

INFORMATION TO USERS

This manuscript has been reproduced from the microfilm master. UMI films the text directly from the original or copy submitted. Thus, some thesis and dissertation copies are in typewriter face, while others may be from any type of computer printer.

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted. Broken or indistinct print, colored or poor quality illustrations and photographs, print bleedthrough, substandard margins, and improper alignment can adversely affect reproduction.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send UMI a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if unauthorized copyright material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.

Oversize materials (e.g., maps, drawings, charts) are reproduced by sectioning the original, beginning at the upper left-hand corner and continuing from left to right in equal sections with small overlaps. Each original is also photographed in one exposure and is included in reduced form at the back of the book.

Photographs included in the original manuscript have been reproduced xerographically in this copy. Higher quality 6" x 9" black and white photographic prints are available for any photographs or illustrations appearing in this copy for an additional charge. Contact UMI directly to order.

U·M·I

University Microfilms International
A Bell & Howell Information Company
300 North Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48106-1346 USA
313/761-4700 800/521-0600

PREVIEW

Order Number 1348826

**Choreography for the camera: An historical, critical, and
empirical study**

Carter, Vana Patrice, M.A.

Western Michigan University, 1992

PREVIEW

Copyright ©1992 by Carter, Vana Patrice. All rights reserved.

U·M·I
300 N. Zeeb Rd.
Ann Arbor, MI 48106

PREVIEW

**CHOREOGRAPHY FOR THE CAMERA: AN HISTORICAL,
CRITICAL, AND EMPIRICAL STUDY**

by

Vana Patrice Carter

**A Thesis
Submitted to the
Faculty of The Graduate College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the
Degree of Master of Arts
Department of Communication**

**Western Michigan University
Kalamazoo, Michigan
April 1992**

THE GRADUATE COLLEGE
WESTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY
KALAMAZOO, MICHIGAN

Date December 15, 1990


WE HEREBY APPROVE THE THESIS SUBMITTED BY

Vana Patrice Carter

ENTITLED Choreography for the Camera: An Historical, Critical,
and Empirical Study

AS PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE
DEGREE OF Master of Arts

Communication
(Department)


Major Thesis Adviser


Thesis Committee Member


Thesis Committee Member

APPROVED


Dean of The Graduate College

Date April 1992

Copyright by
Vana Patrice Carter
1992

PREVIEW

CHOREOGRAPHY FOR THE CAMERA: AN HISTORICAL, CRITICAL, AND EMPIRICAL STUDY

Vana Patrice Carter, M.A.

Western Michigan University, 1992

This study investigates whether a dance choreographer's lack of knowledge of film, television, or video theory and technology, particularly the capabilities of the camera and montage, restricts choreographic communication via these media.

First, several film and television choreographers were surveyed. Second, the literature was analyzed to determine the evolution of dance on film and television (from the choreographers' perspective). Third, shooting and editing theories that maximize kinesthesia were examined.

Three primary conclusions were drawn: (1) Historically, choreographers of critically acclaimed film or television products seemed to understand major principles for shooting and montage; (2) choreographers who expanded their knowledge of film or television production theory and technology tended to assume more control over directing and editing; and (3) most of the surveyed choreographers perceived the communicative value of their dances to increase with their increased participation in aspects of production other than dance. Five secondary conclusions describe desirable conditions for quality dance and film, television, or video productions.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The completion of this document would not have been possible without the support of my friends and colleagues. Although Clara Gamble retired in the process and was unable to be a part of the final approval, she and Wendy Cornish, both dancers/choreographers, were women who enthusiastically supported the idea of this study. They always held their eyes open brightly so I could catch my own reflection. Dr. Steven Lipkin, Dr. Thomas Pagel, and Dr. Steven Rhodes (my thesis committee) stood by me patiently and often offered the words of advice and encouragement that forced me to forge through my vague assumptions and biased ranting to produce a crystallized set of theories for dance communication. My family (mother, Catherine; father, Fred; and brother, Eric Vincent) constantly kept me aware of the relationship of this study and my purpose on this planet: Ma, a dancer herself, simply wanted somebody to start making good ol' dance musicals again like the movies she grew up on, and knew, intuitively, that they were far better than what was being produced today; Daddy, a scholar, knew that dancing alone would not be a strong enough vehicle to allow me to express fully my innate sense of aesthetics (as well as be recognized for such) particularly being a black female; lovingly, Eric just harped on my nerves (sometimes nicely and sometimes not so nicely) regarding the immense marketability of my talents, if I ever finished the thing. Many compassionate loved ones listened and consoled

