

A Semiotics Analysis On A Selected Dance Piece

Dance Analysis on Vollmond by Pina Bausch, 2006

“She requested a gesture related to ‘joy’, or to the pleasure of moving. The question really inspired me. From the movement I presented, she created an entire scene.” —Fernando Suels Mendoza, one of the lead dancers in Vollmond.

Keywords

choreography, dance, intention, element, narration, opposition

Abstract

In this essay, the semiotics analyzation methodology in Dictionary of Semiotics is applied for interpreting dance theatre of Pina Bausch. For case study, a 12 minutes piece is selected from the 2 hour dance Vollmond, which starts from the 100th minute till the end. The terms for traditional semiotic analysis on text is paralleled onto vocabulary in dance context, based on research into Pina Bausch dance theories and my personal experience of choreography, dancer and viewing.

Introduction on Vollmond

Premiered in 2006, Vollmond is one of Pina Bausch's last works, with mature and distinct Bauschean characters carried on and precious tenderness and genuine happiness rarely found in most of her previous works.

From the appearance, Vollmond shares a large amount of commonalities with Pina's previous work. Since *Arien* (1979), water has been one of her favorite element for set design. The evening gown for female dancers shine in the dark and indulgently get wet. The collage of music from classical symphony to electric sound enables a wide range of emotion and actions.

And for the emotional tone, Vollmond is not as harsh as Pina's earlier works like *Kontakthof* or *Rite of Spring*. The violent contrast pieces and cruelty are diminished, rather taking a priority part in other works. Here light-hearted games and silly exercises is used to illustrate unsettling psychological or emotional ideas. Bausch reveals them briefly, and audience owns the freedom to interpret them as what they will. The comic and cruelty, joy and sorrow are mixed together and transforming so fast from one to another, while always effective and poignant. The wit and humor of relief and forgiveness underlying makes me tremble.

With the name *Tanztheatre* (dance theatre), Pina's work can sometimes feel closer to theatre or performance art than it does to choreography, but Vollmond is undeniably a statement in dance. Compared to classical dance like Ballet, contemporary dance presents itself as the combination of the designed motion (dance), the personal motion (style), and the intentional motion (facial expression, gaze and gesture), where abundant information is provided for semiotics analysis.

Introduction on Semiotics Analysis for the Dance Piece

The Context of Analysis

“Funny how the lovely things (always) have something to do with movement…It can be almost anything. It has to do with a certain consciousness, a certain internal physical stance, with an enormous amount of precision: knowledge, breathing, every detail. It always has something to do with the How. Dance is so many things, even very opposite things.”[1] Everything shown on Pina's stage is related to movement. And in other words, movement, or dance, could be interpreted as a combination of elements of multiple aspects.

In order to avoid ambiguity in later discussion, here we could make some clarification on terms in the context of dance theatre. Objects, mentioned as a broad field in conventional semiotics analysis for text, could be named as elements, components or features, and categorized into several aspects such as prop objects, actor, motion, relationship, state of being, etc.

In this essay, the semiotics methodology for analyzing described in Bronwen and Rinhgam's *Dictionary of Semiotics* is adapted and applied to a selected 12 minute dance piece of Vollmond. This piece starts from 100th minute, the beginning of the joy episode, and lasts till the end of the dance. The structure of analysis is listed and explained on how it is applicable for a dance piece.

The Intention of Analysis

“I don't care how people moves. I care what moves them.” Said Pina.

We could recognize various intentions in the dance. The choreographer sends out a concept with her own intention, dancers are manipulated by the choreographer and send out conversation with their own intention. This is a process perfected by the repetitive rehearsals. Then the audience interpret the dance with their personal intention derived from personal experience. And in the documentation video of the dance, it is clear the camera bears its own intention in selecting views and moving in the space. In this essay, I would focus on the dancer and choreographer side. I will begin with interpreting the elements on stage which are constructed by the dancers, and go back to the thoughts and instructions of the choreographer, Pina.

To compose a choreography, a series of why – what – how need to be taken into consideration. As a choreographer, Pina starts from intention (why) and creates the form (what) that bears function (how). Through the backward speculative process, the mysterious construction process for dance theatre is unveiled.

| <u>Contract/Manipulation</u> | <u>Competence</u> | <u>Performance</u> | <u>Sanction</u> |
|--|--|---|---|
| Persuasive doing of sender | Qualifying test | Decisive test | Glorifying test |
| Acquisition of a wanting-to-do or having-to-do | Strengthening of desire | The primary event where the object of value is at stake | The subject's performance is recognized (praise/blame, success/failure) |
| | Acquisition of a being-able-to-do and/or knowing-how-to-do | | |

Stages of Quest, *Dictionary of Semiotics*

| <u>Contract/Manipulation</u> | <u>Competence</u> | <u>Performance</u> | <u>Sanction</u> |
|------------------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Choreographer ↓ Dancer | Dancer ↓ Dancer | Rehearsal, Change, Elude and Add on | Audience, and Choreographer |

Stages of Quest in Dance Analysis

The Structure of Analysis

The 12 minute dance piece could be clear cut into three episodes, or narrative units. Each of the episode constitutes several paragraphs and transformation, and every paragraph is constructed by a series of clip units, which is a combination of elements timely and spatially. Analysis goes back and forth from single units to the whole piece.

