesthetic entertainment enterprise of 'pure dance' emerged, that could exist outside of cultural/ ritual manifestations. It may be interesting to consider whether this separation is actually possible or whether dance is, in reality, still inextricably linked to its cultural influences. I go out on a limb in saying that in my opinion generally, the communicating dance in such theatre/art contexts has become less about the cultural expression and tradition, and more about audience accessibility, its aesthetic appeal and conceptual understanding.

The Culture Factor

In reflecting on the cultural origins of dance, from primitive and complex ritualistic forms to its development as a high theatre art, it is important to realise the continuation of such influences in both the development of dance composition and performance (style, technique, content, etc) and as Stock stresses, its eventual perception by the audience.

As mentioned it would be ludicrous to omit the undeniable cultural thread that runs through processes of dance creation, performance and reception and therefore its influence on communicative exchanges. The very fact that culture may, and almost always does, inspire the dance as art, influences the consequential communicative interaction between dancer/choreographer and audience.

Sylvia Glasser (1991, p. 21) postulates that 'dance' or indeed, any form of cultural expression is inextricably interwoven into the socio-political, economic and religious fabric of people lives". Therefore, as has been discussed, observers of the dance, unless of similar, if not identical backgrounds, cannot in any instance expect to receive or perceive the dance 'language' the same way.

Time, place, race, religion, social customs all make so deep an impression on the arts that it is possible to say that every group of people makes its art in a different language, or at least a different patois, and that none of them is totally familiar to any other group. (Martin, 1965, p. 62)

Birdwhistell comments on simple non-verbal, body movements as a "learnt form of communication, which is patterned within a culture and which can be broken down to an ordered system of isolable elements" (Cited in Thomas, 2003, p. 26) or, in other words, there are distinct cultural differences which may form a codified system distinct to each ethnic grouping. One can assume that it is the same in the instance of exchange in a dance context. Furthermore, Hanna notes Birdwhistell's link between dance, social experiences and culture, hypothesising that "expressive body movement is a culturally determined channel of communication learned through social experience" (Hanna, 1977, p. 219). What does this mean then for theatre/art dance?

Culture is so bound up in the activities of human societies, that even the dance performances of large national companies, for example, are often driven to express or be motivated by cultural values and traditions. Take for example, the Taiwanese dance company *Cloud Gate Dance Theatre* or the Indigenous Australian company *Bangarra Dance Theatre*, both companies are driven by culture within a contemporary context. Their success is perhaps attributed to their unique dance language that is still heavily fuelled by cultural tradition.

Regardless of the cultural diversity from company to company, or from audience to audience, the main point that remains is that communication between dancer/choreographer and audience occurs. The diversity of individuals within an audience whose experiences of dance create, in a way, a pool of possibilities of experience, participate in an environment where “an infinite number of cultural variations are possible” (Blacking, 1977, p. 9). An expression of cultural dance, in my view, does not pigeon hole those who do not ‘understand’ but in fact can deepen and fuel their own physical, mental and imaginative experience.

Paul Ekman, speaking of Robert Hinde’s ideas, suggests that “we should expect similarities among cultures in signals that concern the personal or the emotional and we should expect differences in movements which take the place of words, which symbolise aspects of culture or which depend on languages” (Ekman, 1977, p. 76). This view raises an interesting perspective about emotional universality of movement across culture, whilst identifying those movements that, due to linguistic dependence, are reliant upon an insider knowledge or understanding.

Dance as Art

The function of art is to render appreciable that which is, for the individuals concerned – namely a sender and a receiver – inexpressible through the media of reason and intellect. (Martin, 1989, p.63)

Here Martin gives his understanding of the reason for an art which we see, hear and experience: that through such artistic forms an artist may impress upon the viewer ideas that transcend other means of communication. It is from this viewpoint that the concept of the dance as an art form ought to be recognised, as its purpose as a performative and experiential art work affects its communicative characteristics and effectiveness.

Art is a curious field of practice and experience as it is, from conception of an idea, expression in artistic form and reception, largely an individualistic one. This very nature of dance and all art is important to note when examining communicative characteristics. Perhaps dance may be perceived as more subjective as it is less codified in its language and compositional processes than say music or speech, both of which can be can more

easily written, recorded and reproduced. With dance an idea can be embodied in a vast array of ways and is mostly transient in its form, except for that 'captured' by dance film. This transience allows for an additional layer of communication, as although the actual movement is gone the instant it is performed, the images imprinted in the observer's memory may indelibly remain.

