

The Research on the Structural Forms of Dance

Donglin Jia, National Taiwan University of Arts, Taiwan

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Abstract

This paper which is about the dance structure is the summary of the author's practical experience, and could be regarded as a kind of theoretical exploration on the dance structure. It is presented mainly from the perspective of dance creation practice. However, research approaches used here are certainly interdisciplinary. To be more specific, the study refers to the discussion of the drama structure, and also analyzes some famous dancing works as well as the researcher's own works. To end, there comes an all-round summary of the dance structure in the way of combining theories with practice. As far as the researcher concerns, the forms of dance could be classified into two categories, the internal and external form. The internal form is the dance structure which always hides in the dancing works, while the external form refers to dance languages which can be seen or heard or perceived by others senses, such as the dance movement, costumes, stage design and music. This research is mainly aimed at the internal form of dance, that is, the discussion of the dance structure. The researcher hopes this study can bring at least the following three goals. First, in terms of the dance structure, the study can offer some operational methods that can be used for reference when dancers and choreographers create dancing works in future. Second, regarding the teaching of choreography, the study can provide much more abundant theoretical thoughts to enhance the teaching operability of choreography. Meanwhile, to instruct and inspire students in more effective ways when they are doing practical creation. Last but not least, the study is able to make a difference to the construction of the theory of dance forms.

Keywords: dance forms; dance structure; drama structure

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The paper is a kind of theoretical exploration on the dance structure. To expand and enrich the connotation of the dance structure, the researcher takes use of interdisciplinary approaches and refers to the discussion of the drama structure. What is the meaning of forms of dance? Simply speaking, it is the opposite of the content of dance which refers to the theme or story of the dance, the emotion and thought that the work wants to express, etc. It is a series of elements made up together that makes the theme, the story, the motion and thought of a piece of dance become a real dancing work. Those elements include not only the dance move, the structure and the scheduling of dance, but also the music, costumes, props and choreography and so on that are used in the dance.

The researcher categorizes forms of dance into the internal and the external forms. The internal form refers to the dance structure, which is hidden inside the dance and is invisible to the audience. It cannot be seen or touched or felt, but plays a truly significant role in choreographing, narrating stories, accumulating and foreshadowing moods and so on. Different with the former, the external form means dance languages. It is explicit and can be seen or heard or felt by the audience, including several elements such as the dance movement, scheduling, music, costumes, drama performing and so on. Among those dance languages, dance movement is throughout considered as the most important one. If thinking the internal form, the structure of dance, as the skeleton of the dance, then the external form is its flesh and blood. Those two together make up the dance forms as a whole body. The internal and external forms cooperatively generate the content of dance and give the dance the real meaning. In other words, dance is therefore filled with moods, spirits and values. Without the support of the internal form, no matter how much the accumulation of the elements of the external form, the dancing work would have had nothing meaningful. To sum up, the research on structural forms of dance is necessary and essential to choreographers.

There is a monograph in the field of drama named *The Construction and Deconstruction of Drama (2006)*. The author of the book sorts out dramas through the ages and then categorizes the forms of structure into the following eight kinds, 1) the structure of pure drama, 2) the epic structure, 3) the prose structure, 4) the poetic structure, 5) the film structure, 6) the play-within-a-play structure, 7) the ritual structure, 8) the social forum drama structure. Among these eight kinds, the first five could be put in the same class of the narrative dramatic structure, while the rest three belong to the theatrical dramatic structure. Due to space limitations, here we only talk about the first five structural styles.

As we all know, drama is an art of language while dance is the art of the body and movements. There is no drama without language, but dance can be performed without any words. From this point, the author of this paper can draw a conclusion that text and script are not of such importance to dance. In the general case, only some extraordinarily great works need the professional dance dramas scriptwriter to produce the text in advance. In usual, a piece of dance that lasts less than 15 minutes will not be prepared with a script. That is to say, the text of the dance is usually in the mind of the choreographer, or in the music, or in any other elements.

Although dance and drama have different ways of expression and creation, this does not hinder us to draw lessons from the drama structure type, reference on the structure

of the theatre to enrich the structure of dance creation, to make dance narration more vivid and varied. Below, Aiming to explore more possibilities in the structure forms of dance, the author of this study refers to the discussion of the structure in the region of drama, and also analyzes some famous dancing works as well as his own creations.

1.The Structure of Pure Drama.

