

Issues of Stage Space Organization in the System of Education of Future Choreographer

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Abstract

The article reveals the issues of spatial organization of a ballet performance and the specificity of compositional thinking of the future choreographer based on the spectacular nature of the theatrical image. We analyze the various components of spatiality created by the architectural environment of the stage, sculptural volume and angles of performers, color lighting, coloring, and linear perspective necessary for the competent and expressive construction of a choreographic work in the educational system. We analyze the educational methodology of compositional construction of the stage space: frontal, constructive, coloristic, and decorative levels, as shown by the most representative examples of the construction of ballet scenography created at the turn of the 19th–20th centuries. We emphasize the importance of studying and researching the spatial possibilities of the stage that enhance staging culture in the training process of choreographer directors.

Keywords: *Choreographic Space, Ballet Education Stage Direction, Stage Floor, Construction Methods, Dynamics, Synthesis of Arts.*

Introduction

The modern choreographic education field needs an active search for streamlining and systematization of the methodology of staging concepts of stage dance, updating the theatrical and dance language, referring to other types of plastic arts, and the positive experience in theatrical practice. These issues should be addressed at the stages of education in the choreographic directing major. Creating a visible image of a choreographic work and its stage atmosphere is impossible in a vague stage space. As a rule, the real environment plays a decisive role in its creation, created by scenographic (decorative) means.

The spectacular structure of ballet has its own specific features. The architecture of the ballet stage naturally tends toward spatiality. Like the space in a painting, the stage space plays the same organizing role in the portrayed plot. The unity of space and atmospheric (scenographic) environment, as well as the unity of lighting, is the main, unifying, and connecting factor of the audience's visual perception (Mercer, 2020).

Under the rendering of space, it is necessary to understand not only the scale and perspective change of figures and objects in it and not only its cubature and quadrature but the very condition of the surrounding environment of the actors' figures and objects (props, paraphernalia). This environment is crucial in conveying the distances between the two, as well as between the first, second, and far sides of the stage. Figures and objects under stage lighting, being completely or gradually absorbed as they are removed into the depths of space, constitute the same thing that the painter has to observe and render on the canvas to achieve a harmonious pictorial whole. Spatiality is one of the essential features of ballet synthesis, and the entire scenography of a choreographic performance is subordinated to it. Spatiality is supported by the sculptural form of the actors' figures in the stage architecture, as well as painting (scenery, color spots of costumes, artistic light) on the stage floor. This subordination is the essence of the scenographic synthesis of arts.

The purpose of this study is to consider the pedagogical system that promotes the mastering of the principles of choreographic space organization by students of the Ballet Directing major through the analysis of the synthesis of plastic arts included in the context of a unified staging process.

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In line with the purpose of the study, specific objectives were identified:

to actualize the novelty of the system approach in the study of the compositional construction of choreographic space;

to comprehend the problem of plastic arts synthesis and different methodological levels of stage space organization in the context of the choreographic education system;

to identify and systematize the positive conceptual experience of stage space construction in the scenography of ballets of the turn of the 19th–20th centuries.

Literature Review

Despite the seeming comprehensiveness of the available sources: monographs, textbooks, and manuals outlining the issues of ballet creativity and choreographic pedagogy, by authors such as G. D. Aleksidze (Aleksidze, 2013), G. V. Burtseva (Burtseva, 2000), R. V. Zakharov (Zakharov, 1976), I. G. Esaulov (Esaulov, 2015), J. J. Noverre (Noverre, 1965), A. V. Melekhov (Melekhov, 2015), I. V. Smirnov (Smirnov, 1986), V. I. Panferov (Panferov, 2017) and others, they are insufficient in terms of the dedicated study of spatial composition in classical dance.

If we turn to the pool of sources adjacent to our study, we can distinguish separate groups of publications. One of these presents methods and approaches to teaching creative disciplines that increase the internal motivation of students (Bejtic, 2019; Papaleontio, 2014; Marquis, Vajoczki, 2012) and explores an effective teaching style of choreography that increases creativity in universities. (Drazena, 2015; Amit, 2021).

