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System Attraction of Visual and Iconographic Material as a Development Thrust of Modern Ballet Theater

Tatiana Portnova

Institute of Dance at the State Academy of Slavic Culture, Russian Federation
Doctor of art criticism, Professor

Abstract

The article deals with the issues of artwork impact on ballet artists' and ballet masters' creativity – creation of choreographic works based on artworks. Facts (examples) demonstrating such borrowing are involved, but more significantly, the range of potential opportunities, which may enrich modern ballet theater, is outlined. The matter of figurative material takes on particular importance, i.e. the issue to what extent a choreographic work reflects the essence of an artwork accurately, deeply, and adequately. The article considers the connection and mutual benefit of the processes of creative interpenetration of graphics, art, sculpture, arts and crafts, and ballet theater. Different techniques of figurative sources are studied: illustration, statement, demonstration, comparison, event localization, generalization, stylistic device, and their visualization by means of choreographic dynamics. It's concluded the synthetic nature of ballet theater gives rise to new polygenre structures that can intensify both expressive and semantic content of choreographic image, create original stage solutions.

Keywords: ballet theater, visual iconography, artistic thinking, stage director choreographer, creative techniques, dramatic character, ballet synthesis.

Introduction

When starting developing one or another art issue related to the area of fine arts, a stage director choreographer, figuratively speaking, gets the second qualification, although the profession of choreographer itself implies the ability to artistic and figurative thinking except for ballet master craft and acting skills. That's why it is no surprise that many famous dancers' biographies are tied to the artist profession. Moreover, a specific sample of graphic, figurative, and sculptural arts can revive its spirits on the stage. For this reason the features of choreographers' perception of fine arts works, the trends of selection of specific topics, images, solutions, art concepts from comprehensive artistic legacy are of particular interest.

It is notable that seemingly inviolable in their integrity and completeness iconic works of fine arts gave a great boost to acting imagination. Meanwhile we should specify what brings success or failure when translating fine arts artifacts – which will be close to the form of a graphic, fine art, or

sculptural work as possible – into the language of choreography (translation methods may crucially change the original). When the question is creation of works based on another kind of art, in this context ballet theater is closer to literature, but, nonetheless, when images of fine arts become the playing material a stage director choreographer and performers have the same difficulties, the same problems and obstacles that are met in all paths linking both kinds of art. Most often discussion and questions concerning literary classic transposition take place. Have we a right to change it? How the author can be revealed through the form of performance? Whether original's greatness is belittled in this case? There's another problem when transposing fine arts artifacts – the issue of transposing an image stated in the sphere of choreographic action fleetly. In this respect there are other translation methods, but they are various too. Deviation from an original can be excused in different ways when one succeeds in creating impressive, appellative performance, when something integral, independent and new emerges. Particularly when temporal and non-temporal art is involved in the interaction, the question is not how we should and how we should not translate works of art, but what will eventually come out of such try. It's a matter of method chosen and dictated by the author. When staging based on graphics, fine arts, sculpture works, a ballet master should be able to interpret and understand in what way the main author's message is mediated within the art fabric of choreographic work.

Methods and techniques of iconographic material use in ballet practice

There are different graphic material use task solutions. The main requirement to the complex of such solutions is to contribute to author's idea revealing to the maximum and spectator's better understanding. Directing and performing practice offers different options to solve such tasks, each of them is useful as certain artistic concept expression. We distinguish the following ones: illustration, statement, demonstration, comparison, event localization, generalization, and stylistic device. There are smart solutions among the said techniques. We're going to examine some of them.

The creative technique of *illustrating* suggests accuracy and unicity of choreographer's interpretation of pictures consisting of the series. It should be noted that both choreographic interpretations – The Creation of the World and Caprichos were based on major talented works of fine arts – Jean Effel's graphics and Francisco Goya's etchings. About hundred Effel's pictures are known. Using them in The Creation of the World choreographers Kasatkina N. and Vasilyev V. thought and improvised, sought for the instantaneous nerve of each episode they saw on paper. The pulse of images depicted on Jean Effel's papers began to throb on the stage. The drawings are a pathway to performance, a formula of possible personification, a peculiar scheme complemented by a number of choreographic movements. However, selection of Jean Effel's drawings is for reason, they are imbued with a playing spirit, their structure is subject to the logic of action, movements, playing. One event follows another forming a plotline. Every time choreographers find stage correspondence the to master's graphical images, trying to keep their identity. In Adam's and Eva's, and other characters' choreography Kasatkina N. and Vasilyev V. try to preserve the brilliance of the artists' drawings. The story of the creation of the world, naive and kind in its first part, reveals tragic notes and dynamism in the second part when the ballet's authors along with their characters overstep the framework of the ancient parable genre entering the world of modern conflicts and problems. As a result, little figurative intermedia are smoothly woven in the ballet fabric.

