

Contemporary Dance Choreography and Creation Strategy with the Development of Immersive Dance Theatre

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Abstract: *The development of immersive art is changing the expression of dance art and promoting the rapid change of art and culture industry. In order to provide choreographers to create a broader idea in the future, this paper will try to explore the contemporary dance choreography elements, dance choreography logic, immersive dance theatre choreography path, and the role orientation of choreographers in dance choreography under changes of immersive dance theatre.*

Keywords: *Contemporary dance, Choreography, Creation strategy, Immersive dance theatre*

1. Introduction

When we go all the way back to the beginnings of immersive theatre in the 19th century, creation strategy of participatory element with the changes of immersive technology and the potential changes of political economy and social culture in the development of art have also brought new challenges and difficulties to dance choreography. At present, the concept and technology of contemporary dance choreography in some countries and regions cannot keep up with the development of immersive dance, and some problems need to be solved urgently. For example, under the immersive dance theatre, what should the choreographers do to face a large number of nonprofessional dancers (such as the audience) and the dancers' improvisation with the help of interactive experience in performance? With the continuous changes of immersive dance theatre, how to adapt to the development of the times and make rational interdisciplinary application (such as the interactive installation, VR, etc.), how to get the audience a sense of experience beyond the traditional dance theater, and how to develop new artistic thinking and create more infinite possibilities? Therefore, based on the above questions, it is necessary to analyze the Dance Choreography and Creation Strategy from multiple angles with the Development of Immersive Dance Theatre.

2. Dilemma

The impact of immersive dance theatre on the development of contemporary dance choreography and creation can be roughly divided into four aspects.

First of all, whether choreographers can effectively combine and utilize contemporary dance elements and interdisciplinary application? Immersive dance theatre tends to stimulate all five senses- sight and sound, as with conventional theatre pieces, but also touch, and frequently taste and even smell. Choreographers should focus on the development of dance noumenon and enrich the display forms of dance to create a better experience, rather than being covered up by the dazzling art installations or immersive form far outweighs the contemporary dance content, like "immersive technology" for the sake of "immersive technology".

Secondly, can the change of dance choreography logic keep up with the way of dance viewing? The changes of different dance presentation modes brought by immersive dance theatre and technology will force the innovation of dance choreography and creation, immersive dance theater creates a physical environment that differs from a traditional theater where audiences sit in seats and watch a show unfurl on a proscenium stage with a curtain; on the other hand, the different types of immersive technology, such as 360, VR, AR, MR, XR, require the choreographer to constantly update his creative logic according to the development of technology. The artistic presentation mode means that dance choreography and creation have to reconstruct themselves according to the presentation logic of

immersive dance.

Thirdly, the immersive art culture has brought changes in the path of contemporary dance choreography and creation. The rise of postmodern cultural trend, especially the rise of immersive technique allows the choreographer to tap into customer's emotions in a way they never could before, which makes individual audience members feel as if they had a uniquely personal experience and that they are not just a part of the crowd, and the free style of contemporary dance has a certain impact on building audience trust and subsequent business value; besides, immersive dance theater doubles as an art installation and hands-on museum, at the same time, immersive productions often emphasize social interactions, either through directed tasks in small groups, or by fostering a looser party atmosphere.

Fourthly, how to position the role of choreographers under the development of immersive dance theater? The subjects of contemporary dance choreography and creation activities are becoming more and more diversified. First, more and more nonprofessional subjects participate in perform environment; Second, the change of interactive environment accelerates the reconstruction of the traditional relationship between choreography and performance, so that when the creator pays attention to the "interaction" of the work, he transfers the power of "choreography" to the performer.

3. Research on the Development of Immersive Theater and Contemporary Dance Artistic Features

The origins of immersive theatre go all the way back to the beginnings of modern theatre in the 19th century. Call-and-response, when a leader puts out a call and an audience call back a pre-ordained response, has long been a concept in music, adding a participatory element. In the centuries that followed, things like murder mystery theatres and haunted houses also put their intended audience into an environment and allowed them choice in how they viewed the story. Even traditional proscenium theatre started to adapt some immersive or interactive elements. In 1985, the Tony Award-winning Best Musical, *"The Mystery of Edwin Drood"*, required that the audience vote on who killed the titular character, spurring one of seven possible endings.

Well-known UK-based theatre company Punchdrunk is known as pioneer of the form of immersive theatre. While they have been producing immersive and promenade theatre since 2000 in the UK, they and immersive theatre as a genre meteorically shot to worldwide fame after *"Sleep No More"*, their 1930's film noir adaptation of Shakespeare's *"Macbeth"*, was unanimously well-received in New York.