In the book *The Construction and Deconstruction of Drama*, the pure dramatic structure refers to the oldest and most typical way of drama structure, in line with classical unities of time, location and event. *The Unity of the Action* which is put forward by Aristotle is particularly prominent. Throughout the whole story, the beginning, development, climax and the ending are very clear, and are integrated as one successfully. Structures of different historical period drama works such as The Greek tragedy, classical drama, and Henrik Johan Ibsen's creation and so on all belong to this kind of structure form. The magnum opuses include *Antigone*(c.411 BC), *Oedipus Rex*(c.430-425 BC), *A Doll's House*(1879).

The ballet *La Fille Mal Gardée* (1789) is the classical work of the pure dramatic structure. The work tells a story of a pair of young man and woman's free love. An honest kind-hearted rural girl Lisa, fell in love with a tenants Collins. Regardless of her grandmother's disapproval. The grandmother despised the poor and curried favour with the rich therefore she wanted to marry her granddaughter to rich miller's son, Alan. Collins hid in the straw bales to get into Lisa's house and made an appointment with her. Once they were madly in love, grandmother suddenly came home, in order to avoid her, he hid into the storeroom. Grandmother knew that Lisa won't marry miller's son, so she put her into storage as well. The miller took the son to put forward an engagement, opened the door of the storeroom, only found from the inside walked out a pair of lovers. In desperation grandmother granted their request, and blessed them.

The rhythm of *La Fille Mal Gardée* is Simple and compact, from the beginning, development, climax and end, the ring by ring, without the slightest procrastination waste. The play was born in 1789, the choreographer is Jean Dauberval from France, who is a student of Jean George Noverre, the master of Plot Ballet. The assertion of the Plot Ballet is that ballet is the drama with dance. The dance is in the service of the plot development, character is also as the plot to service. The development of the plot is the most important, so is the structure form. This is the very important characteristic of the pure dramatic structure. *La Fille Mal Gardée* is the work under this theory. It has a very simple, clear and compact drama structure and is a piece of dance work of the pure dramatic structure.

The researcher has created a work named *Intimates Women's Farewell Sadness*, which also belongs to this type. The work is created in 2012, for the 7th of college students' dance competition winning the first prize in Guangdong province. The work in the late Qing Dynasty in the Guangdong region of intimate women for the creation of objects, the Guangdong Women, if you don't want to get married, as long as after a called comb special ceremony, you can become intimates women. After becoming an intimates woman, you can no longer marry lifelong, get a kind of a free life; but at the same time you won't continue to live at home, you cannot go back home in your lifetime, after the death your tablet will not be placed at home either. Intimates

women also can't get married for life, if there are any violation, will sentenced to death the way organization related soak pig cage. Currently in Foshan, Huizhou, Guangdong and other places there are scattered dozens of surviving intimates women. The background of *Intimates Women's Farewell Sadness* is set in Guangdong in the late Qing Dynasty and early Republic of China, with a runaway daughter in order to avoid marriage pressure, volunteered to be intimates women's story as the main content. At the beginning of the dance, there is a relationship between escape and chase. The daughter ran away from wedding and her mother chased after to force her into a marriage. After the runaway the daughter hid into intimate female group, to join the ranks of intimate women. Mother found, from the hard-line force into the weak attitude cried, and now her daughter cried to ask her mother to agree with her decision. They both knew that after such a ceremony, they would be separated forever. A deep sorrow tears their hearts. How to make a choice between being free and making up a new family? The price of liberty is to abandon the family and kinship, while the price of accepting a new family is to marry a man without affection, spending the rest life in depress. This phenomenon is a bad habit in society, but does let thousands of families shattered.

In this work, marriage escape is the temporal setting. Then the place the daughter escapes to accounts to the location. Naturally, the parting situation of the mother and the daughter, the conflict between family and liberty consist of the event. From the views of "Three Unities", this work is in line with the theory of the structure of pure drama. In addition, it is necessary to be emphasized that the construction of theory is always later than the creative practice. That is to say, even in the field of drama, those theories of construction are flexible, rather than rigid. Therefore, when they are applied to interpret dancing works, there will and must be something improper. Please be understanding. And also, the work just lasts about seven minutes, which may lead to the development of the story not full enough. But overall, it is still a dancing work created by the researcher which is with the structure of pure drama.