As discussed, primitive cultures have long expressed themselves through movement and dance, for perhaps more ritualistic or ceremonious purposes, and the 'rise' or evolution of dance to a high art/theatre form has been quite gradual. I may be bold in saying that perhaps movement expression has been overlooked as an art form, yet in some ways, as Martin asserts, movement lies at the core of artistic creation and experience of any form.

We have no experience of art until it has been transmuted into assimilable stuff, and this assimilable stuff is the stuff of life experience, which in its basic terms is movement. (Martin, 1965, p.4)

Martin loads movement and dance with a pertinent role, such that it is through movement experiences that we can ascertain an engagement with art. The performance then of a pure dance event, rife with stylistic movement, holds value for both artist and appreciator, as "of all arts, dance may be the one that is closest to life experience, for it involves the human body moving in reaction to its environment" (Martin, 1965, p. xi).

Blacking's discussion of the importance of the experience of art, and more specifically dance, in human communicative experiences, stems from scientific and biological studies, at least those available to him at his time, concerning the human brain. He suggests that achieving a state of 'lateralisation of brain function' involving the simultaneous use of both hemispheres of the brain, the left – reasoning and analytic thinking, and right - artistic talent and body awareness, is ideal (Blacking, 1977, p.19-20). Such a state of brain function is experienced through art appreciation, where there occurs "a biological function [] activating both hemispheres of the brain and so contributing to a more complete human consciousness" (Blacking, 1977, p. 20). When the two channels of brain activity are simultaneously stimulated in the communicative exchange a desirable holistic state is accessed. From this viewpoint, Blacking alludes to the duality of mind and body in the experience and perception of art, and therefore of its associated communicative interactions.

Mind and Body Connection

I hold the belief that we experience ourselves, others, and the world through our bodies. I believe there is an interrelationship between mind and body, and that there is a recursive relationship between movement and emotion. (Ellis, 2001)

In discussing the unique communicative behaviours of the body it has become apparent of the need to recognise the mind and body connection that exists when dealing with the transfer of physical and mental images that occurs with dance. The mind is, in a sense, a dual processor of the physical conversation that occurs. The link between thought and action of experience is somewhat overlooked by most commentators who consider the phenomena as individual and separate entities, yet some theorists argue, and I tend to agree, that the connection is overt.

It is evident “in the areas of non verbal communication, especially dancing and music, that we may observe the mind at work through movements of bodies in time and space” (Blacking, 1977, p. 18). The dancers as well as the observers experiencing the dance kinaesthetically are simultaneously thinking bodies that may construct their own ideas, images and thoughts about the dance, and sub-sequentially may or may not elicit a response or reaction.

Movement is the most elementary physical experience of human life. Not only is it found in the vital functional movement of the pulse and throughout the body in its business of keeping alive, but it is also found in the expression of all human emotional experiences; and it is here that its value lies for the dancer. The body is a mirror of thought. (Martin, 1989 p. 7-8)

Martin asserts that we mostly think of action and thought as individual entities. However there is a psychical accompaniment or intention that goes hand in hand with the physical action (Martin, 1989, p.13). Similarly Hanna observes that the “power of dance lies in its cognitive-sensori- motor and aesthetic capability to create moods and a sense of situation for performer and spectator alike” (Hanna, 1977, p. 216).

Additionally the notion of shared somatic states infiltrates the link between mind and body in dance performance, as the experience of movement can stimulate a heightened

state of awareness or soma. Anthropologist John Blacking explains that “shared somatic states are consequences of the sensory and communication system of the human species which is the basic condition for human interaction” (Blacking, 1977, p. 10). Similarly Hanna (1977, p. 222) refers to the Kreitlers’ argument “that the focal point of the arts is pleasure, which includes altered states of consciousness.” A notable link exists therefore between the sensation of an altered state and an effective communicative event.

The Kinaesthetic Experience

The idea that human beings have an unconscious receptive sensibility to movement of the physical body is particularly interesting in the study of the dance as a unique communicative and responsive form, and also infiltrates the universality debate. Such theories perhaps put aside some questions surrounding the ability of dance to communicate because, regardless of contrasting contextual backgrounds of choreographer, dancer/s or audience member, an engagement with human movement is experienced by individuals in any of these roles through the mutual medium of the body.

The argument simply follows that as human beings we all move and, therefore, we all have a degree of kinaesthetic experience and understanding of physical movement. The observers of dance performance receive sensations in recognition of the mutual experience of the body. In a communicative context therefore, the value that the body holds in ‘speaking’ to an audience through performative dance, is significant.