There are three levels in analyzing the dance piece. The discursive level focuses on the elements, including the figurative components, the grammatic/syntactic features and the enunciative components. The narrative level interprets the dance piece from the structure of actantial and canonical schema. And the deep/abstract level discusses the core intention of choreographer. Examples and explanations on the selected piece are provided through out the process.

The Principle of Analysis

These four basic principles are adapted from Dictionary of Semiotics, and kept as priority in the analyzing procedure:

1. Meaning is not inherent in visual elements, elements do not signify by themselves. Meaning is constructed by what is known as a competent observer, by a subject of giving form to objects.

It had never been Pina Bausch's intention to explain her work or to label things. "They are quite clearly visible in all my works. I would have to be a poet in order to intuit them again." Said Pina. [3 in biography] "If she could say everything in words, she once remarked, then she would not have felt the need to choreograph." [1] However, Pina doesn't expect a one and only response to her intention. She respected each dancer as the subject and audience as the interpreter of the dance. She believe each person could and should experience for themselves. "Everyone reacts quite individually. Someone who happens to be in love sees a performance with different eyes to someone who has just experienced something terrible." [1 Biography]

2.Semiotics view the dance piece as an autonomous integrity that is internally coherent. All analysis here is based on the original research into the actual elements and structures of the dance, showing how meanings are constructed and what the meanings are. In other words, the analysis is not developed from external description or review. Specifically, when we interpret an object as a signifier, we don't take what is conventionally and broadly accepted as the signifier for it outside the context of dance, or the dance piece.

Pina is well-known for adapting motion of common life into dance piece. What needs to be pointed out is that, some action might contain very different meaning while being adopted in dance theatre. It is possible to start form a familiar action and ends as an alienated interpretation, in terms of exaggerating or transmitting the meaning, or linguistically named as synecdoche and asyndeton.

3.Semiotics posits the choreography structure or narrativity underlies all discourse, not just as visual satisfaction or sensational expression. That's where the relationship further than pure motion reactions could be believed in. In common sense, everyone could read out inter-relationship and emotions of human beings from the dance.

What we need to mention is that, though Pina Bausch is often interpreted as political or feminism, she had never acknowledged these as her main intention for choreography. I prefer not to interpret too deep under this discourse.

4.Semiotics posits the notion of levels of meaning, and the deep abstract level generates the surface level. A great dance piece must and could be studied at all these different levels of depth, as the construction of Pina's works is far more beyond pure intuition of one narrative dimension. It is created as a result of layers of intentions and meaning translations.

Though never referred to in the title, there is always a core motif for Pina's dance theatre. Pina broaches the themes she wants to tackle with by persistent questioning. A request for gesture of "joy" leads to responds from words and conversations to motions and scenes with various personality, experience and style by various dancers. And from the motif of waving arm created by Fernando Suels Mendoza, Pina created the whole scene (100:00-103:35). The question from Pina is what we are always looking for in order to unveil the deepest level.

Semiotics Analysis

1 The Discursive Level

The discursive level is where we examine the specific elements and grammatical items/structures that are visible on the surface of the dance. Key elements are as listed:

1.1 Figurative Components:

By figurative elements, or figures, we mean all elements that refer to the external physical world. In dance they could be categorized into several aspects, including object, motion, actor, inter-subject relationship, state of being, etc.

As Denis Bertrand has commented [1 in Dictionary], the figurative level makes no sense on its own, it only acquires meaning in relationship to a subject – the narrator – and to the feelings and judgements of this narrator. This is the reason why an abstract motion or state of being could be interpreted differently with a different subject. The figurative reality of all sensations is taken into analysis in this process, and the isotopies and oppositions comparison of them would serve the deep level of the utterance.

Some questions could be taken into consideration while listing the elements: How are they distributed in the dance? Which is/are the dominant one/s? Can we extract oppositions at this level? From the interpretation we get an indication of what will be the significant themes.

a) Object

Object is a nonnegligible part of dance, especially in dance theatre where body is not the only endowment of materiality. The objects provide dancers with figurative components to react with, from the huge ones as the site, i.e. water, rain and stone, to the smaller props i.e. glass, bottle, bucket, chair, mattress... Costume is another significant part, though I won't talk about it in this essay, for the value doesn't go through a clear transformation in the piece selected.