The Creation of the World ballet runs in Russia and abroad, it has won the heart of mainstream audience and revealed the huge, endlessly rich world of the Biblical story, evangelic thought idea and soul, wherein Jean Effel's graphics played a prominent role, for many people for the first time. Having considered the technique of choreographic illustrating based on the graphical originals, using the form of short story (in its nature, highlighting key points), we conclude it specifies a logic direction to the choreographic idea. The power of good quality figurative material that provided the basis for the scenario appeared fairly significant: the main content potential is discovered mainly in plots and less in plastique expressiveness means. Despite all advantages this technique doesn't make a choreographic work completely independent – graphical papers are too distinctly recognized in it. Performances evolve as though not by the laws of stage, but as if following pictures meeting the laws of graphic composition. Moreover, these performances characters exist in spectators' consciousness not apart, but they are interrelated, one character complements another

one. It can be relation-coincidence or relation-contradiction, one image may recall or degrade another one, but they are in contact with each other.

The technique of statement is considered by choreographers more than just completed fine art work use. It's kind of a new life request, adding a new zest ready to go beyond the scope of its framework and become a part of space. Leonid Yakobson's choreographic miniatures *Eternal Spring*, *Kiss*, *Eternal Idol*, *Minotaur* and *a Nymph* are an invitation to have a look at Auguste Rodin's sculptures and a caution signal – keep out these images. Only beginning and the end of choreographic miniatures show the accurate silhouette of Rodin's marble sculptures, it is they that comprise the semantic core of Hermitage originals borrowing. Yakobson's way through the Rodin's *plastique* became a movement to clandestine, emotional beauty through surface, visible, physical beauty. Posture, movement, perspective Yakobson appreciated badly in Rodin's sculptures became productive in the momentary changes of body *plastique*, head turns, facial expressions. The ballet master placed the generalized as if coming from antiquity scenes upon a pedestal. Delicate, nude beauty of their figures set in sterile white marble revive in duet dance, became the model expression of Rodinian images (performers' white close tights imitate the sculptor's material).

While graphical series, as we've demonstrated, provide choreographers with a complete chain of events, Rodin's set images created Yakobson's choreography, are so economic and reserved according to chosen origin conditions, but are largely determined by the ballet master's idea. "To Rodin movement was the main form of life expression in sculpture, the sculptor was an ardent spectator of dancing... He was absorbed with high-spirited choreography, he admired the new searches of Fuller and Duncan, Russian ballet and Nizhinsky" [7,156]. Although Rodin's *Kiss*, *Eternal Spring*, *Eternal Idol*, *Minotaur* and *a Nymph* aren't direct expression of dance, they personify allegorical abstract notions. Nonetheless, they are theatricalized, ballet. Thanks to Yakobson's fantasy the "expanded" space of Rodin's sculptures created the *plastique* synthesis of directly dramatic image. Rodin's sculptures translation into the Yakobson's choreography language involves development of plotlines, which are eventually hinged on the main stem – the beginning and the end depicting the same visual image (a perfect copy) of Rodinian sculptures.

Chalon's engravings and lithographs brought out in the 40-s of the 19th century became a useful source to restore the choreographic act *pas-de-quat*, reconstructing the images and style of four romantic ballet dancers: Taglioni M., Cheritto F., Grisi C., and Grahn L. Such figurative sources can be considered standing alone as they give a ballet image and exercise not creation, but reconstruction function based on the image depicted. In such a way, a number of choreographers from Dolin A. to Yakobson L. offered their reconstructions of *pas-de-quat*. In this regard and in other cases a two-dimensional graphical or figurative image is projected in time and space becoming a three-dimensional and musically dynamic.