Dance critic John Martin speaks of the ‘sympathetic motor response’ a means by which audiences can responsively access and respond to dance. Jack Anderson speaking of Martin’s ideas states:

Dance movement communicates to an audience by a process of kinetic transfer [Martin] calls Metakinesis... movements serve as kinetic stimuli and viewers respond to them with muscular sympathy. These responses need not be, and are often not, overt; instead, the response may be entirely a matter of inner mimicry. (Anderson, 1989, p. xii)

Martin's ideas, though centred on modern dance, present the notion that through an inherent kinaesthetic awareness and empathy, an added level of kinetic transfer, or communication, occurs between performer and audience. Fowler (1987, p. 29) notes theorist Theodore Lipps' view that such kinaesthetic sensations are in fact "the nature of our response to *all* art, not just dance".

This inherent ability to engage with dance is also discussed by a number of anthropological experts, some of whom postulate that empathy for movement exists as a biological characteristic of the human species. Dance anthropologist, Judith Hanna (1977, p. 211), asserts "human dance has its roots in phylogenetic and ontogenetic evolution, firstly in predisposing psychobiological processes and secondly in social experience". Such an idea is intriguing in terms of human exchange, as the communicative powers of dance, if you like, perhaps have the potential to be embedded in our nature.

There in lies a problem however in pinpointing "to what extent humans have a biologically based predisposition for dance as, for example, there seems to be a genetic programme for language" (Hanna, 1977, p.212). Hanna refers to Lennenberg's view that such predispositions may exist for language (spoken), yet pointing out that it is largely uncertain whether dance can be considered 'programmed' within this predisposed 'language' bracket.

It has been discussed by dance theorists that movement is the most accessible and responsive action, behaviour or experience of the body, yet which may be often neglected in favour of thought processes. In her thesis Sarah Fowler discusses the devaluation of bodily expression as a result of the "placing of the highest value on the intelligible world" (Fowler, 1987, p. 4). This suggestion appears undeniable when considering the influence of muscular memory, the constancy of habitual movements and the range of bodily motion used in seemingly automatic daily life situations. The point I raise here is that the movement potential of the average person is far larger than is most often realised and utilised, and is often encroached upon by the value placed on the thought and intellect. It is my suggestion that experiences of live dance performances may draw an acute awareness to viewers' own bodies through such sensations of kinaesthetic response.

Discussion of the sympathetic movement capabilities of an audience raises an interesting question within the communication of dance. Why is it that audiences are interested in experiencing a communicative exchange through dance? A dancer can only perform within the range of physical capability of the human body, therefore why does the dance continue to attract and engage audiences? Though this question can be answered a number of different ways, in a general sense, the audience is easily engaged in the movements of bodies in time and space that are outside the realm of normal human motion.

Human behaviour and action are extensions of capabilities that are already in the body, and the forms and content of these extensions are generated by patterns of interaction between bodies in the context of different social and physical environments. (Blacking, 1977, p. 11)

As explained above, though many factors affect responses and varying degrees of interest in the dance, a kinaesthetic ‘understanding’ of bodies, that have been extended to their full range of movement capability, is seldom achieved by individuals of the audience. As explained by Hanna, the Kreitlers argue that,

Remoteness from the habitual seems to be more important in dance than in any other expressive forms as a means of arousing interest and generating aesthetic experience. (Hanna, 1977, p. 222)

The kinaesthetic experience of movement in a theatre dance performance therefore most often may be triggered by movements that are far and away from the range of assumed capabilities of the spectators and are often the most interesting for this reason.

Francis Huxley draws an important connection between kinaesthetic sympathy for movement and cognitive thought processes explaining that “physical sensation can thus be spontaneously translated into mental imagery ... though this doesn’t mean that there is any necessary constancy in an image so produced” (Huxley, 1977, p. 31). Hence although an image may be produced from a kinaesthetic experience, obviously the physical response or mental image will largely vary from viewer to viewer.

Movement and Emotion

The expression of emotions in dance is central to dance's value for us.
(Fowler, 1987, p. 24)

It has become increasingly apparent as I sift through dissertations of the anthropologist, critic, scientist, dance/art historian, and movement specialist, that there is an inescapable connection between a sense of emotional expression, its perception and movement. With fascination, I delve still further into this idea.