Stone

A huge stone is on the middle of stage for Vollmond, presents a sense of nature and an object to interact with. A man climbs onto the stone and jump into the water directly, which could be interpreted as the endeavor of joining group interaction, or attempt to hurt to himself. (A woman walks down from the stone accompanied by a man, while their relationship silently broken after she is on the ground.) A man ascends the stone and stands still, pointing his arm towards the sky, and this moment serves as a fake end of the episode. A man slide onto the stage from behind the stone, where the stone performs as an object for hiding. The stone reminds the audience of the whale fin in Ten Chi (2004), however it is a metaphor of unchangeable, as the antithesis of all the other elements, especially the water surrounding it.

Water

Framed by designer Peter Pabst, a huge boulder dominates the stage for the entirety of Vollmond. In contrast with the solid and intractable stone, the field of water changes for different episodes. The wet area is expanded from the ditch to the whole stage. Water is sprayed by solo dancers and poured in drunk ecstasy, or it falls from the fly tower as the rain or waterfall in Utopian and soaks all the other elements on stage. Unlike previous works such as Arien (1979) or Keuschheitslegende (1979), water doesn't serve as the living environment for the hippopotamus or crocodile, or the copy of the street and gutterway of Wuppertal. It is itself, which could be consumed, used and interacted with.

Metaphor for the site

Pina often relates her dance to outdoor environments, implying a space unlimited by the orientation of backstage-frontstage, in-out. In Vollmond, we have the question on what is the metaphor for the outside and the inside. The sea is the unreachable at the outside, while dancers keep going back and forth touch the water, interact with the shoal and the huge stone, and come back to the inner land to spray at the audience. The beach is where the audience are, treated as the inside. Why there is no moon shown in Full Moon (Vollmond)? The only trace that might relate to the moon is the drunk ecstasy. Is the moon real? Is the joy real when the delightfulness is overwhelmed by the desperate struggle? We have no answer.

b) Action

Each action contains at least one core motif. A motif in dance is a recurring or repeated gesture/movement (phrase) which has the potential to be developed in the dance. The motif contains the essence for the completed piece, and is usually repeated, passed away or sent around.

When we read the action which contains the motif as an object or utterance, there should be a sender (subject of giving out the motion) and a receiver (object of the interaction). In this way, action could be categorized into several types.

Gesture

Make a fist, lift a hand, wave arm, point arm towards sky, kick water, swirl, shake...

When only part of the dancer's body is activated, the motion could be recognized as a gesture. A distinct gesture could be recognized as the core motif for a clip. In Episode I, all begins with the simple arm movement of Fernando. It is expanded to a whole body movement, spread to one another dancers, and then transformed into other related actions, like the single arm circle at the end of Episode I-Paragraph I.

Individual movement

stand up, sit down, lie down, run, jump, turn...

When the action causes a transformation in place or implies an effect on someone else, it is identified as a movement rather than a mere gesture. On the one hand, there are a lot of solo dance in the selected pieces, and each solo clip is a sequence of individual motions. On the other hand, sometimes the spatial arrangement of individuals is maintained regardless of the whole group movement, where the identical motion of each dancer in the group could also be identified as individual motion in semantic understanding, i.e. group parade in Episode I.

Action with object

slide in the water, scramble on the ground, climb the stone, drop into the water, step onto the chair, pour water, ...

Objects are given a significant role in Pina's dance theatre. To make an emphasis and prepare for the repeat scene, Pina only allows a few objects to show up on stage. Each one of the objects could appear several times with different dancers and for different reasons, in the familiar way of daily utilization or be wild and beyond human imagination. The paired action of pouring water from a man to a woman on chair might be the most famous scene in Vollmond, which leads to chaotic carnival.

Interactive action

approach, avoid, flee from, stand by, call for, push, pull, hold hands, hug, kiss, hit, lift, block...

Though Vollmond is one of the most gentle and joyful dance for Pina, the relationship between human beings, especially small groups or a pair, doesn't always appear as delightful. There's quite a bit of hitting in Vollmond. And when people aren't smacking each other, they're kissing furiously. The hit-and-run style is as naïve as the game of rebellious children, however implies the failure of stable relationship between male, female, and all people. Pina's continued fascination for the tension and cruelty found within interpersonal confrontations is articulated in multiple scenes, followed with the playful expression of relief and forgiveness.

c) Actor

Actors themselves are component to the choreographer, and they become the object to each other in the inter-reactions. It is not only in the sense of body, but also in the way of forming an entire configuration of choreography, in organizing time and space. In other words, choreography is not only about selecting and piling up dancers for each scene, but also about weaving the individual movement together into one piece through timelines.

To the choreographer, the dancers are individuals who contain their own names, styles and characteristics. At the same time, they also bear labels as man, woman, old, young, tall, short, muscular, slim, etc. There is reason to believe that, at least sometimes in choreography, the first idea comes to the choreographer's mind might not be 'I want A, B and C', but is possibly

'I want two old man to lift a younger woman'. In this more abstract compositional idea, there is always freedom for alternation within each label while looking deeper into the dancers' personalities, figuring out the efficient and reasonable routine for individuals and creating a balance.

d) Inter-subject relationship:

For actor configuration, there is an opposition between plural and singular. Actually it is rare for Pina to have only one dancer on stage. Her stage action is always de-centred, with several montage sequences occurring simultaneously. Audience is forced to split their focus and the convention of observation is challenged.