Some papers address the problems of developing dramaturgical thinking through choreography (Bogdanov, 2010; Burge, 2016) and teaching choreography as a model of a continuous process (Butterworth, 2004), including in schools (Arjona, 2023).

Other works analyze research in the field of dance education (Yurieva, Makarova, 2010; Dogorova, 2006; Sally, 2007; Banevičiūtė, 2015).

Finally, another segment of publications deals with specific issues that consider stage space in one way or another (Grigoryants, Kiseleva, 2003; Rubidge, 2011; Hasgül, 2016; Lyangolf, 2019; Viaud-Delmon, Mason, Noisternig, 2011; Schiller, 2003).

Other works analyze research in the field of dance education (Yurieva, Makarova, 2010; Dogorova, 2006; Sally, 2007; Banevičiūtė, 2015; Heiland, 2024) and improving the professional competence of the future choreographic group leader (Sidikova & Adasheva, 2023).

Finally, another segment of publications deals with special issues that in one way or another consider stage space (Grigoryants & Kiseleva, 2003; Rubidge, 2011; Hasgül, 2016; Längolf, 2019; Viaud-Delmon, Mason, Noisternig, 2011; Schiller, 2003; Pedersen, 2024). There are works that focus on the psychology of dance (Dako, 202; Hermans, 2021) and the search for its somatic values (Fraleigh, 2021; Ravn, 2020; McMains, 2021; Mattingly, 2023).

The analysis of the available literature shows that national art history still lacks definitions of such historically established concepts as "choreographic space", "model of choreographic thinking", and "status of plastic arts in ballet theater". With all the uniqueness of the Russian choreographic culture experience, the lack of development of the above-mentioned issues in the system of choreographic education led to the choice of the topic of this study.

Research Methodology

The main method of research is the integrative one, which allows to highlight different variants of spatial expressiveness in the stage synthesis and, at the same time, to show their interacting unity.

The method of system analysis enabled us to consider the author's choreographic concepts of the late 19th–early 20th centuries, underlying the traditional and non-traditional pedagogical teaching systems of M. Fokine, S. Lifar, L. Myasin, B. Nijinskaya, and developing the space in synthesis with the thinking of ballet performance artists.

Results

The main goal of forming new, necessary creative skills in student choreographers is to create dance compositions in different parameters of choreographic spatiality. The unification of painting, sculpture, and architecture gives rise to the unification of two different forms of spatiality: the real spatiality created by the architectural environment of the stage, the sculptural volume of the dancers and color lighting, and the pictorial (illusory) spatiality created by painting; its style, composition, and color. The organization of scenographic ballet spatiality depends on the genre of the choreographic performance. Visual arts manifested or included in the genre structure of ballet theater help in the creation of scenographic spatiality. This is how the crafted global space of the ballet performance emerges. In mastering space, students need to understand the plastic and imaginative texture of ballet not as a random mechanical coupling of elements of the language of fine arts with the genre basis, but as a thoughtful, meaningful, and consistent interaction of all visual aspects of the work. Their interaction is not a static phenomenon but a dynamic process. "A spectacle is always something on which people's attention is focused, which attracts their active interest expressed in sustained contemplation of what is happening" (Andreeva, 2002, p. 8). Achieving the necessary contact with the audience so that a tense field emerges between the stage and the auditorium, in which only genuine, deep, rather than superficial communication is possible, is the main task of the artist and choreographer. I. Andreeva's thought can serve as an essential methodological principle in the approach to analyzing the phenomena of ballet scenography. This is confirmed by the experience of its development and especially by the period of the turn of the 19th–20th centuries. We mean the problem of interrelation of specific, genre, and compositional principles in scenography. The whole range of these questions is included in the task of compositional activity, which in turn includes several independent creative aspects and pursuits. It is through the development and discovery of new compositional regularities and phenomena, methods, and techniques that it is possible to realize such achievements in the ballet scenographic space. The term "composition," meaning the combination, the joining of parts into a whole, is used in both the visual arts and dance. Based on life impressions, both the artist and the choreographer create a spectacular picture by combining disparate elements into a single visual and expressive form, subordinating it to their idea. All elements (components) of acts, pictures, and episodes, without exception, are considered from the point of view of pictorial expressiveness. Composition becomes the most active conductor in the performance and the active exponent of ballet synthesis. The ballet master can boldly and originally use a complex of compositional means and techniques characteristic of fine arts: the unfolding of action, alternation of contrasting and nuanced scenes, use of symmetry and asymmetry, fast or slow change of episodes, playing with details, and perspective vision. While working on a performance, the choreographer and the artist have to solve a whole set of problems from placing the figures of performers and objects on the plane of the stage to revealing their characteristic tone, taking into account the lighting and the environment. Compositional laws, techniques, and means directly borrowed from the fine arts (compositional center, laws of linear, air and color perspective, isolation technique, and the law of the impact of the frame) teach choreographers a lot. This includes finding the compositional center and its place in the image, the use of the technique of isolation of figures on the stage floor, the subordination of all details to a single compositional concept, the construction of corps de ballet scenes depending on the laws of linear, air and color perspective. Finally, the ballet takes into account the law of the impact of the frame in the stage space (it can be changed using backstage). The rectangle of the stage box turns into a window from which we see the world animated by the choreographer's will. The choreographic scenes taken from the performance are a sort of model of picturesque paintings, where the characters are in some