The following technique of *stage demonstration* of fine arts works diverges from successive choreographic registration of graphical series events and doesn't make the effort to penetrate deep into a sculptural image. It gravitates toward the broad coverage of the material encapsulated in some or other figurative or sculptural work. In the choreographic act *La Marseillaise* based on the same-name monumental relief of French sculptor Rude performed by Duncan A. and in *Absinthe Drinker* based on the Picasso's work in modern choreography masters take well-known creative concept as a point of departure (the course of plots demonstration takes place as in the first two options from the external artifact of fine arts to its inner embodiment). However in this case signs (works of art) and what they mean (their stage transformation) act with no any gap. Personifying Rude's *La Marseillaise* and Picasso's *Absinthe Drinker* authors-performers as if fall artists' prisoners. Their works became that magic crystal through which they had a look at epoch, plot, characters not just projecting them (as in the Yakobson's case) in some moments of choreographic narration, but caught the evolution of images' development in the instantaneity and simultaneity of the graphic sources (the Rude's epic relief and the Picasso's grotesque canvas). The images developed temporal length. While time encapsulated in serial graphic papers gave rise to the endless transition of choreographic compositions mainly generated by artist's interpretation (these papers' author), at this point evolution of dance images is boosted by the choreographer's personal vision, who tries to represent the fine art work he addresses not in the starting and ending guise (Rodin's sculptures stage embodiment), but cognize its idea and essence. Duncan A. as if divided the Rude's monumental relief into separate episodes and demonstrated them in dance in time sequence (such organization of choreographic material was suggested by the relief compositional

structure). She understood that such demonstration method may upset the monument integrity, that's why she successfully tied episodes-fragments with a permanent image symbol (a woman stops showing the flag) located in the central part of the relief. This complete and self-sufficient symbol-fragment became a peculiar sculptural unit of her dance. Karsavina T. wrote, "The power of her art consisted in dance sincerity and passion, not in cloudy and wobbly theories and reasoning. This art was individual by its nature, it wouldn't exist without Duncan" [1,163]. In this work of art the dancer found her understanding of the human as a creature closely related to the Motherland, full of hidden power. Duncan A. studied sculpture. Probably, it helped her to express her ideas brightly, accurately and emotionally, to reveal the Rude's relief main message, to reach proper mood of the plastique solution. In other words, she tried to find a plastique equivalent of Rude's majestic La Marseillaise, to express the thrust of revolution through the nature of dance. Expressing her view of the French revolution Duncan A. demonstrated her own director's signature (she was the act choreographer and performer). All of this is confirmed by numerous sketches of Duncan's dancing, belonging to foreign artists of the end of the 19th century – the beginning of the 20th century, which impress with diversity of "choreographic animation" and plastique interpretation of the original.

Let's consider other aspects of artifacts interpretation by means of choreographic means. One of them can be called creation technique on the motifs of works of art. Put it differently, it's creation regarding, but not based on art works. Let's define this technique *generalization*. Trubetskoy's The Cyprus Statue, Cherepnin's Le Pavillon d'Armide, Badalbeily's Maiden Tower and other ballets represent generality, universality of the embodiment model. Choreographers deal with not specific works of art, but generalized notions regarding epochs, kinds or genres of fine art. For example, Fokin M. being a supporter of different epochs, i.a. Russian folk performance, interpretation, used arts and crafts (weaving, woodcuts, folk craft).