In each of the clip unit with more than one dancer, there exists inter-subject relationship. We could simply name the relationships as irrelevant, friendly and opposed. The dancers could be working towards the same goal/destination, or they are conflict and there is violent contrast. Three and more dancers often constitute various relationships at the same time. And sometimes, the whole group of 12 dancers is a neatly identical or randomly chaotic parade, with no distinct relationship between any of them but only collective unconsciousness.

When there are more than one clip units on the stage, there are multiple types of configuration. They could be performing indifferently overlapping in time and space. Or some of the individual clips develop into reaction with each other. The flow could also be passed on from one dancer to another (group), and the motif is maintained while the subject is changing.

e) State of being:

The most legible state for actors is the state of movement: moving or in stillness. Though there is no pure stillness, sometimes a dancer appears still and quiet(with only upper part of body moving) in a distinct way, and it becomes a decisive moment.

There are also some other types of states. The relationship with water transfers the dancers from dry to wet, or in a more detailed list, in the rain, in the water, expanding the wet to the dry ground, etc. For time, there is an opposition between durativeness and punctuality. For the physical state of body, there might be relaxed, stiff, extended, vibrant, spasmodic, etc. And for facial expression, we see joy, excited, intoxicated, expecting, demanding, thrilled, amazed, in love, sad, dazed, grievous, furious, uneasy, etc.

1.2 Grammaticic/Syntactic Features:

The use of linguistic devices such as repetition, ellipsis, active/passive voice, nominalization and cohesive markers throw light on the organization of the dance and thus reveal textual strategies of manipulation.

A clip unit is marked by either the dancer entering and leaving the stage, or the clear change of motion composition. For most clips, the structure of the unit is clear and legible. One thing

to pay attention is the confusion in analyzing through video. Watching a video documentation is like reconstructing a story through the read out of another person. Though all the elements are maintained, there are still intentional or unconscious selections, or say, emphasis. In this way, we need to be conscious that sometimes a dancer leaves the camera doesn't mean the clip is over. And the deduction process on finding out the real start/end of the clip timely and spatially is unneglectable, which equips the analysis procedure with a subjective layer.

a) Transformation

For clip units or motion that could be identified as transformation, there is another layer of lexical effect for them besides the original signified.

Pina often ends one clip in a gentle but unpredictable way and transmits to the next. In Episode I, when the parade of key motif transform into sitting parade, two dancers curiously watch the first several ones changing their motion, stay in their own routine and then willingly follow the others. The transformation is more than an alternative motion and implicitly points out the ending of one clip and the start of another.

b) Repeat

The repetitions leave stronger impression to audience, and they serve different context through various combinations. Elements repeated in close proximity are employed to refer to the familiarity, in order to heighten the dramatical points by foregrounding the opposition between the clips.

This selected piece is not long enough for holding reappearing components. Nevertheless, several figurative components have been appearing in previous parts, such as glass, stone and chair. And some motions and clip units also repeat. What to pay attention is that, even with a same signifier, there might be a translation of the signified. After all, we all know how Pina enjoys making an object into a use deviated from the conventional way.

Glass

In the selected scene, the glass appears in the water-pouring scene of Episode I, and could be interpreted as the signifier and receiver of unstable relationships

When we look back to earlier part in Vollmond, we see the glass first appears in the 10th min, as a sign of gracefulness when a young woman flicked with the glass. In the 16th min, two men arranged several glasses in line and jumped along them. In the 21th min, the glass first appeared in a similar utilization as the scene in the selected piece: here a man poured into two glasses from a bottle, all held by himself, and he toasted to himself. Then in the 28th min, a woman poured water out from a glass in a parabola while trotting several steps, and the water dangerously fell across two men lying on the stage and implies the chaos later.

Chair

The chairs appear in the same water-pouring scene with glass, while it first appeared in totally different environments and gradually evolved into a combination with glass.

In the 17th min, a woman first sat on a chair and leaves. A younger woman stepped onto a chair alone and steps down. And this motif was inherited by all the male dancers in the scene of selected piece. In the 18th min, a woman came down from the stone and lies on the chair with a cloth covering it. She was dragged down and wrapped in cloth, then the chair was moved away. In the 20th min, the first version of pouring water into the glass on chair appeared. When a woman sat on the chair, the man poured into her glass from a plastic bottle on the ground. Then he stepped up, kept pouring and poured onto her, then stepped down. After that he used a towel to wipe her, which is an activity eliminated from the scene in selected piece. Some other configuration of chair utilization appeared few more times, with no relation to the scene we talk about.