As explored earlier, scientists Ekman and Friesen discovered the possibility that facial and postural movements are evoked by stimuli designed to elicit an emotional response, indicating that universal responses between diverse societies of people may occur. To suggest that the human use of body language and facial expression in relation to emotion is universal, is however not solid evidence for the universality of emotional engagement in dance.

Blacking notes, in regard to spoken language, that linguistic language "can be extraordinarily ambiguous and inaccurate, especially when describing feelings" (1977, p. 9). Then comes the question, is movement language any different or better than spoken or written language in communicating emotion?

Arguments postulate that the movement of the human body is a primary response to the experience of emotion. The universality factor perhaps lies in the idea that responses or experiences are first 'felt' through movement in order to then stimulate a responsive thought or action, which may of course vary between individuals. Martin confirms that "physical movement is the normal first effect of mental or emotional experience" (Martin, 1989, p. 8). Blacking further states that consequentially an experience of "feeling is the catalyst that transforms acquired knowledge into understanding, and so adds the dimension of commitment to action" (Blacking, 1977, p. 5).

Dance and movement can be utilised to express emotion, and as discussed, some argue for its effectiveness over other communicative modes. It seems that movement can evoke emotional responses, perhaps different for each individual, yet evocative none the

less. Movement is “found in the expression of all human emotional experiences; and it is here that its value lies for the dancer” (Martin, 1989, p. 8). Emotionally tied elements within movement, such as a frantic and erratic actions or legato limb extensions, allow an audience to latch on to such qualities that they may have felt previously or encourages an empathetic response. In this sense I tend to agree with Martin that the physical and compositional movement choices play an invaluable role in the communicative exchange. As he explains “movement, then, in and of itself is a medium for the transference of an aesthetic and emotional concept from the consciousness of one individual to that of another” (Martin, 1989, p. 13).

Universality

Dance is transparent. It is indicative. It suggests and describes. It signifies the universals that precede meaning. (Serres, 1995, p. 127)

Discussion of the idea that dance, as a form of non-verbal communication and physical art form, has the ability to ‘speak’ universally, across cultural boundaries is a key interest in this research endeavour. As evidenced by the assertion above, it is often described to be so in a variety of contexts. Yet is there truth in such statements?

The term ‘lingua franca’ initially inspiring this study, translates from an Italian origin as “Frankish language”, and is defined as a “medium of communication between peoples of different languages” (“Lingua Franca”, 2004). The idea that the communicative and expressive nature of dance may have the capacity to transcend other human ‘language’ barriers is however speculative without considering the innumerable factors influencing the experience of the exchange for each individual. As discussed, aspects such as the moment of the performance, previous encounters of dance, personal contextual history and so on, unavoidably shape the interpretation of the communicative event from person to person.

Similarly other non-verbal communication modes, body language and gesture, which may be categorised as universally used mechanisms of communication, ought to be considered in the context in which they occur. The simple ‘thumbs-up’ gesture, for example, used in Western culture to indicate approval or a job well done, is

contrastingly considered vulgar and offensive (Gonzalez, 2008) in South America (with the exception of Brazil), West Africa, Greece, and areas of the Middle East. The idea then that “non-verbal languages, like verbal ones, are the result of social development” (R. Williams, 1981, p. 46) is a valid point, as gestures may for example, be similar in form from culture to culture, but what they express can be totally different. Williams compares the baring of teeth, as a sign of defence, to smiling and cheering, noting the physical similarity of the two expressions, yet obviously highlighting the meanings which are clearly contrasting. Birdwhistell (In Knapp, 1972, p. 19) asserts that “there are no universal gestures. As far as we know, there is no single facial expression, stance, or body position which conveys the same meaning in all societies”. What then does this mean for the communication and interpretation of the dance? And in terms of a ‘dance language’ which is vastly variable from one performative event to the next, can there be a consistent interpretation of a dance performance from person to person? Is dance a lost cause in terms of communicative exchange with peoples of different social and cultural contexts?

Studies by psychologist Paul Ekman provide evidence for the possibility of universal responses and interpretations to physical actions. Testing facial expressions across culture, Ekman and his colleagues conducted several studies involving people from diverse human societies. One specific study involved the relaying of a story to subjects from at least six different countries (some isolated, primitive and preliterate, others highly developed and literate), who then chose from a collection of photographs displaying different facial expressions, to identify the emotion displayed in the story. Results showed that each culture could similarly and easily identify the emotions being expressed, hence arguing that “there is a growing body of evidence which suggests a pan-cultural element in emotional facial behaviour” (Knapp, 1972, p. 21). Though this specifically refers to facial expression, it is not to say that a dance performance clearly displaying or evoking emotions and feelings, for example, the expressions evident in traditional narrative ballets, could not according to these findings communicate on a universal level.