Acknowledgements--Continued

me in times of need, among these people are: (my first typist) Dondra Tenniswood; (boy friend during the first year) Greg Kanipe; (best friend in "the zoo") Donna Jean Russau; (the man who gave me my first shot at producing, directing, and editing) Jim Heyden; (saving grace) Mo-Maureen Murphy; and (home-stretch typist) Alashar Waltz. Regarding this thesis I am thankful for God's blessings, these people, the choreographers and writers whose combined works are this study, and many others who helped me out in one way or another.

Vana Patrice Carter

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	ii
CHAPTER	
I. INTRODUCTION.....	1
Statement of the Problem.....	5
Definitions.....	6
Preview.....	8
II. METHODS.....	9
Procedures.....	9
The Review Process.....	10
Summary of Review Process.....	13
Questionnaire.....	13
Pilot Study.....	14
Participants.....	14
Summary of Chapter II.....	15
III. RESULTS.....	17
Part I: Historical/Critical Analysis.....	17
Film/Television/Video and Dance Types.....	17
Evolution of the Adaptation.....	21
Hollywood Choreographers Direct.....	26
Why Choreograph for the Camera.....	33

Table of Contents--Continued

CHAPTER

Construction of Images.....	39
Juxtaposition of Images.....	47
Summary Part I: Historical Choreographer's Perspective.....	58
Film and Television Theories for Dance.....	58
Summary: The Choreographer and the Production Process.....	59
Part II: Survey Results.....	60
Response Rate.....	61
Survey Part I: Choreographers' Background.....	61
Survey Part II: Typical Working Situation.....	64
Survey Part III: Feelings Regarding Production.....	68
Methods and Techniques.....	68
Survey Part IV: Opinions Regarding Production.....	73
Methods and Techniques.....	73
Summary of Part II.....	79
IV. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....	81
Primary Conclusions.....	81
Secondary Conclusions.....	82
Number One.....	83
Number Two.....	83

Table of Contents--Continued

CHAPTER	
Number Three.....	84
Number Four.....	84
Number Five.....	85
Recommendations Regarding F/T/V & D in General.....	86
APPENDICES.....	91
A. Instrument.....	91
B. Surveyed Responses.....	97
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	105

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

"The Dance is an animate composition in space. Dancing is movement made significant; technique [is] used to express spiritual content in intelligible form" (Armitage, 1969, p. 1).

"The function of dance is communication.... Communication is not meant to tell a story or to project an idea, but to communicate experience by means of action and perceived by action" (Armitage, 1969, pp. 83-84).

Early in my performing career, I found myself wondering why a dance was shot for film or television from a particular perspective when the dance had not been choreographed to be viewed from that perspective. The limitations or perspective of the camera seemed frustrating. Artistic statements communicated through the choreography were often lost in the transformation of the dance from the rehearsal studio to the television set. I blamed the director. I imagined how upset the choreographer must have been to see how the television version failed to reveal the visual intent of the movement.

Dancers were often upset because they were framed or edited out of scenes. Many times the amount of energy they had put into their dancing was not evident. Some dances seemed to have been "ruined" because of inappropriate filming methods or editing. This caused dancers to be disappointed with the finished

product. The director shot what he/she wanted to shoot, and we were not to expect the choreographer's perspective to be shown. I personally settled into the notion that "that was just the way things were."

During the rehearsal of my first television special, the director came in, giving notes to his assistant while watching us perform the complete dance routines. The choreographer described the effects of the costumes and the spacing. The director came back another day and called cues to his assistant while we performed the routines. Later, the choreographer told us to perform for the studio audience and not to be concerned with the cameras. We were told the camera view would be randomly changing. We were told not to look into the camera. We were not told where the cameras would be. I concluded that the choreographer really did not know what was going on. It was no wonder the dance scenes seen later on television replays were so disappointing to many of us.

Such experiences led me to think that the choreographer either trusted the director or that choreographers did not care what happened to the dance once it was choreographed. From what I could surmise, choreographers did not stage the movements to be filmed in a specific way. It was usually staged to be performed in one direction. It was the director who made camera angle and shot decisions.