kind of cause-and-effect relationship. They are useful to the choreographer because they allow them to see how visual, expressive, and clear they are in terms of composition. They give a good chance to build the logic of the plots.

So, a ballet performance, just like a painting, can be complex in composition and staging. This is how N. Elyash evaluates the knowledge of composition in the choreography of M. Petipa: "Here I want to digress a little and turn to Petipa's mass compositions, striking complexity, the beauty of the pattern, and the organicity of the interweaving of lines. This pattern acts not only as an art form but also carries an undeniable imagery of its own. In these expanded ensembles, the development of the dance theme begins: a special correlation not only of linear constructions but also of paired dances, the separation of small ensembles, with their deep connection to the whole, that is, what we can safely call choreographic polyphony" (Elyash, 1992, p 15). It is thought that many scientific publications and works on composition in fine arts could be used by students as materials and sources for choreographers (practically all compositional laws, rules, techniques, and means are universal in fine arts, arts and crafts, architecture, and ballet). Because of their spectacular nature, they penetrate the organizational structure of dance. "There are no rules, much less laws, for organizing stage space, as far as I know. Each time the stage director, most often together with the scenic designer, thinks over and finds a solution for the stage space, based on the peculiarities of the place of the future performance but at the same time remembers that their solution should allow them to build spatial plasticity", notes A. A. Rubb in his reflections on the design of spectacular productions. (Rubb, 2004, p.387). Ballet theater (especially in the late 19th–early 20th centuries) has a great experience in creating a variety of spectacular forms. But even with all the diversity of ballet scenography can be grouped into types in spatial and compositional terms. The development of a compositional theme in ballet usually generates the general principle of the scenographic solution.

In our opinion, the methods and forms of compositional development of the internal space of the ballet stage can be frontal, constructive, coloristic, and decorative. The stage space, which develops in time, is based primarily on its composition. It establishes the dominant principle of space development: horizontally or in-depth (this is determined by the choreographer's plan and the topography of the stage). The authors are gradually solidifying in their minds the desired variants of the scenography of a ballet performance: integral synthetic compositions, unified dynamic, plastic, and plot dramatic constructions, organically reuniting all possible expressive means based on a well-thought-out rhythmic pattern. Here it is necessary to actively develop choreographers' "compositional and spatial thinking" so that they can embody and convey their author's thoughts and ideas through the plastic possibilities of dance.