Repeated Group Clips

In the 106th min, two men get off from the chaos tangling group and run along an elliptic trajectory. The end of the running leads the next group onto the stage. This clip is repeated twice at the very beginning in the 5th min and the 8th min, with the exactly same dancers.

Also, the group comes to appearance after the two men has been repeated in the 9th min previously. These clips didn't appear in coherence at the beginning part, however they are rearranged into interaction and imply the audience with some implicit logic.

1.3 Enunciative Components:

Ideally, the audience is watching everything on stage directly and there is no third-person or extra-diegetic perspective. It is necessary to acknowledge that the dance theatre is not performed spontaneously or out of improvisation. Through the process of materializing the theme, there are several levels of translation and enunciation.

Again, the selection and motion of camera lens is in some ways an extra enunciation to the dance. However, it is beyond the original construction intention of stage configuration, for the choreographer serves the audience with priority rather than the hanging camera. In this way, we won't talk about the selected view in the essay.

We could use the definition of enunciator and enunciatee in interpreting the construction of a dance piece, as there are several layers of author/sender of a concept/antantial/visual message addressed to an enunciatee or receiver.

As explained previously, in the progress of choreography, Pina is in charge of piling up, selecting and editing the elements, Pina, as the choreographer, is the **Sender**, who sends out the intention of dance and manipulates the dancers. The ideal audience are the **Receiver**, who watches the dance, interprets the themes and reflects on themselves.

Dancer, who delegates the thoughts of the choreographer and translates the abstract into

figurative components, could be recognized as the **Narrator** in performing the dance. The Narrator changes from on clip unit to another, within the manipulation of the same Enunciator. As the dancers are performing right to the real audience, and the ideal audience is not represented in the dance piece itself, no **Narratee** is shown.

Here we find the traditional semiotics analysis methodology is not 100% applicable here, and in this way we make an agreement that it is not necessary to include all the enunciative roles in a dance piece. Followed by this, in Vollmond we believe the **“I” and “You”** are not put into appearance, as the dancers' performance doesn't need to be presented by a simulacrum, and there is no one addressing the performance on stage but only audience in the auditorium.

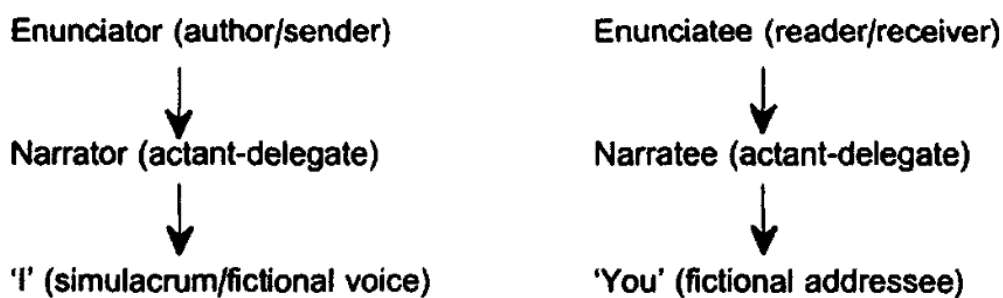


Diagram of Enunciation/Narration, *Dictionary of Semiotics*

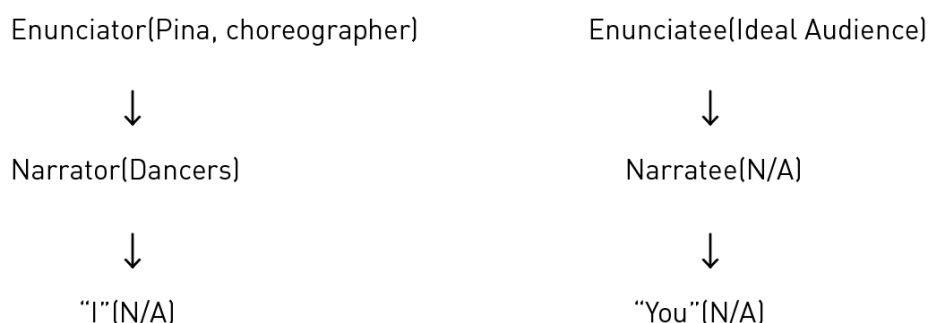


Diagram of Enunciation/Narration in Dance Analysis

The enunciative components leave trace for the audience to go back to the intention and instruction of the narrator and choreographer. For instance, in the documentary *Legacy of Pina*, one dancer addresses to another that “follow her” and “stay with her” would be two significantly different intentions. The first constitutes the intention of observing and an almost imperceptible delay in time and space. On the contrary, the second implies the movement need to be quick enough and the dancer is moving consciously.

We could take another example from Episode I in the selected piece. When four men are pouring water towards backstage, “one man perform a routine, then four men repeat it” and “one man perform a routine, then he does it again and three other joins him” are very different instructions, where the latter create an atmosphere of centered force, even this man kept brought about may not even stay in the center.