Such a notion is of great interest to me, as it seems that although there are many strands in which an audience has the potential to connect with the dance, as explored the emotional or feeling responses may be the most powerfully and in this sense most

consistently received. The suggestion that at the very least observers could engage emotionally, if not in any other way, with the communicative dance event, regardless of different socio/cultural contexts of the people in the audience, is a fascinating notion. Body movement, and therefore dance, a simple and universally accessible strand of human communication, may then have the potential to extend beyond cultural boundaries to communicate in a readable manner regardless of past, present or future influences on the individual. For the purposes of this study the main point to draw here is that as humans, the proclivity to move a certain way to express a particular emotion, serves in effect as a physical lingua franca.

To speak exclusively about the human universal use of body language and facial expression in relation to emotion, is perhaps not solid evidence for the universality of dance. Yet insights into modes of bodily communication, such as facial expression, though perhaps subtle and minimal in range of movement, are never the less linked to the communicative event of dance. Both are physical forms which are characteristically incorporated into dance by the simple nature of the communicating instrument, the body. Findings here serve to arouse a consideration of the potential for universal human communication, a basis for further studies of dance as a medium for such processes.

Dance historian and chronicler, Iro Valaskakis Tembeck, similarly draws the connection between dance and emotional expression: “at the key moments in life we turn to music and dance to express the feelings and realities that overwhelm us” (Cited In Doolittle & Flynn, 2000, p. viii). Tembeck suggests that there exists a human inclination to employ the expressive abilities of dance to channel what can not be articulated in verbal or textual language. It is quite a profound idea that the use of artistic forms, such as dance, in representing emotional experience, may be more instinctively and powerfully employed.

Movement analyst Karen Studd believes that “body movement can be considered a universal language to which every human being instinctively reacts” (Cited In Ferraro, 2008, p. 1). Here Studd refers to the interpretations and responses of individuals to dance, regardless of whether they are different, somehow each individual can instinctively respond to and identify with movement.

The Dancing Body

Although all humans make facial expressions and move their body for communicative purposes, the assumption that “all human beings move, all dancing is movement, therefore all human beings dance” (D. Williams, 1991, p. 34) is in this context perhaps too generalised. It is my opinion rather that all humans have the physical capability to dance and an inherent ability to connect with dance, because all human beings are manifested in a physical body.

Human behaviour and action are extensions of capabilities that are already in the body, and the forms and content of these extensions are generated by patterns of interaction between bodies in the context of different social and physical environments. (Blacking, 1977, p. 11)

Human beings move to live; therefore regardless of other individual differences they have a kinaesthetic experience of movement in a communicative context. Drawing on this inherent ability to engage with movement, again it may be argued that an observer of a dance can receive sensations from ‘experiencing’ the moving body. Looking specifically at a dancer’s body, however, there exists a potential obstacle, as they are most often trained and moulded to embody particular aesthetics and execute virtuosic physical movements, which are perhaps outside the normal range of human bodily action. However, regardless of the fact that dance movement in a performance context may be stylistically and technically embellished, the movement that ensues is none-the-less a product of the human physiology, of which all audience members can assume to have an understanding. Although dancers may have such ability and display extraordinary stylistic body movement, that may not be so familiar to the audience, this is not to say that the observers cannot receive something from the communicative experience of the dance.

A Universal Myth?

The underlying thread running through this study of human communication processes and the nature of such interaction in dance performance is the debate surrounding the idea of universality of dance.

The dissertation by Associate Professor in Dance at Queensland University of Technology, Cheryl Stock entitled *Myth of a Universal Dance Language: Tensions between globalisation and cultural difference* links closely to this debate. From this paper, it is clear that she doubts the validity of the perception of dance as a common language. She pinpoints unavoidable tensions largely from a cultural standpoint that impede mutual understanding and appreciation of various styles of performative dance. Highlighting that “difference in how we view the world” (Stock, 2001, p. 2) create international strains in mutual understanding, distinguishing experience of culture and art, claiming that dance may prohibit a sense of universality. Furthermore, increased globalisation, or the “popularisation and hybridisation of cultural difference” (Stock, 2001, p. 2) has, in her view and contrary to what may be assumed, impeded a greater level of cultural understanding.