I questioned how a choreographer could allow any dancer to be cropped out of a frame. It was difficult for me to understand why our intricate footwork was ignored in favor of medium close-ups of our upper bodies. I was told by dancers,

who had been in the business longer than me, that sometimes entire dances did not appear in the final version of many feature films, that dance sequences are often left on the cutting room floor.

The stage choreographer has quite a bit of control over the final form in which the dance is presented. The dance is choreographed for the proscenium arch. The view of the work is from one angle, that beyond the proscenium wall. The choreographer stages the work with that single factor in mind. Theatrical stage or concert stage choreography was created for a clearly defined point of view.

Fresh out of college, I could not understand why such artists compromised their work. Was it solely for the money they were able to earn? Fortunately, I began to work for choreographers who were also directors, and other choreographers who appeared to work closely with directors. These choreographers were active in the production process. They provided the dancers direction for the camera. One choreographer even videotaped rehearsals. Others choreographed in segments to allow for editing. Some knew ahead of time where the cameras would be and when the view would be switched from one camera to another. They were, therefore, able to help us rehearse with an awareness of the position of the camera prior to shooting the dance. Because these choreographers had directing abilities, in time, I could almost envision the end product. I admired those with perceptions of the whole as well as parts of the production.

I was fortunate enough to have worked with a couple of choreographers

who directed and choreographed good dances for film and television. Whether or not they had formal training or a technical background in film or television production, I did not know. I postulated that more production knowledge could be the answer to improving the aesthetic communication of dance on film or television.

Each choreographer handled his or her role differently. Many found it necessary to make suggestions to the director in order to present parts of the dance in a certain way. Others were more reluctant. Some were not given the opportunity to make suggestions. The experienced television choreographers had learned to choreograph movement that was visually effective from several angles. Often movements were changed or adjusted during shooting when the selected camera angle did not complement the choreography. Still, I found it hard to understand how or why choreographers would create dances and then risk allowing their work to be changed by those insensitive to dance. Later, I began to perceive these artists as victims, as opposed to my earlier perception of them as, more or less, apathetic sellouts. They were individuals with a sense of artistic integrity, but for the most part, they seemed to lack film or television skills, resources, or political savvy. I observed that the choreographers, who were able to direct or collaborate with a director, either knew more about the media or they knew the right director who asked their advice.

It was not until after I had personally choreographed for television that I truly began to understand the value of technical knowledge. In the commercial

film and television industry, dances were learned and rehearsed in a very short period of time and shot as quickly as possible.

Could it be that some film and television choreographers were unable to communicate fully their ideas because of what they did not know about the production process? It was at this point that I began to search beyond my personal experiences and observations. I knew that all dance on film and television was not miscommunicated. As my understanding of the production process increased, so did my curiosity.

My desire to help preserve the artistic value of an original choreographic idea forced me to want to examine the involvement of the choreographer in the film and television production process, and to examine production practices. It became important to me to find out how past choreographers were able to produce quality work. In addition, investigating today's film and television choreographers' means of bringing their vision of dance to life appeared to be a way to determine how things had evolved.

My concerns were the impetus for this study and led me to propose the following statement of the problem.

Statement of the Problem

A dance choreographer's lack of knowledge of film, television, or video theory and technology, particularly the capabilities of the camera and montage, restricts choreographic communication via the film, television, or video medium.

In order to focus on this problem, I set about to answer the following questions:

1. What has characterized, historically, the relationship between the choreographer and the film and television production process?
2. What shooting and editing theories would most benefit the film and television choreographer?
3. What encompasses today's choreographers' perceptions and knowledge regarding film, television, and/or video production process for dance?

Definitions

The following definitions serve to clarify the use of certain terms throughout this thesis.

Choreographer: The composer, arranger, and director of dance movement.

Collaboration: When television/film workers work jointly and the responsibility for decisions is divided.

Continuity: Matching the precise relationship of time and/or space from one shot to the next.

Dance: (a) To move the body rhythmically, and (b) any ordered or random succession of movements.

Director: One who directs the talent and is responsible for developing the look and sound of the film or videotape.

Dynamic articulation: An edit where (a) one of the two shots displays a

moving camera or subject/object, (b) both shots display movement, and (c) the speed of movement varies because of the camera's distance to the subject/object from one shot to the other.

Editing: The selection and assembly of shots in a logical sequence.