2. The Epic Structure

Compared with the structure of pure drama, the framework of this structure is much looser. The pace of the play is also not so compact. Works of this type often break the limitation of time and space, but is freely composed by the hero's will. Plays in this type do not follow the rule made by Aristotle which has mentioned previously. In spite of the looser structure, works in this type are more philosophical. The representatives who create this kind of works are William Shakespeare(1564-1616), Johann Wolfgang Von Goethe(1749-1832) as well as Bertolt Brecht(1898-1956). And the masterpieces in this type include *King Lear*(1606), *Faust*(1808-1832), *A Life of Galileo* and so on.

Dance Drama *Wild Jujubes*(2004), the work which is directed by Zhang Jigang, is a masterpiece in this type. The story happens in the Yin family in the late Qing Dynasty. At the very beginning, the Yin family was wealthy in Jinzhong City, Shanxi Province, China. Gradually, the Yin family came down at this time. The widow Yin Shi lived with her little boy who was a little bit silly. The housekeeper saw such situation and intended to devour the property of the Yin family. So he wanted to let his illegitimate daughter Jujube marry the silly Yin Master. However, the smart and beautiful Jujube had been in love with a good hard-working little buddy. The boy

learnt step by step in the Yin and became a capable manager. And so he was sent outside to do the business for the Yin. At the time of parting, the housekeeper's daughter Jujube put some wild jujubes into a purse for the little man as a token of their love. But Jujube's this action was observed by the greedy housekeeper, so he poisoned in the purse when Jujube was unprepared. Two years later, Yin Shi was seriously ill, so the steward forced Jujube into getting married with the silly Yin Master by calling it was to joyous. Jujube, of course, desperately resisted the arrangement. So the steward told her that she was his illegitimate daughter. And also he told her that he had already poisoned her lover. Jujube thus thought the boy had been dead. With the death of Yan Shi and the fact that she was the illegitimate daughter of such a cruel evil, she cannot stand anymore and was crazy. But in actual, the young man was still alive. Soon after, he took his full treasure caravan passing by home. He took their token all the time, looking forward to the future. However, on the way back he met his sweetheart, the crazy Jujube, on the street. To evoke her memories, he ate the token and was unfortunately poisoned. On the trail, with the sunset, two young lovers left behind an eternal farewell of love and loyalty with their lives ending.

In 2014, the researcher created a small drama called *The Sunflower* which won the first batch of funding of the China National Arts Fund in 2014. The inspiration of this work is from the special groups such as the autistic, the depressed, the disabled, etc. The work contains four sections as following. 1) Preface: The Elegy. 2) Chapter1: Let's Run away from Here. 3) Chapter2: Come into My Arms! 4) Chapter3: The Sunlight Is Bright. The Sunflower Blooms Right. The entire work lasts 70 minutes long. Among these four parts, *Preface: The Elegy* is just a work with the epic structure. When creating this work, the researcher was badly disappointed and shocked by a variety of ugly social issues at that time. For example, on October 13th, 2012, in Foshan, Guangdong, a two year old little girl Yue Yue was rolled twice by two cars within around seven minutes. Eighteen passengers went by, but no one went on to save her. We do not know if they are afraid to save a life? Or they just don't want? Because in recent years, there occurs many cases that the kind rescuers are instead framed. But actually, there is no valid excuse for people's indifference to life. The only fact is that, due to the indifference of those passengers, the little girl lost her precious life. Although an old garbage grandma held up the girl recklessly once she found her, but it was too late to save her. This matter prompted the researcher to reflect on our social status. What happens to it? Why are people so indifferent to life? Why there is nobody but a garbage grandma? Is our life as worthless as garbage? Or only the people who live in the bottom of society still retain their reverence for life? The researcher compiled all of these reflections into this work to express the reverence for life, and to recall the good nature of human beings. In the work, there is an angel holding white flowers. Every time he meets different people, he gives flowers to them, and as well love. Although he encounters faces of indifference, he still shows everyone the original innocence and warmth. When a man falls down to the ground, he goes to help him up. However, the man instead of standing up, firmly clings to his leg so that he could not escape. The crowds, regardless of the context, denounce the angel together. Someone in the crowd shouts "where to run!", "Stop!", "Go!", in turn, the crowd form a cage unconsciously to trap the angel in. Is it really the clamor for justice? Or they just shout for a shout? Here, the researcher designs a plot that the angel finally escapes from the crowd leg seam, the cage is empty, but people still continue to clamor. With this design, people will think about

the deep thought the performance intends to deliver. It is also a way to present out the characters' mental activities. It was the mental activity of not only the angel, but also the audience. The researcher deliberately creates this kind of alienation effect to let the audience ponder the inner meanings.