Since the success of *"Sleep No More"*, countless immersive productions have popped up on both sides of the Atlantic. In New York, these include *"Natasha, Pierre"*, and *"the Great Comet of 1812"*, a techno-rock musical adaptation of a chunk of Tolstoy's *"War and Peace"*, and *"Then She Fell"*, an adaptation of Lewis Carroll's *"Alice in Wonderland"* set in a mental hospital. London's immersive theatre scene has recently featured an all-night production of *"Macbeth"* in a block of flats; *"Leviathan"*, a production of Herman Melville's *Moby Dick* in which the audience stands in for the crew of the ship chasing after the famed whale; and *"The Drowned Man"*, a combination of Georg Buchner's *"Woyzeck"* and Nathanael West's *"The Day of the Locust"* set in a 1960's movie studio and produced by Punchdrunk.

Immersive theater allows audiences to converse with the actors and interact with their surroundings (interactive), thereby breaking the fourth wall. From the *Introduction to New Media Art* (Liu, 2013) [1], it is not difficult to summarize the five main artistic features of new media art at present: interactive experience of art, popularization of expression, nonlinear narrative logic, virtuality of artistic scene and the combination of art and technology. This provides the necessity of times and social development, as well as the feasibility and rationality of field development for this paper to explore the development strategy of dance choreography.

Merce Cunningham is considered to be the first choreographer to "develop an independent attitude towards modern dance" and defy the ideas that were established by it (Naranjo, 2010) [2]. Reflecting the situation in society at large, contemporary dance is increasingly incorporating overtly technological elements, and, in particular, robots. (Damith et al., 2016) [3] The concept of beauty is not the only pursuit in modern dance. The life concept of modern dance is tolerant, optimistic and happy. Its artistic concept is to seek common ground while reserving differences.

4. Choreography and Creation of Immersive Dance Theater.

For a long time, the relatively fixed choreography thinking mode and knowledge architecture system, as well as the different understanding of cultural traditions, make it difficult for many choreographers to

really understand and apply reasonable choreography development strategies to interpret the value and significance of immersive dance theater art. Therefore, an in-depth understanding of the connotation and extension of the in-depth interleaving of immersive dance theater is the inevitable trend of the times.

Immersive dance theater describes an art movement and a dance theater moment. That moment has existed in New York since 2011, when Punchdrunk Theater launched its version of “*Macbeth*”, entitled “*Sleep No More*” as if retold by Alfred Hitchcock and Isadora Duncan, in a formerly abandoned club in Chelsea renamed the McKittrick Hotel. “*Sleep No More*” is still running, as is “*Then She Fell*”, Third Rail Projects’ take on Lewis Carroll and Alice in Wonderland, which debuted the following year (Brown, 2011) [4].

In the middle and late 20th century, due to the rebellion of postmodern dance against tradition and rationality, choreographers tended to be freer in creation, resulting in “improvisation” being paid much attention and respected in the process of dance choreography and creation (Fildes, 2018) [5]. Therefore, the concepts such as music improvisation, proposition improvisation and environment improvisation under the guidance of new media have been derived (Li, 2015) [6]. No matter what kind of “impromptu choreography” is, it only emphasizes its “limiting factors” on the basis of the present, and requires that the impromptu behavior has a certain relationship with the “limiting factors”. Kloppenberg thinks that there are two schools of thought on the role of improvisation in dance: one is to regard improvisation as the act of releasing the subconscious, and guide the body to speak the deep internal impulse or ideas through improvisation, rather than handing over the right of speaking to the conscious mind. The other school insists that improvisation is the final act of consciousness and a conscious, cautious and timely creative choice to follow the current trajectory (Kloppenber, 2010) [7]. There is a very important space for thinking about for positioning and creative strategy of the choreographer under the change of new media.

Cameras, data projectors, microphone sensors, microcontrollers and various software tools are organized and arranged to participate in creation and performance. Therefore, sound, video, 3D animation, motion graphics, biofeedback and light have become an important part of new media digital interactive dance (Xu, 2020) [8]. In digital interactive dance works, the mediated body captured by the camera is involved. Digital space has completely changed the concept and perception of physical space, blurred the boundary between physical space and digital space, and blurred virtuality and reality. The development of technology brings interactivity and new art forms to digital interactive dance. By analyzing its interactive design principle, in this paper, I deduce the new choreography law and body strategy gradually established in it, and discuss how to interact the dancer’s body behavior with the computer-generated sound and vision, so as to maximize the effect of the work, provide new on-site experience for art creation and more experimental possibilities for choreography practice. Art also creates new forms of expression and interaction based on embodiment and helps to the design of interactive systems of emotional intelligence.

There are also some problems in the development of new media dance. For example, new media technology is no longer limited to the use of technical elites. The wide use of sensor equipment, wireless personal communication and computer vision is rapidly making dance choreography a convenient medium for composers, choreographers and dancers. However, Siegel pointed that standardized interface equipment or systems have not been adopted, which indicates that the field is still in the experimental stage (Siegel, 2011) [9]. This may be related to the lack of appropriate technology and the lack of artistic experience in this field. This makes it more important to explore the strategy of dance choreography. On the other hand, as Dixon appealed, “In the process of creating digital performance works, don’t be too obsessed with technology, but pay more attention to artistic vision and work content.” (Dixon, 2007) [10].