The frontal method of compositional construction of ballet space is characteristic of choreographic numbers, miniatures, études, and single-act ballets without a scenery backdrop. In the composition of such a scenographic space, there is only the first plane (the front half of the stage by the ramp) and the second plane (the second half of the stage by the background). In this type of construction, there is a horizontal (frieze) development of space; at the same time, the figures of the artists are three-dimensional. This can be seen in the choreography of the early twentieth century: *Las Meniñas* by G. Fauré (1910), choreographed by L. Myasin and designed by K. Socrates; *Roméo et Juliette* by K. Lambert (1926), choreographed by B. Nijinska and designed by M. Ernst; *Barabau* by V. Rieti (1925), designed by M. Utrillo; *The Triumph of Neptune* by D. Berners (1926), designed by A. Shervashidze: all choreographed by J. Balanchine; etc. In the same group, we should include performances with the presence of painted scenery (as a rule, not spatially developed) with the organization of movement of artists in a rhythmic and profile direction. Vivid examples are the scenography of the reviewed ballets of the turn of the 19th-20th centuries in the choreography of M. Fokine: *Cléopâtre* by A. Arensky; *L'Après-midi d'un faune* by C. Debussy; *Daphnis et Chloé* by M. Ravel, designed L. Bakst, as well as the following plays: *Pastorale* by J. Orík (1926), choreographed by J. Balanchine and designed by P. Pryuna; *Zéphyr et Flore* by V. Dukelsky (1925), choreographed by L. Myasin and designed by J. Braque; *Le Bal* by R. Rieti (1929), choreographed by J. Balanchine and designed by G. Chirico; etc. The composition of this scenographic space incorporates mainly the sculptural-graphic technique of artistic design and choreographer's thinking, although decorative manifestations are also observed in it.

We see a different approach to solving the compositional problem of space in the works of the authors who set themselves the task of constructive construction of the artistic image. The main means of spatial scenographic solution are the figures of actors, objects, and constructions on the stage; their arrangement on the plane, when the distance is counted from one figure to another, from one object to another (they are interchangeable). The treatment of all material objects is characterized by great material concreteness; it is not based on illusory color changes dissolved by the stage environment but rather on a system of color relations that convey volumes free of random optical changes. This is a horizontal development of space rather than an in-depth one, although depth can be created by the background, and decoration is implicit in this kind of compositional thinking. The scenery is usually flat and constructive; it is built on contrasts, creating a balance in the picture field of the stage. Harmony of abstract geometric forms in various combinations is also used in space to create strong expressive images. The scenery does not give the effect of depth and spatiality, merging with the second plan of the stage floor. It can be compared to a panel or mosaic in the space of an architectural interior. In this type of construction of scenographic space, realistic scenery opens up a third (landscape or architectural) perceived (rather than objectively existing) plan, which can be compared to the technique of tempera or fresco in the space of an architectural interior, which is hardly applicable. Examples are the scenographic design of ballets: *Renard* by I. Stravinsky (1922); *Les Noces* by I. Stravinsky (1923), choreographed by B. Nijinska and designed by N. Goncharova; *La chatte* by A. Sauguet (1927), choreographed by J. Balanchine and designed by N. Gabo and A. Pevzner; *Le pas d'acier* by S. Prokofiev (1927), designed by G. Yakulov; and *Ode* by N. Nabokov (1928), designed by P. Chelishchev and choreographed by L. Myasin. The constructive construction of scenographic space is based on the authors' architectural and graphic thinking. It is only supplemented by decorative and pictorial elements.

The next, coloristic principle of building ballet scenography is based on color nuances as one of the effective means of realistic composition (in terms of showing space). It is used when it is necessary to not emphasize the nodal moments of the image but to create smooth transitions in the compositional and figurative solution of the ballet performance instead. Four plans of depth construction are used here, rather than three. The fourth plan is usually the horizon on a depicted scenery or the use of several perspective sceneries instead of a single backdrop. Elements of air and color perspective are indispensable elements of the coloristic structure of scenography. This principle can be likened to the watercolor picturesqueness of an easel painting that extends the space into the depths. This is the most indicative principle of the spatial construction of the stage and the scenographic solution. It covers a wide range of ballets from the late 19th–early 20th centuries, created upon both nuanced and contrasting color relationships. These are primarily ballets designed by K. Korovin with choreography by A. Gorsky: *Swan Lake* by Tchaikovsky (1901); *Scarlet Flower* by F. Hartmann (1908); *Raymonda* by A. Glazunov (1908); *Le Corsaire* by A. Adam (1912); *Nutcracker* by P. Tchaikovsky (1919); etc., as well as Fokinsky performances in the design of A. Benois and L. Bakst: *Les Sylphides* by F. Chopin (1909); *Petrushka* by I. Stravinsky (1911); *Schéhérazade* by N. Rimsky-Korsakov (1910); *Giselle* by A. Adam (1910); *Carnaval* by R. Schumann (1910); *Le Spectre de la rose* by K. Weber (1911); *Narcisse* by N. Tcherepnin (1911); etc.