2 The Narrative Level

The narrative level is the level of choreography structure, based on the two fundamental narrative models: the actantial narrative schema, and the canonical narrative schema. In order to unveil the structure, we need to identify the principal motion/clips and main transformations.

Based on the disjunction of motion, actor and music in style, rhythm and configuration, the 12 minute piece falls into three main episodes (narrative programmes). And there are several transformations for organizing the paragraphs and clips in each episode. The brief description of the episodes is listed, and further explanations would be made later.

Episode I: 100:00-103:35

the episode of joy. The delightfulness is spread from a solo dancers to the whole group, then it evolves into collective drunk ecstasy in a water-pouring carnival.

Episode II: 103:35-106:50

the episode of contradiction in relationship. Beginning with individual awakening, the solo dancers explore the interaction and co-existence with others, and they find contrast and violence in group relationships.

Episode III: 106:50-112:50

the episode of struggle and relief. The distance between furious dancers in the water is gradually shortened, finally everyone is back on stage. The end of the dance resonate with the transformation scene in Episode I.

2.1 Actantial Narrative Schema

Six key narrative functions (actantial roles) are attributed to the characters, in order to account for all possible relationships within the narration. In semiotics analysis methodology, these are Subject, Object, Helper, Opponent, Sender and Receiver.

In most of the dance clips, it is not believed to have the obligation of narration completeness. In this way, there may not be a perfect loop that contains all six narrative functions, and the theatrical contrast is not necessary all the times. Even only several of them appearing in a clip would still make it understandable for the audience. The motif or a prop would be the object which could be clearly identified. In interpretation, following questions could be asked:

a) Who is the subject of the quest? What is the object of the quest?

The first dancer in the clip as the initial creator is often identified as the subject, and whatever/whoever he/she is articulating or interacting with is the object. The object could be a motif repeated in motion, a prop object as the interactive component, or as abstract as the intention passed on from one subject to another.

In Episode I-Paragraph 1, the core motif of arm motion is the object. The first man is the subject who creates it, and it is copied by all the other dancers.

In Episode I-Paragraph 3, the dancers set in pairs and pour water from one glass to a bottle. There are two objects for the quest, the water serves as the concrete and pragmatic object,

and the motif of giving and receiving is the abstract and cognitive one.

b) Does the subject have helpers and/or opponents?

In some clips with a clear narration of the contrast, the subject faces opponent and get helped/self-helped and accomplishes the success. The survival in contrast is one of the main themes in Pina's previous works, especially in delineating the brutal relationship between male and female.

c) Who is the anti-subject (if any) and what is the goal of the anti-subject's quest?

Unlike text or most of the media, as an anti-subject should have a goal rather than simply contrasts with the subject, it might be too complicated a narration for dance piece of Pina. And we won't talk much about this in the essay.

d) Who or what is the sender? And who is the receiver?

In other words, what motivates the quest of the subject? And what is the influence of the quest? For short clips, usually the sender could be seen as the same with the subject. In other words, the subject is motivated by him/herself rather than triggered by observing another dancer. However, for the transformation followed by a parade clip, the sender is the trigger dancer who changes first, different from the main dancer as the subject.

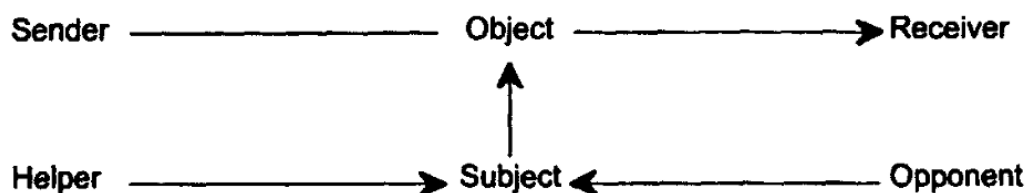


Diagram of Narrative Functions, *Dictionary of Semiotics*

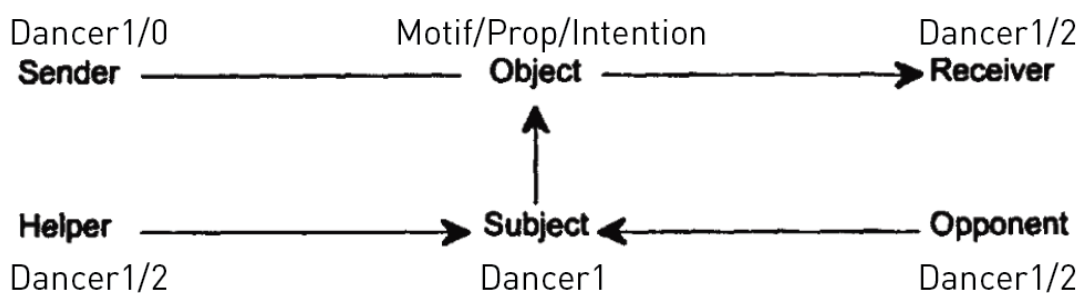


Diagram of Narrative Functions in Dance Analysis

2.2 Canonical Narrative Schema

This schema is used to divide the quest into logical stages. For the clip with a more clear plot or narration, it is easy to discover the logic motif inside the motion flow. And we could deconstruct each clip into the following four steps where the intention lies behind the surface level and underpins these motion. Also, as, stage action is always de-centralized by Pina, there are often several montage sequences occur simultaneously. In this way, the clips could be read indifferently, while some motion would communicate with one another, in terms of space, time, motion, or configuration.