How can we, in view of these indisputable tensions, maintain the myth that dance is somehow an exception - that by its very nature of being a non-verbal form of communication, it can escape the misunderstandings prevalent in other areas of communication and interaction. (Stock, 2001, p. 2)

She identifies classical ballet for example, as being an ethnically /culturally specific dance form that despite its significant influence throughout the world (Western) and its ability to adapt and diversify in form, it is still limited to reaching particular cultural appreciators.

Can we really argue that a dance form developed in the rarefied courts of a French empire, with its European fairy tales and animals and unusual and particular aesthetic, is somehow an international language? (Stock, 2001, p. 2)

She justifies her perspective by highlighting that stylised conventions of technique, unusual narrative influences of ballet, and likewise the asymmetrical, dynamically varied and indefinable nature of the contemporary aesthetic may be unappealing and often confusing for peoples of varied cultures.

In some cultures the extreme extroversion and high extensions of classical ballet are not only antithetical to that culture's own aesthetic which may favour subtle enclosed movements, but it can also be culturally offensive. (Stock, 2001, p. 2)

Stock's argument presents the valid implication that dance is unavoidably appreciated and received differently from culture to culture as contextual factors influencing the individual, including socio/cultural values and pre-existing experiences of dance, present tensions that pervade experiences of the communicative exchange. Although not all humans may dance in the sense that is being focussed on in this study, all humans move and all communicate regardless of their cultural/social values and backgrounds, hence all observers will ascertain a degree of communicative engagement with the performative dance event. The key is the use of the body as the instrument of the communicative exchange, the mutual tie between peoples of any context.

Stock further highlights the importance of the body as the instrument in the delivery of the dance. She notes that in the context of formal dance performance, the physical actions are the product of a specific bodily history.

The deep body encoding of dancers which makes their dancing highly articulate is certainly a result of professional training. It is also the result of lifelong cultural and social conditioning, genetic factors and personal preferences which equally inscribe the body, and communicate in vastly differing ways. (Stock, 2001, p. 3)

Although validly making a point about heightened body awareness and physical ability of dancers, Stock suggests that use of such advanced and diverse bodily movements in the communicative exchange, perhaps limits the audience's ability in inter-cultural contexts to identify with and 'understand' the dance. Yet in my opinion, the experience of a dance performance with highly abstracted ideas and articulate, technical movements inspires the imaginative processes of the observers, whose unfamiliarity with such 'body behaviour' may become curiously engaged in the dance event.

From a cultural standpoint Stock summarises her views of universality of dance, stating that "we can perhaps claim that dance is a universal cultural phenomenon, this does not follow that there is a pre/trans-cultural understanding or reading of the experience of dancing" (Stock, 2001, p. 4). To substantiate the value of dance she discounts the importance of labelling it as universal, instead stating that it is the "rich diversity of dance that is its greatest cultural and social asset" (Stock, 2001, p. 4).

A Perspective in Critique

A critic's view of, and response to, a dance is perhaps an interesting one to consider in discussing the unique communicative processes of dance alongside the issue of universality. We are all critics in the general sense, when we receive and perceive the dance, or any art, presented before us. In most instances we are emotionally engaged, or disengaged, with it to a degree that we may, as critics do, judge it. The questions, "Did I like it?" and "Did I get it?" plague spectators' thoughts as they reflect on the performative experience. Yet such queries may in fact be quite important in the communicative transactions occurring between choreographer, dancer/s and audience, producing perhaps an automatic process of analysis. I question however whether such questions may tend to cloud an openness to receive and experience the dance, when and if overpowered by a proclivity to understand. Furthermore, whether an audience member may like or dislike the dance, comprehend it or not, may be a product of many things, unrelated to the actual communicative event of performance.

Dance theorist and critic John Martin, perhaps known for his staunch following of Martha Graham and the 'modern dance', offers intuitive perspectives concerning the communicative abilities of dance, and audience approaches to the experience of dance. How does a critic, an experiential expert of dance performance, receive, perceive and judge the dance?

Martin's argument centres on movement as the 'stuff of life', the very essence of experience and the origin of thought, integral to the creation of, and the response to, art of any form:

Let it suffice that the medium in which the art impulse first expresses itself is that of movement. No matter how many later developments it may undergo which may refine the element of overt movement to the vanishing point, no matter how sophisticated, how abstract, how involved it may become, movement is still at its root. (Martin, 1965, p. 2-3)

He believes that the conception and interpretation of artistic works ultimately have their genesis in movement. Here he draws from the idea that movement is synonymous with

our life experience, and therefore experiences of dance can be assimilated to personal movement experiences, from which point meanings may be perceived.