This compositional principle is particularly effective in the creation of open-air ballets, where topographical, landscape, architectural, and other features, including the size of the stage space, play a major role. There is no usual stage box, scenery, curtain, or machinery here, hence other methods and means of impact on the audience are used. The coloristic principle can be called the most effective technique for arranging an open space. The spatial and coloristic arrangement of scenography includes the pictorial, as well as the adjacent decorative and pictorial method of staging.

Finally, the decorative principle of the stage ballet space organization converges with the constructive method in terms of the plane solution of the backdrop but differs from it by a pronounced stylization of space. On the set, we observe the image in a two-dimensional format and only based on visual experience we can complete our impressions. For example, we can do it by the ratio of nearby and more distant objects, the contrast of images, the nature of light shading, and other features. Nonetheless, the flat image on stage reminds us that it has no depth, and, therefore, is not real. This technique is comparable to the patterned origins of carpet, ornamental painting, and folk crafts; it is characterized by a two-plane solution of space.

However, in the late 19th–early 20th centuries, ballet scenography of this type proposed and skillfully developed its system of correlations of shadow, light, and color, its concept of correlation between life and stylization, art, and a spontaneous sense of reality. The authors, walking along the line of symbolic and allegorical, along the line of complicated conventionality, confine the scenographic space in the frame of the stage and at the same time concentrate everything visible inside it, as in the compositional center.

A vivid expression of the decorative principle can be seen in the work of artists who worked on the design of Diaghilev's ballet performances: *Le Miroir magique* by A. Koreschenko (1903), choreographed by M. Petipa and designed by A. Gorsky; *L'Oiseau de feu* by I. Stravinsky, choreographed by M. Fokine and designed by A. Golovin and L. Bakst; *Le sacre du printemps* by I. Stravinsky (1913) choreographed by V. Nijinsky and designed by N. Roerich; *Soleil de Nuit* by N. Rimsky-Korsakov (1915), *Les contes russes* by A. Lyadov (1917), choreographed by L. Myasin and designed by M. Larionov; *Chout* by S. Prokofiev (1921), choreographed and designed by M. Larionov, etc. The decorative principle of ballet scenography includes decorative and graphic, decorative and pictorial, and actual decorative interpretation of artistic design. It can be called the most all-encompassing among the compositional and spatial solutions we have identified.

The inclusion of various assignments offering students many opportunities for creative expression and experimentation with different styles and genres of dance in the space of the stage will help them to form intellectual and creative abilities in the practical course. After all, depending on the nature of the tasks set, the ballet master determines the compositional scheme of the performance, each time finding new solutions. "Each performance is the discovery of a new system of patterns", noted O. Remez (Remez, 1982, p. 103). It requires no proof that creating the atmosphere of a ballet is the most important undeniable function of directing, a touchstone that reveals the maturity of a director's skill. The details and nuances of the atmosphere should be deposited in the viewer's perception, connect with others, gather into a coherent feeling, and be materialized into close attention to the stage events. This is especially important in ballets where there are many, by no means minor characters. A ballet can be "well-staged" when the super task is understood, when the ballet master's art and visual style is only a facet of the synthetic realization, in which the features of the actor's performance, the character of lighting, the rhythm of movement and plastic action, etc. appear together. Ballet style should be understood as a single, common technique for the performance. It should not only be composed and conceived, but also understood as if from within, feeling its necessity in this particular work. Then, it will appear in the viewer's perception as an integral artistic image, characterized by the novelty of the solution, the unexpectedness of the means, and the absence of cliché techniques and borrowings. The diversity of stylistic, compositional, and genre techniques makes it easy to change the tone of the scenographic narrative.