a) Contract

The contract is the persuasive doing of the sender. The sender motivates the action, and communicates the modalities of desire or obligation to the receiver. When a contract is established, the receiver becomes a subject and embarks on the quest. The contract is followed by three tests:

b) Competence: the qualifying test

The subject acquires the necessary and practical competence to perform the planned action or mission. In dance, the dancer accumulates energy, gains spatial freedom or is occupied with object for next step and following motions, i.e. a woman is held by two men and pushed backwards for several steps, or a chair is put on the stage for a woman to sit on and a man to step on. These facilities also perform as the implication in a way of making use of the possibilities. The woman is able to accelerate energy for the next onrush, and the paired up dancers would balance with the chair in order to create a motion configuration.

c) Performance: the decisive test

It is always a principle event or action. In dance it is probably one peak motion or one moment, and it could be either moving or still. In Episode I-Paragraph 3 of the selected piece, when one man is pouring water from bucket at the first time, it becomes the decisive moment. Also, the decisive test could be a confrontation or conflict between a subject and an anti-subject, i.e. in Episode II-Paragraph 2 a woman is held and quickly lifted to the highest point for one second. It should be mentioned that a decisive test in dance clip might be the climax but not need to be the transformation, and it should be completed in order to be further revealed in the next step, the glorifying test.

d) Sanction: the glorifying test

This is the stage at which the outcome of the event is revealed. This last step presents as the testify whether the decisive test has succeeded or failed. In the context of dance, it is whether the climax works as the transformation to the contradictory development of the starting point or not. In this step, it is the point at which the performance of the subject is interpreted and evaluated by a sender-adjudicator. And the audience is able to compare this step with the original starting point, to make a judgement whether the final step is in accordance with the original set of values (ideology or mandate) instituted by the initial (mandating) sender.

In completing this step, there might be an emphasis onto another dancer, which could be recognized as the narratee responding the original narrator. Again, the two roles for the narration could be played by same dancer when it is a solo dance clip.

3 The Deep/Abstract Level

Also known as the thematic level, it is about the abstract or conceptual syntax where the fundamental values which generate a dance are articulated. For Pina, “I am not interested in how people move, but in what moves them.” Her questions for the dancers are the key to the deep level, and she welcome answers in either way, materialized or abstract.

Dance piece of Pina is more like a poem, constructed by discrete short clips. With no main narrative line timely nor spatially, dance theatre is significantly different from other media. In this way, it would be unfair to compare dance theatre with fiction or prose which owns a theme, not to mention the conventional theatre with a plot.

It is so abstract that the clips are related to the core intention in various ways, either for or against it or just loosely respond to it. Each clip is able to be interpreted and understood when related to social experience, nevertheless there is no strong logic in organizing each of them in terms of order.

However, if we accept the fact that there is no sequential narration, the core themes in each episode still could be identified by looking for the fundamental oppositions and transformations. These questions could be asked:

a) Can we reduce all the oppositions found in the figurative and narrative levels to basic umbrella oppositions that can function as a common denominator for the text?

Peaceful Joy — Ecstasy,

Misery of Individual — Contradiction in Relationship,

Struggle — Relief

b) What are the two most abstract poles of meaning between which the dance moves?

Joy — Misery

c) What fundamental transformation of values is at stake?

Joy — Ecstasy — Misery — Struggle — Relief

And when we reorganize the key components into isotopies and oppositions, we could draw a semiotics square diagram for the logical expression of relationships: contrariety (opposition), contradiction and implication.

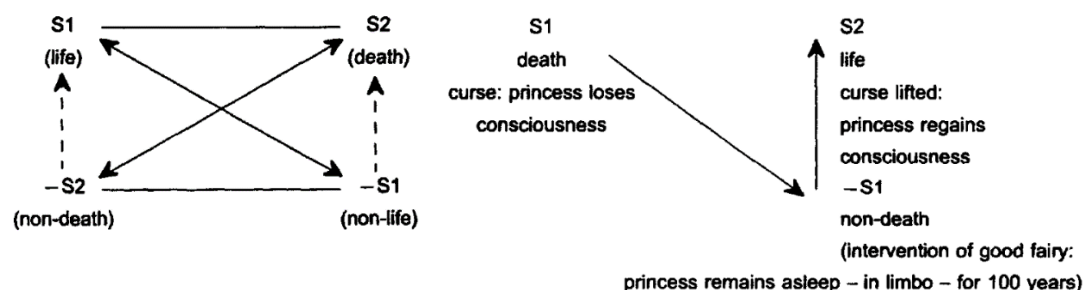
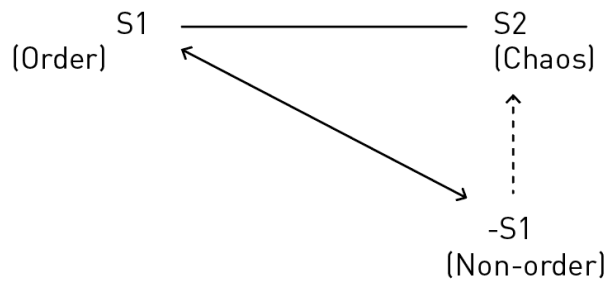