Benois A., a ballet decoration and costumes author, elaborated the unusual plot of Le Pavillon d'Armide. He made a decoration- tapestry from which characters revived beginning their magic dance at midnight. The images of Armide and her page-boy were particularly impressive. Benois A. supported by French artist Bocquet's drawings made setting on a topic favourite at the end of the 19th – the beginning of the 20th centuries with a dream and reality shift. In the myriads of wonderful metamorphoses the Benois' and Fokin's signature is discerned: fantasy, wit, sense of style. They wanted to recapture brilliance, splendour, and significance of the older ballets and used the monumentally exquisite image of tapestry for this purpose. "Mysterious twilight of the baroque pavilion gives way to a glaring magic garden. The spectacle evolved among plashing fountains, whimsically shaped trees, statues, wherein ballets masquerades of the epoch of Louis the Fourteenth revived" [3,193], Krasovskaya V. recalls. It's not a problem for Fokin M. to translate (literally translate, adapt) the tapestry stylistics into the language of choreography, its specific nature as an arts and crafts object into stylistics of dancing stage and performing principles. Depicted in the tapestry large figures of talking Armide and the Youth are surrounded by an opening curtain with architectural view looming in the background. The picture is framed in a decorative fringe and everything simulates ancient embroidery. The tapestry with its frontally outlined postures of the characters reviving and coming upon the stage as if turns them in the movable pictures of performance. However they're still on the verge of tapestry perception, because of keeping frozen perspectives and frontal views. "The tapestry under the chimney place delightfully continues the idea of Boucher and Lemoine, figures of sleepy apparition: "clocks" in white camisoles with lights in their hands, knights resembling the King of the Sun in the Ballet of Night, paradistic sorcerers and wizards, and veiled ladies they conjured – all of this is revived with bright and stylish beauty" [2, 227], Lifar S. writes.

Thus, the authors of the considered performance using the technique of generalization made an effort to create the symbolically allegorical expansive artistic image of tapestry as an arts and crafts phenomenon and its metaphoric influence on the spectator.

Other technique of artistic thinking – *comparison* – gravitates to the accurate analogy with source. Authors of such choreographic works as St. Sophia's Frescoes, Adjanta Frescoes, Crystal Palace tried to bring not figurative art works to choreography, but vice versa – to bring choreography to a fine art work or even to a piece of architecture. Choreographers using fine art and architecture do not attempt to find only their imaginative analogue, they're interested with the plot despite the fact that phenomenon of these works success is not in event connections

development, but in interpreter's method and vision, who can find the deep in the surface. The methods of art depiction are organized in ballets as a complex polyphonic system. Each performance is built based on its structural principle.

The choreographic work *Adjanta Frescoes* performed by Pavlova A. is also directly related to monumental painting, only in this case of the countries of the Foreign East, particularly, India. The coloristic and compositional immaculacy of images of dances set with accurate sense of the oriental style shows not only performer's sound knowledge of wall-painting of ancient Indian masters but her constant desire to convey the very essence of partially lost pictures in all their ethnographic details, colorful specialities, mighty and original depiction in the language of dance. While the specific monument St. Sophia Church is taken as a basis in St. Sophia's Frescoes, the figurative layers of Indian frescoes in the Pavlova's dancing are generalized, they are emphasized only at the level of style joints creating integrity of the general figurative and choreographic conception. The plastique of each dance episode in Pavlova's interpretation not just matches the plot pattern of mural paintings of India but is subject to it, exists by its and pattern rules. Pavlova's frontal and side-face poses are picturesque and frescolike. The system of iconic signs-symbols, which can be seen in temple frescoes of India, gives rise to the similar interpretation logically set in dancing. Each ballet dancer's pose correlates to this art system in some or other way, matching it or going beyond. *Adjanta Frescoes* is an associative dance. Using frescoes motifs as a part of the monumental art of India, Pavlova found the imaginative solution meeting technical opportunities and compositional techniques of choreography of that time.

We turn our attention to another technique used by choreography representatives when adapting works of fine art – *localization* of events. An artifact plot of interest (graphical, figurative, sculptural) is though decomposed not into individual parts or is not broken down at all, but is considered in accordance with other director's logic, it becomes the scrim of facts. In this case we also discern traces of illustrative technique. However the original itself was an illustrative cycle in it. In *Catarina, the Bandit's Daughter* based on the Salvator Rosa's biography literary data expressed in performance events are used in Jules-Joseph Perrot's choreography; in *Pictures from an Exhibition* everyday stories of genre painting are borrowed in Fyodor Lopukhov's choreography; plot motifs of the West European engravings of the 18th century are also borrowed in Jean Dauberval's choreography in *La fille mal gardée*. However in this case we deal with the graphic arts of different authors (*La fille mal gardée*) and even different epochs (*Pictures from an Exhibition*) synthesized in one performance. Easel works of fine art can be added to this category. Their fixed image becomes a particular symbol in ballet – the plot of Eugène Delacroix's *Liberty Leading the People* in such ballets as *Flames of Paris*, Bitov's *Gavroche*. The image of easel art canvases with characters depicted presents on the stage as a character and not decoration (background). However, occasionally in the course of performance it gains that recognizable plastique pattern-image that we see in the original.