In “*choose-your-own-adventure*” theater, agency is given to the audience to participate in changing the narrative while the performance is taking place. Bespoke theater, invented by Fondudes, extends participation to pre-production, so that each show is customized at script level for each audience. (Betches, 2019) [11] Modern forms of immersive theater have a wide range of definitions, all based upon the degree and type of engagement found between actors and their audience. There is considerable debate among critics concerning these definitions of interaction, (Bouko, 2014) [12] which centres on the concepts such as audience influence, participation, social constructs and roles, and involvement, all of which depend on the degree of involvement needed for the progression of the works.

5. To Find a Way Out

Under the promotion of the renewal and development of immersive dance theatre, firstly, the dance

choreographer a clear picture of the current situation, to seek methods and update their ideas. In the face of the continuous emergence of various social trendy cultures and the continuous exposure of talents, the dance choreographer should put themselves in the right position, timely update their creative ideas and techniques with the help of science and technology, and create excellent art works in the new era.

It's also important to collect the evaluation of non professional (mass) audience and professional choreographers on immersive dance theatre works, and emphasizes the audience's evaluation and participation in immersive dance theatre.

Secondly, choreographers should aim to clarify the relationship between contemporary dance and immersive theatre, following the development of art but do not fall into stereotypes. The creative concepts and declarations that choreographers and digital artists present in their use of new technologies are also the responsibilities and challenges facing artists in the 21st century as they rethink artistic boundaries and creative identity.

The interview method is used to investigate, in order to master the experience of professional and non professional dance choreographers with immersive dance theatre and creation experience on choreograph and creation development strategies, especially the problems existing in the choreograph and creation process of professional choreographers, as well as the needs and ideas of choreograph and creation strategy development, and summarize them in combination with their own experience.

Thirdly, in the face of constantly updated immersive dance theatre, also in the exploration of creative ideas, cooperation has become an essential aspect in creation work. In all the process of creation, immersive dance theatre is the art with the help of professional workers as the theoretical basis, and on the basis of art, combined with the knowledge of computer science, engineering, media science, sociology, psychology and other disciplines (Tong, 2017) [13], this paper summarizes the knowledge points related to this article in the literature and constructs the knowledge system. Choreographers could collect the viewing traffic of professional contemporary choreographers, dance theatre works and immersive technique experience workers, etc., the experience of cooperation can provide useful development strategy reference for future contemporary dance development, interdisciplinary art practitioners, creators and researchers.

6. Significance

Immersive dance theatre not only reconfigures the relationship between choreographers and performers, but also changes the relationship between works and audiences. The proposal *On the Status of Artists* adopted by UNESCO in 1980 is the only international legal document that directly advocates member states to improve the social and economic status of artists through various measures. In this paper, I study the development strategies of dance choreography under the change of new media, so that choreographers can clarify the current situation, learn from methods and update their ideas, which also reflects the importance of the identity of dance choreographer and director as an artist.

In the artistic practice under the change of immersive dance theatre, contemporary dance choreographers and directors should enrich the display forms of dance through the research on the development strategy of dance choreography and take the development of dance as the core, rather than being covered up by the development of new media. In terms of artistic thinking, choreographers should systematically consider and control the overall and other artistic elements of the work, so as to make them be in the core position on the issue of the dominance of the work. As for dance choreographers, in addition to clarifying their own identity of participating in creation, they should also remember that "choreography" is the starting point of the work, not the end point, and should pay more attention to the overall situation and aesthetic value of the work. Artistic creation needs the support of rich technological development. The continuous progress of technology endows artistic creation and artistic works with different information and technical characteristics of the times. It can provide a broad development space and platform for art. It can not only make art have richer creative ideas, but also make the communication channels of art more diversified.

With society moving towards postmodernism, the relationship between dance and daily life has been reconstructed. Dance culture is no longer beyond the people and life but built into the people and life. In this situation, professional dance creators should take the initiative to integrate into the media society, understand the meaning of immersive culture, understand the production and flow mechanism of post-modern social culture, make full use of the platform role of the media, find creative inspiration from the collision of multi cultures, make it clear that dance editors should fully absorb the cultural nourishment

of contemporary media culture, and have a deeper understanding of the relationship between dance and social culture, dance and daily life. At the same time, professional choreographer should pay extensive attention to details, especially what might in more conventional theater be called props, but which function as artifacts here, providing an opportunity for the audience members to explore the world and making the immersive theater doubles as an art installation and hands-on museum.

7. Conclusion

Immersive dance theatre, as an art product of the integration of information technology and multidisciplinary, is a highly advanced and contemporary cross-border art form. Facing the social changes such as COVID-19, there is a growing need for great works of art that go into the heart of the audience. Through the research on Contemporary Dance Choreography and Creation Strategy with the Development of Immersive Dance Theatre, it provides constantly updated ideas for improving the contemporary dance creation system, lays a more solid foundation for the joint creation of artists in different fields, and provides a useful reference for cross-border and interdisciplinary art practitioners, creators and researchers in the future.

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