Diagram of Deep Level, *Dictionary of Semiotics*

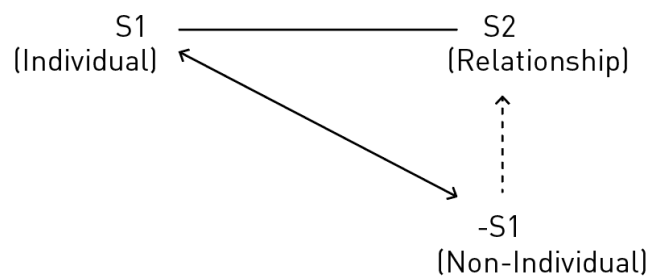
Episode I: 100:00-103:35

The episode of joy. The delightfulness is spread from a solo dancers to the whole group, from order to chaos, from peacefulness to turbulence.



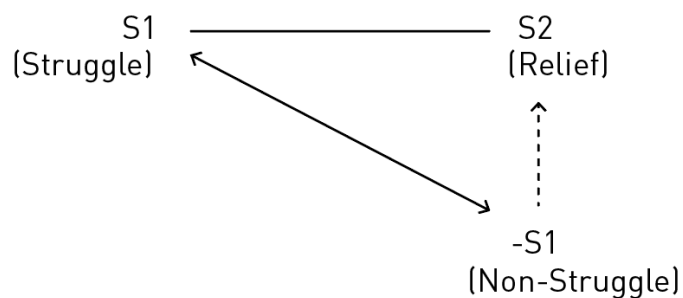
Episode II: 103:35-106:50

The episode of misery. Beginning with individual longing in pain, the solo dancers explore the interaction with others, and they find contrast and violence in group relationships.



Episode III: 106:50-112:50

The episode of non-joy. Solo dancers fluctuate between joy and misery, from childishly spraying the water to desperately drowning in the water. The relationship between furious dancers is gradually smoothed, finally everyone is back on stage in balance and relief. The end of the dance resonate with the transformation scene in Episode I, everyone sitting on stage and turning randomly with smile on face.



The Semiotics Square of the Selected Piece

Opposition or contrariety: S1 — S2

Meaning is viewed essentially as a product of opposition. S1 (Joy) and S2 (Misery) have a feature in common. And S1 (Joy) presupposes the existence of S2 (Misery). If we don't see the three episodes together, it would be hard to find the Joy contrasted by the Misery in desperately struggling for relationships.

Contradiction: S1 <—> -S1

In order to move from S1 to S2, we must first negate S1 (written -S1). S1 and -S1 are in a relation of contradiction: -S1 negates S1.

Implication of Complementarity: -S1> S2

The third relationship seals the square. This is built on the connection between a term and the negation of its opposite: -S1 implies S2.

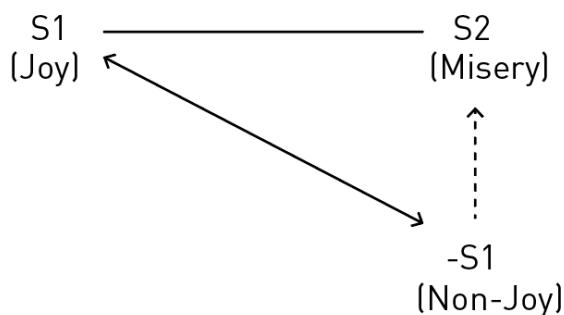


Diagram of Deep Level in Dance Analysis

Conclusion

This essay is based on the analyzing methodology in Dictionary of Semiotics. Though some of Pina Bausch's dance theatre has a well-known context, either narrative (i.e. Bluebeard) or musical (i.e. Spring Ritual). However, most of her works appear as a weaved up net with an abstract theme, The theme of Pina's dance always evokes inner connection of human beings in multiple ways, and the dancers and audience would read the dance differently without an organized one-line conclusion. Thus it would be difficult and unfair to impose a logical narration line in interpreting the choreography structure, which is what I have been avoiding doing all the time. With this principle of respecting the dance as what it is, the essay is a naïve analysis and interpretation. I hope this could set up a framework for semiotics applied in choreography study. And I hope to further develop it into a mature methodology for understanding dance piece and constructing choreography.

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