In the reception of the performance dance, Martin notes the importance such movement experience as the key 'information bank' if you like, obviously for the dancers, but also for the observers in responding to and perceiving meaning from a dance performance:

Not only does the dancer employ movement to express his ideas, but strange as it may seem, the spectator must also employ movement in order to respond to the dancer's intention and understand what he is trying to convey. (Martin, 1965, p. 1)

This commonality between the performer of the dance event and the observer is, in effect, one aspect of the communicative exchange between dancer and audience. As previously discussed, through the sympathetic movement experience of watching the dance, the audience may be moved to respond in such a way that provokes a gasp, a holding of breath, a laugh, a cold shiver or even prompt them to get up and walk out of the theatre. How then should we approach dance and respond to it? As alluded to in the introduction of this topic area, Martin suggests that an audience member asking such questions of themselves in relation to the work is precisely the problem. With theatre dance audiences, particularly of modern dance, he asserts:

The mistake that is made is in looking for a standard system, a code such as characterised the classic dance. The modern dance is not a system; it is a point of view. (Martin, 1989 p. 20)

This statement encapsulates perspectives of modern and contemporary artistic expression and perception that view each work of art not as products of formulae or strict processes but arising out of a personal creative and performative experience, which in turn, stimulates individual interpretation. It is his belief that in the creation of dance, and therefore also in the reception, it is necessary to accept the "discarding of all traditional requirements of form and the establishment of a new principle upon which each dance makes its own form" (Martin, 1989, p. 33). The suggestion is therefore, that the form and composition of a work operate as the channels into the spectators' bodies and brains. Whilst the dancer performs movement layered with a particular movement technique,

compositional aesthetic and conceptual intention with a purpose to express, similarly the audience perceives such movement with a purpose to respond.

In our reception of a work of art, it is those elements in it that awaken experiences out of our own background that give it value for us, for nothing outside experience can possibly have meaning (Martin, 1965, p. 4).

Martin discusses at length his take on how dancers and choreographers create dance that inspires responsive and communicative outcomes. Reflecting on Martin's ideas, Jack Anderson states that "dancers organize the movements in their works to produce specific reactions in their audience" (Anderson, 1989, p. xii). The suggestion here is that perhaps above the style and technical aspects of a dance, the organisation or choreographic composition is more influential in the perception of the work in performance. Yet from my own experience and what I understand of other choreographic processes, the compositional work evolves out of developmental processes where the response that will result from an audience, is not always consciously considered.

Martin summarises his perspective on the responses to dance as art stating, "Our total reaction to a work of art depends upon the equipment we bring to bear upon it, our past experience and present expectations" (Martin, 1965, p. 24). With this in mind, I note Martin's biased position in terms of his focus on modern dance, and, in doing so, draw attention to the cultural distinction that Stock highlights. It is his primary concern with modern dance, much like Stock's concern with the cultural presentation of dance, which ought to be recognised as quite specific, categorised forms of performance dance rather than as an overall view of theatre dance. However at visceral levels of emotional and kinaesthetic response, which are seemingly key elements of the communication in dance, his ideas remain applicable regardless of the dance style or cultural origin. The communication he suggests occurring at the compositional, artistic and kinaesthetic levels ought, in my view, to apply in a general sense to theatre dance as it is considered in this thesis. Accepting that the exchanges and responses may be variable, with an intention from both the performer and spectator to engage with the communicative event, inevitably a shared experience ensues.

Why so unique?

Zooming in on the primary enquiry for this paper, it is pertinent to summarise the characteristics of dance that make it a unique form of communication and expression. Though there are, no doubt, additional factors that influence the communication of theatre art dance, I will make reference to the subject areas dealt with herein.

An overview of human communication behaviours established the valuable role of non-verbal communication modes in the whole human communication process, including in the context of theatre/art dance. For both the performer and observer, engagement with the performative event enables communication to ensue, producing a response from the audience that may be manifested in thought, imagery, discussion, facial expression, or empathetic body movement. The dancing body/ies, highly trained or otherwise, display physical dance movements capable of transmitting a multiplicity of messages to convey meaning, emotion or expression in which to subjectively perceive and evoke interpretative responses from observers.