F/T/V & D: This acronym will be utilized throughout this document to abbreviate the phrase Film/Television/Video and Dance, which refers, collectively, to any dance and film product, dance and television product, dance and video product, dance and film and television product, or dance and video and television product.

Kinesthesia: The sensation of bodily tension or movement perceived through nerve ends in the muscles, tendons, and joints.

Permutation: The arrangement of subjects/objects, or the perspective of the arrangement of subjects/objects in a shot.

Static articulation: An edit from one static shot of static subjects/objects to another shot of static subjects/objects.

Three stages of film and television production: (1) Pre-production/preparation--the phase of production when planning, budgeting, financing, scheduling, scripting, organizing and rehearsing are accomplished; (2) production/shooting--the phase of production when the images and sounds are inscribed on the film or videotape; and (3) post-production/assembly--the phase of production when various shots and sounds are assembled, and the final product is distributed.

Preview

The remainder of this thesis contains an identification of the research methodologies in Chapter II. Chapter III presents the findings of the research conducted, including a summary of: (a) the historical relationship between the choreographer and the film and television production process; (b) the theoretical information that would most benefit the film and television choreographer; and (c) the results of a field survey administered to present-day choreographers. Finally, Chapter IV summarizes the thesis with a qualitative analysis of the research findings. Chapter IV ends with specific recommendations regarding choreography for the camera.

PREVIEW

CHAPTER II

METHODS

This chapter addresses the methodology used to investigate the statement of the problem presented in Chapter I. Two research procedures were used in this study. First, an historical and critical review of the literature was conducted. This review was done to characterize the relationship between the choreographer and the film and television production process, and to analyze theories on film and video that would most benefit the choreographer. The historical and critical review addressed questions 1 and 2 of the problem statement. Second, a survey was given to working choreographers to assess their attitudes and knowledge regarding film/television/video and dance (F/T/V & D) products. The field survey was conducted to analyze question 3 of the problem statement.

The historical/critical analysis identified the roles of the choreographers as well as the film, television, or video methods most successfully utilized. The survey method attempted to identify: (a) what today's choreographers know about film and television production, (b) how they work in these media, and (c) what their perceptions are regarding the use of the film/video media for dance.

Procedures

The researcher reviewed and analyzed the literature, designed a

questionnaire, tested the questionnaire in a pilot study, administered the questionnaire, and analyzed the data.

The Review Process

The early stages of this research project involved a review and analysis of the dance, film, and television literature. Six criteria were used to select the literature for review. To be reviewed, the literature had to deal with:

1. Choreographic methods and theories for choreographing original dance for film and/or television;
2. Choreographic methods and theories for adapting dance, originally choreographed for the proscenium arch, for film and/or television;
3. Film and television/video directing and editing methods and theories for dance;
4. Basic camera direction theories or techniques;
5. Basic film/television theories or techniques; and
6. Basic film and television/video aesthetics, methods, and theories used to enhance the movement of subjects/objects and gestures.

The analysis synthesized the theories and methods applied to (and those potentially applicable for) choreographing, directing, and editing dance for the film, television, or video media.

The first step in the literature review process was to review thesis and dissertation abstracts. Five sources were sought through the Inter-Library Loan system.

These sources were abandoned because they failed to meet the review criteria. Next, film and television magazines and journals were reviewed. These sources contained some information that met the review criteria. Dance magazines, books, journals, and film and television books supplied the bulk of information reviewed for this thesis.

Interestingly, there were two columns that appeared monthly in Dance Magazine which covered dance on film and television, but information regarding the choreographing process or the filming and/or videotaping production process was deficient. "Dance in the Movies" (Knight, 1958, 1960) appeared in Dance Magazine until the mid-1960s. "On Television" by Ann Barzel appeared in Dance Magazine from 1950 to 1960. Both Knight's and Barzel's monthly accounts of the numerous dance sequences in the media during that time rarely critiqued the quality of the whole film/dance or the television/dance product.

An article by Allegra Fuller Snyder (1965) entitled "Three Kinds of Dance Film" met the review criteria and provided thorough and critical views of F/T/V & D. This piece provided the study with a wealth of information.

There was a limited number of books under the topic of dance that provided a perspective of choreography for the camera. Several books made mention of dance in the Hollywood musicals; however, such sources failed to meet the review criteria. Robert Coe (1985) in Dance in America provided short descriptions of some filming and choreographing processes employed for dance adaptations for the film medium. Coe's book, Dance in America (1985), and Dance in the