3. The Prose Structure

The feature of prose can be described as “Form Loose but Idea Concentrative”, so does the prose structure of dance. Such dramas think the original appearance of life is bland and does not have so many intense conflicts. These works pay attention to the true nature, pursuing the exotic mood. Sometimes, "the commander of the play is neither a hero nor a central event, but rather a kind of mood wrapped in a strong atmosphere of poetics." Works created by Anton Pavlovich Chekhov(1860-1904), Eugene Gladstone O'Neill(1888-1953) and Lao She(1899-1966) are all of this type. And the masterpieces in this type are *Three Sisters*(1901), *Teahouse* and so on.

By 2015, the researcher created a dance theater work named *Looking Back* which theme is to go back home. China's reform and opening up has been conducted for three decades, which has brought great prosperity and rapid development of three decades. While people's living rapidly develops, there is inevitably a loss of some spiritual things such as the care for loved ones and neighbors, the firm faith and so on. Everything has materialized. A few decades ago, there were not only heirlooms, but also a heritage of spirit. But now, even the houses have become something can always traded, let alone the heirloom or other heritable things. Changes in the social consumption patterns promote the idea of people change a lot. People are obsessed with looking ahead and never look back. However, from a creator's personal experience, many wonderful romantic dance creations of the researcher originate from his life experiences in child. They are related to the memory of the hometown. When the creation encounters diverse bottlenecks, the technical part is often the easiest to solve. But to break the emotional bottleneck, looking back to the past and the deep inside of oneself is of necessity. That is to say, to the researcher, the meaning of the hometown is a very important source of inspiration. However, the researcher is reluctantly put in front of the reality that the rapid development of the social structure in hometown changes everything thoroughly. The change in material, together with the loved ones leaving, lets such feeling of the hometown even more intense. When the researcher looks back again, everything has changed too much. It is hard to find a way home any more. This work uses the dance-theatre expression, which has both dance and drama performance. But among these performance sections, there were not conflicts. The researcher just wants to review such precious memory by reproducing some past events into his dancing work, including *Vole's Tail*, *Fly away the Bed*, *Bed Falling Snow*, *Way Home*, *Die Team at the Entrance to the Village*, *the House Where I Grow*, *Another House*, *Trolley*, etc. There is no causal relationship between these sections, because they are just a series of real life show in childhood. *Looking Back*, from the internal structure, is the researcher's deliberate use of interdisciplinary knowledge to the creation of dance theater works.

4. The Poetic Structure

The poetic structure has some characteristics as following. Firstly, “it has neither a complete plot, nor a certain character”. There is even “no coherent and logical words”. The development and process of the dance creation is “just with the step of the producer’s emotion and spirit”. “This kind of structure does not emphasize the cause-and-effect linkage between the characters and the logic of story. The process of the creation is mainly based on the producer’s thoughts and emotions”. That is, the producer of the dance “makes up a series of movements which are less coherent but much more jumping according to nothing but only his emotions and thoughts. As a matter of fact, it is in literature the characteristics of poetry”. The master pieces of this kind of structure are Maurice Maeterlinck(1862-1949)’s work named *The Blind*(1890) and the work called *Waiting for Godot* which is from Samuel Beckett(1906-1989).

In the field of dance, the poetic dance is the type that has a poetic structure. The poetic dance, as the name suggests, refers to dance as the main means of art, integrated with music, choreography and other artistic means to create a dancing work which is full of the deep thoughts of the poem. What is more important in the producing process is to show the characters’ inner world and thoughts out with the way the poem always adopts. In addition, when the dance is aiming to show a certain life event, it should use excellent and concise movements just like those words selected to be used in the verse. Works of this type include pieces of great musical and epic dance like *The East Is Red*(1964), *The Road of Revival*(2009), etc. These works use the development of history as their clues. When create such a dancing work, the producer always retrieves some important invents as nodes, together with the use of music, dance, poetry readings and other art forms, to process and reproduce those events. Then all those events are going to be pieced together to finally work out an integrated and comprehensive art work that consists of diverse art forms such as music, dance, recitation, etc.