La fille mal gardée ballet in Dauberval's choreography is the first attempt to transfer the genre plots of the West European engravings of the 18th century to the stage. This ballet libretto is of interest to researchers. As far as this setting came to us composed of storylines borrowed from fine art, the issue of its origin should be considered based on examination and in close connection to sources it was a part of. Everything what issued regarding *La fille mal gardée* was issued with no illustrative material, which would back research arguments. According to Slonimsky, "Once Dauberval saw an engraving in which the artist depicted a lovers' date interrupted by a third person: the girl wipes her tears and her mother threatens the running away boy... this engraving suggested Dauberval an idea to compose a ballet called *La fille mal gardée*" [8]. It should be noted that opportunities to turn the picture into a staging are rooted in both the nature of the engraving amusing plot and in the features of literary treatment of the drama material. The choreographer succeeded in creating stage images coming down from the engraving. Their graphic prototypes continue to exist in them, they're jestful and sad, they touch the spectator by the harmony of poesy and humour the plot poetics of the unknown artist's engraving of the 17th century is winged with. Apparently, more than one plot depicted in the engraving Slonimsky mentioned formed the basis of the ballet. In addition, the images of other engravings of the same period of the 17th century were used. As a result, they merged in the realistic choreography of the grand performance. Dauberval's characters acting on the stage are mischievous and ironic, moving and kind much like dairy notes mini-storylines glimpsed at. They attract with agility, splendor of portrait sketches, plastique

pattern expressiveness, abundance of everyday details fixing spectators' attention not only to the main but also to what contributes to more prominent and convincing demonstration of environment where characters live. Dauberval appeared a master who can state his ideas clearly and expressively, convince the spectator in his selection accuracy and infect him with his attitude to the shown on the stage, suggest him his own interpretation of the engraving he saw.

The last *stylistical* technique we've specified gives rise to not less interesting, largely unexpected and unique forms of transformation and classic styles of fine arts in ballet staging. Mikhail Fokin's creativity can be considered the result of self-determination with his artistic affections and world outlook at the turn of the 19th – 20th centuries. He was born not just for ballet. Fokin not only felt and understood plastic arts well but as we have already mentioned profoundly pursued fine art along with choreography. Besides, he knew the art of specific periods and actively used this knowledge in his performances in an original way. Worship of gorgeous images of ancient sculpture and painting, their elaboration influenced the figurative stylistics of his ballets. The figurative source nature dominated in the Fokin's early ballet master practice, when he sought the impetus of new visualization in mythology and sculpture preparing to set the mythological ballet of *Acis and Galatea* (1905). No wonder that figurative dramatic elements prevailed in his late works overmastering music and dancing. Vivid imaging and colourful expressiveness of his ballets along with creative concept of artists, who made sceneries for his ballets, were based on the principles of plastic art collaboration. It's possible to suggest keen interest to the art of the Ancient Middle East and antiquity (Cleopatra, Narcissus, Daphnis and Chloe, etc.). "One can hardly argue that the Fokin's greatest power is stylization and that his best ballets are stylized ones, such as *Scheherazade* (the East), *Cleopatra* (Egypt), *Daphnis and Chloe* (Greek antiquity), etc. Regarding these ballets Fokin exercised the amazing knowledge of various periods and different nations style, such unusual expertise that none choreographer had in Russia (probably, in the entire world)" [4, 171], Lifar wrote. The ballet master referred to the exhibitions of famous St. Petersburg museums, foremost Hermitage and the Russian Museum. Original historical materials provided visuals authenticity. In respect to the abovementioned ballets the author's ability to find stage visual equivalents to works of art (reliefs, paintings, easel works), to make comprehension of idea and message the process touching both mind and soul is significant. Graceful side-face movements and gestures as if they came from Egyptian temple reliefs with their by-lines rhythmic composition are internally connected with choreographic text throughout *Cleopatra* ballet. The flatness of compositional staging certainly met the canons of Ancient Egyptian art. Ballet costumes, wigs, makeup (long arrows, black eyebrows, highlighted lips) came out in a new style like on a polychromatic Egyptian sculpture. Ballet slippers gave way to sandals. It is graphic stylistics coming from the artifacts of Ancient Egypt created the ideal model of image, became a dynamic spring and semantic core of the performance by its "canonical" development of the artistic idea.