Discussion

Thus, as the study shows, the direct contact of species and genre elements of the language of fine arts in ballet theater is accompanied and reinforced by compositional and figurative links. The development of an art form within types and genres raises the need for an equally complex synthetically imaginative interaction. In other words, this need leads to further development of the figurative structure of ballet scenography, strengthening the interrelations in the morphological system of ballet synthesis of arts. That is why it is so important to study the compositional and figurative language of the visual arts in ballet, its expressive and figurative possibilities that increase the artistic and staging culture of a ballet performance. This process is not finished, indicating the diversity of artistic searches, aspects, and reserves. Speaking of compositional possibilities, we should bear in mind that the most general abstract order organizing the stage space is an objective quality that does not exist independently of the inhabitants of this space (dancer performers). This order affects them in the course of the theatrical action. The regularity is manifested in the organization of space, in the dynamics of dance as opposed to its statics, in the tectonic sense and atectonic tendencies, and, finally, in large-scale comparisons. All these significant characteristics create specific elements of stage space, and they also determine the compositional and figurative possibilities of the synthesis of the arts. It is in the dynamics of polar oppositions and in their dialectical unity that ballet scenography can convey meaningful images that form the basis for the formation and emergence of spectator emotions. This

activation of the image and figurative side of a ballet performance is mostly implemented in a strong manifestation of the personality of the artist and the choreographic director.

The thoughtfulness of plasticity, ability to create atmosphere, and emotionally subtle and non-standard artistic design are all evidence of the maturity of skill of the ballet master and the artist, of their purely individual handwriting. Hence, the organization of stage space is a twofold creative process. Undoubtedly, a talented artist is the main figure in the performance design process. However, the visual style of the choreography is also determined by the director's vision. That's why it's so important for an artist to work with a good choreographer and, vice versa, why it's so important for a choreographer to work with a good artist. It all depends on how resourcefully and expediently they both utilize the artistic and staging possibilities of their stage.

Therefore, the educational and creative work of students should also include research activities: participation in master classes, conferences, and festivals; the ability to talk about various topics of creativity and art, analyze and evaluate choreographic performances. At the same time, it is necessary to be able to go as far as possible into the study of the peculiarities of creating compositions and staging dance works. For this purpose, future choreographer directors need to know the history of world choreographic art. Before embarking on staging work, a student choreographer should familiarize themselves with the work of famous choreographers and ballet masters, understanding their mindset that is necessary for the success of the work.

Thus, the practical significance of our work lies in the possibility of incorporating the results of the study into the theoretical concept of pedagogy of choreographic culture. The materials of the analysis can be used in the development of educational lecture courses on staging work of a ballet master, art history of choreography, choreographic training methodology, etc.

Conclusions

To conclude our deliberations, it is necessary to define the aspects of the integrity that the stage process represents, to the student's understanding. We will refer to each of its integral parts as a "whole". These parts make up a more complex spatial and compositional figurative unity. At the same time, we must not forget that the stage process and its integral parts are not abstract categories but the vibrant life of art in endless combinations of singular and unique phenomena marked by specificity. The concept of the scenographic process includes, first of all, the art itself (the clash of artistic methods, the coexistence of artistic styles, directions, and genres in their dialectical changes and crossings). Scenography is the centerpiece of the many potentials of choreography. The stage space can be seen as a given, as something complete, unchanging, and facing the audience directly. This aspect of the scenographic process can be called the organizational whole.

The components of the scenographic narrative (space, color, light, props, mise-en-scenes, episodes, dance plasticity, dynamics of action, rhythmic structure, transformation of decorative components in the course of action, etc.) are always unique. At the same time, the compositional and figurative types of scenographic design that we have considered above allow us to identify an aspect of scenography that can be designated as a typological whole.

The stage process cannot be understood if one is distracted from the creative laboratory of the artist, from comparing the conception with the final result, from evaluating the reasons influencing this result, and from analyzing the complex interaction of the components of a ballet performance. It is important not to lose the sense of unity and always be aware of the correlations of the components and their dynamics characteristic of ballet.

Finally, it is impossible to understand stage space and its potential in isolation, outside of its relationship to the other arts. The fruitful feature of this whole is in the tangible, visible "outputs" in the diverse fields of fine arts, decorative and applied arts, and architecture.

The problem of synthesis of ballet scenography components is directly related to its image and is defined by the combination of the specific subject basis of the stage ballet space and the sequential transformation of the author's idea, starting from the setting of creative tasks and compositional concept and ending with the synthesis of all components.

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