Although *The East Is Red* is called a great music and dance epic, the study here still categorizes the poetic dance into the type that has the poetic structure. In fact, the major distinguishing feature between the work with poetic structure and the work with epic structure is the purpose of creation. To give a further explanation, the work with poetic structure always aims to express the poetic mood and emotion with the use of poetic structure and words, while the work with epic structure aims to recount a fascinating story in the same manner. *The East Is Red* contains several stories about the history when Chinese nation suffered the deep misery. But as far as the researcher concerns, the intention to perform those stories is not to tell the audience the story itself, but to express deep emotions based on these stories. To boost the emotion and mood is the real inner purpose of the work.

5. The Film Structure

This kind of dance structure is closely related to the art form of film. Compared to the live drama performance in the theatre, the main feature of the film is to break the constraints of time and space to create a montage effect. There are many works in this type, such as *Equus*(1973) created by the English playwright Peter Shaffer(1926-), as well *The Emperor Jones*(1920) written by American playwright O’Neill who has been mentioned in the explanation of the prose structure.

The work *On Danfe* performed by the Compagnie Montalvo Hervieu is a typical dancing work with the film structure. In this work, the choreographer applies a lot of multimedia technology. The multimedia image here is not only used as a kind of stage background, but moreover it melts together with performance of the real dancers. The multimedia video has input lots of dance movements of those dancers in advance. While those real stage dancers perform the work in the theatre, the virtual images in the video take part in intermittently, so that the audience cannot distinguish the live performance and the virtual video. In addition, animals like elephants and giraffes are walking up and down in the multimedia video. They appear and disappear mysteriously, and thus, together with those real stage dancers, create a magical effect which is described as montage.

Frankly speaking, the author of the study suggests renaming the film structure as the montage structure. As is known to all, the movie or film is made according to the script, and the script itself has its unique form of structure. To take *Hamlet* and *Three Sisters* as examples, if they were both adapted and filmed, it would be obvious and clear that structures of these two films are not the same. *Hamlet* will be performed with the epic structure while *Three Sisters* with the prose structure. To sum up, the film structure could be viewed as the use and effect of montage. And so, it is reasonable to call this film structure as the montage structure.

Conclusion

These five types of the dance structure have been illustrated in detail throughout the whole passage. The study can be viewed as a kind of theoretical exploration on the dance structure with the help and reference from the field of drama. Except for using interdisciplinary knowledge and approaches, the researcher also emphasizes the scientificity of the study result. Meanwhile, the researcher tries to make sure that the theory and result of the study are practical and feasible in dance creating.

1. These structure forms are originally summarized into theory for plays in the field of drama. They are explained and summarized in their special background. Therefore, when they are applied to interpret dancing works, there will and must be something improper which can even cause some problems. In views of this situation, the researcher emphasizes two key points. The first is to learn from other disciplines with a kind of open, inclusive and modest attitude. And then, solve problems encountered in learning.
2. Creating a dancing work is truly complex and difficult. When you are producing a dancing work, you may refer to some experience, but there are no fixed patterns or routines. That is to say, the five forms mentioned above cannot explain structures of all dancing works, and they are also unable to restrict the possibilities in the future creation. The study is of utmost importance to provide the future dance creation with the reference value.
3. As is known to all, dancing works have different size. Naturally, there will be differences in structures. The structure of a great work may be huge and complex, which thus may contain different structures in every small section. In opposite, a small piece of work may have a relatively clear and simple structure. What deserves to be noticed all the time is that, no matter how great or simple

the work is, there are always some structural problems.

4. Apart from these five structure forms explained throughout the paper, there are some other typical dance structure such as the musical structure and the psychological structure and so on. Because there are already much many excellent and fantastic discussions on them which are made by many predecessors, the author here will no longer mention them.

In this study, the researcher makes a great and careful analysis of the content and forms of dance. What's more, with the long-time practice of teaching choreography and rich experience of creating dancing works, he makes a further thinking and exploration of the dance structure. Aiming to explore more possibilities in the dance structure, the author of this study refers to the discussion of the drama structure, and also analyzes some famous dancing works as well as his own creations. The author hopes the new result of this study could provide the future dance creation with a positive reference value. At the same time, the dance structure will be more flexible and diverse, and the dance creation level of choreographers can get a further improvement and a long-term development.

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