Non-verbal channels of communication operate powerfully in the dance as with ordinary human interactions, contributing to the way dance in a theatre/concert context conveys meaning or inspires interpretation from audiences. However as primarily a non-verbal form, in terms of meanings, dance performances may appear more ambiguous and less codified than spoken or written forms. In this way, the abstraction of the physical body 'language' may allow the audience to communicate at an additional level, inspired to conjure their own creative perceptions.

Following the collation of theories, perspectives and studies of various scholars of communication and dance, dance may be considered a physical communicative form, within which exists a myriad of 'languages' or dance dialects. In this way, dance in a theatre/art context may incorporate dialects, undoubtedly culturally bound in some way, as a product of the people involved in its creation, performance and reception belonging to a specific cultural history. It is my belief however that dance of this nature does not isolate or restrict others of vastly differing cultural background or experience from appreciating a communicative level of dance. If a willingness and/or intention to engage with the dance exists, the communicative event will occur.

Similarly, when it comes to the consideration of dance as a performative art, like with any art, questions of meaning and interpretation filter through audience responses. The human inclination to be inquisitive together with a strong desire to understand, may as Martin discusses, limit our potential to experience the communicative event. It is my assertion that although a theatre/art dance work may not be fully 'understood' or may be incomprehensible conceptually to an audience, does not render it useless. Instead the dance challenges our experience physically and creatively, encouraging us to learn.

Dance is unique in the way that the meaning or intention is presented through the intangible and transient nature of movement in which a message or concept may be encoded (composed and performed) and decoded (received). Though elements such as composition play a vital part in establishing the communicative intention or idea, as Barthes argues, the audience will ultimately receive the dance based on what they themselves are drawn to in the work, their past and present expectations of dance, and their individual experiences of life and movement. A unique communicative experience of the dance for each performer and observer ensues, wherein each individual concerned is in a sense the author or creator.

The movement of the body, something of which we all have experience, invites dancers and audiences to engage and communicate in a uniquely physical way. The fact that the human body is the communicative, expressive and even responsive instrument of the dance is in my view the distinguishing communicative characteristic. The use of the physical body in the dance provides an immensely effective access point for audiences to latch on to. Unlike verbal languages where in order to engage in the communication a familiarity with the spoken dialect is required, dance enables peoples of all cultures to, perhaps at differing degrees, engage with the communicative event through the mutual medium, the human body.

Kinaesthetically therefore theatre/art dances offer something exceptional as a communicative and expressive medium. Theorists have established that dance inspires an empathetic muscular response from the visual and sensory experience of dance. The receptive and responsive mechanism for the audience can in fact be manifest in the

body, as the physical movement experiences of the audience act as sensory or kinaesthetic links to the dance.

The mind/body connection, or the simultaneous thought and action activity associated with the participation in and observation of dance is particularly influential to the nature of the communicating dance. The suggestion that mental and physical processes are simultaneously active at a desirable level during the experience of such performative art is an important contributor to its effectiveness as a communicative form. Similarly an experience of altered states of consciousness renders such communications particularly powerful in their ability to connect with observers.

The suggestion that across culture there may be similarities in the responses or predisposed physical actions to emotionally driven stimuli influences the power of the communicative nature of dance. The idea that physical or body responses are the most humanly instinctual reactions to emotional ideas suggests that the dance can encapsulate a particularly effective communicative channel for the relaying of emotion and 'feeling' ideas, that may be to some degree universally recognised.

Though I consider dance a unique medium through which to communicate, as with any other communicative modes, I again note the significance that in such exchanges, interpretations and meanings may and will inescapably vary from person to person. Thus in the sense of interpreted meanings or the reception of identical experiences, the dance ought not to be considered universal.

As stated, dance as a form of expression and communication encapsulates no single physical 'language', but many movement dialects, styles and vernaculars that may be endlessly varied. Though she refutes the universality of dance in the general sense, I acknowledge Stock's view that the cultural diversity and unique variety of physical languages within the dance form are in fact what makes it uniquely expressive. As such I believe that dance, a form that encapsulates many styles of human movement integrated with the possibility of innumerable intentions and conceptual ideas, enables audiences, regardless of their own history, to realise a degree of engagement with the presented enactment. The notion of movement being so close to all humans, their experiences of themselves and of the world, and as Martin labels it "the stuff of life", to

me very simply illustrates the unique nature of dance as an expressive form. In this sense, I consider theatre/art dance a form of expression and communication that is not only uniquely communicable, but uniquely universal.

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