The image of a mythological character materialized in marble – a youth elevated by ancient sculptures to the standard of beauty was used by Mikhail Fokin in his "antique" ballets: *Narcissus*, *Daphnis and Chloe*. In this regard Krasovskaya V. stated, "The antique myth about nymph Echo incurring the curse of gods upon egotistic youth Narcissus was embodied in the techniques of graphic statics. Plastique Hellenic art-stylized poses changed: in such a way Echo - Karsavina and Narcissus - Nizhinsky moved on the stage" [3,213]. Apart from Fokin other representatives of choreography of the end of the 19th – the beginning of the 20th centuries touched antique samples of fine art. For example, in the ballet of *Afternoon of a Faun* in Nizhinsky's choreography the first idea of ballet compositional development occurred to Sergey Diaghilev. In Venice in 1911 "... he began to show Nizhinsky Faun's angular movements; but that was the least of it: the entire composition of the ballet – from nymphs' appearance, dancers' poses simulation on antique vases – to the last gesture – with a musical crescendo stop – belongs to Sergey Pavlovich. Diaghilev tried to spot the dynamics of antique poses, dynamic plastique in antique images – in museums and oeuvres devoted to antique sculpture and painting – and trusted Nizhinsky to realize the plastique he had found [6, 233-234]. Rodin delighted with Nizhinsky's plastique in this ballet said that "each artist, who actually loves his art, must see this performance – the excellent embodiment of beauty standards of Ancient Greece" [9, 579]. Delicate naked beauty set in marble came to life in the images of *Narcissus*, *Daphnis* in the formula of soft Ionic antique style, and zoomorphic features appeared in the *Faun's* image.

Conclusion

Having considered all options of distinguished choreographic techniques when working with figurative material as exemplified by many cases, we should note that secondariness, a predetermined outcome in images creation and simulation are typical to all of them. Figurative sources are unique and require a particular approach, where not only knowledge of them but elective acuteness is necessary. They aren't ready-made material to set a ballet. They are less than a source, and more than a source at the same time. Fine arts works used by modern theater can be rightly called the art of image interpretation that has its special place along with literary sources not for nothing. The new trend in choreodrama gravitating to stage depiction techniques, and sometimes directly borrowing images and plots from graphics, painting, sculpture, arts and crafts, and architecture, provides the breakthrough level of stage directing as compared to what is considered typical. Such directing should have zest for metaphoricalness, associations, hyperbolization, details pun, generally speaking, vision freshness. Given this, the said artistic means should support the harmony and relax of choreographic narration, also basically conditional, which predetermines its rhythm and plastique framework. New polygenre structures appeal to new, deeper comprehension of the synthetism of ballet art. Success in the area of arts interaction requires careful reflection concerning the spare opportunities of choreography meeting modern staging solutions.

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Система привлечения визуального и иконографического материала как движущей силы развития современного балета

Татьяна Портнова

Институт танца государственной академии славянской культуры, Российская Федерация
Доктор искусствоведения, профессор

Аннотация. В статье рассматриваются вопросы воздействия искусства на артистов балета и балетмейстеров – создание хореографических произведений, основанных на произведениях искусства. Представлены примеры подобных заимствований, но что более важно, изложен диапазон потенциальных возможностей, которые могут обогатить современный балетный театр. Вопросу образного материала уделяется особое внимание, т.е. вопросу, в какой степени хореографическое произведение отражает суть произведения искусства точно и глубоко. Рассматриваются процессы творческого взаимопроникновения графики, живописи, скульптуры, декоративно-прикладного искусства и балета. Исследуются различные методы образных источников: иллюстрации, демонстрации, сравнения, локализации событий, обобщения, стилистические приемы и их визуализация с помощью хореографической динамики. Сделан вывод, что синтетический характер балета порождает новые polygenre структуры, которые могут активизировать как выразительное, так и смысловое содержание хореографического образа, создавать оригинальные сценические решения.

Ключевые слова: театр балета, визуальная иконография, художественное мышление, режиссер-хореограф, творческие методы, драматизм, синтез балета.