



There are numerous possibilities open to the composer in the arrangement of the overall form. The essential thing to remember is that each part of the dance must have relevance to the whole.

It might be useful to think of a dance as having outer and inner rhythmic forms. The inner rhythmic form consists of the time/force shape that each movement, movement phrase and section create, while the outer rhythmic form consists of the shape brought about by the juxtaposition of each section in the dance.

The illustration above shows that each movement has a rhythm, each of the phrases has a different rhythmic structure, and that the overall shape has an ABA rhythm – the B section forming a contrast to both As.

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Elements of construction

Several elements of construction have already emerged in the discussion on the construction of a dance. It may be useful to convey these in a list so that the reader can select each element and evaluate its constructional purpose in any given dance:

1. the motif(s) (foundation(s) of construction)
2. repetition
3. variation and contrasts
4. climax or highlights
5. proportion and balance
6. transition
7. logical development
8. unity

Each of these elements could be discussed in relation to many forms of art. Each element is related to, and complements, the others. All serve unity which is the overall aim in any art. To achieve unity the other seven elements must be employed.

Motifs

In *Methods of construction 2 and 3*, we have discussed the function of the motifs in composition in some depth. It remains to say that these dominant elements of the composition only emerge as dominant in the light of all the other constructional devices used.

- Without repetition, the motifs would be forgotten.
- Without variation and contrast, repetition of the motifs would be dull if presented ad lib in their original form

- A dance lacking climax or highlights would seem to have motifs which have no content worth highlighting.
- Without careful proportioning and balancing of the whole work each of the motifs could become almost eliminated or even too dominant.
- Without transitions the motifs would be isolated movement statements. Transitions between movements within the motif and between the motifs are important in defining the phrase and section shaping of the dance.
- Without logical development from motif to motif the theme of the dance would be blurred.

The motifs contain the main ingredients which provide the unifying threads for the whole work. These include the style, qualitative colour, light and shade, line and shape in space, and types of action which motivate the rest of the work.

Repetition

As we have seen, repetition must be recognised as a main device in dance composition. It should be clear that repetition in a dance exists in the form of development and variation of the movement material which is established within each motif. Also that, in the context of dance as an art form, the word repetition has wider interpretations than its normal usage.

Variation and contrasts

These elements of construction differ but complement each other. Variation demands that the content, which has already been established in the dance, is used again in a different way. Contrast demands the introduction of new material either within the original motif during a repetition, or as a variation of the motif. The new material can be another motif of course.

A successful dance should feature both these elements. Variation gives an interesting logical development to the whole providing the necessary means for repetitions of the theme, so that the audience can view it in different ways with growing understanding. Contrasts provide the exciting changes which colour the

content. Contrasts can be effected in many ways, and often – though not always – provide the climaxes or highlights in a dance.

To make a contrast, the composer should consider a change in content but this should not be done for the sake of contrast alone. It must also be relevant to the idea behind the dance. In terms of quality, for example, the slow section could be followed by a fast section, or the predominantly slow section could have a fast movement to break the continuity of slowness. In spatial content predominantly small low level movements could be contrasted by a large high level movement. In action a phrase containing stepping, gesturing and travelling could be contrasted by jumping: a phrase using one side of the body could be contrasted by one movement of the other side; predominantly symmetrical body action could be followed by a sudden change to asymmetric use of the body.

Contrast is not only achieved through sudden changes in content. It is possible to build gradually towards a contrast. Movement might accelerate from slow to quick, show little tension and increase in strength to show a great deal of tension, start low and gradually grow to high level and so on. Contrast emerges if the predominant material of the dance is interrupted or punctuated by fresh or opposing movements. It would seem that the opposite, or near opposite, in content is a requisite feature of contrast.

Climax or highlights

Many people think that a dance should have only one climax, the rest of the content supporting it. In fact, a dance can have many highlights which may or may not be real climaxes too. In retrospect, the moments which are remembered are highlights of the dance and remain of special significance to each particular viewer. In a work of art, no two people view in the same way, and no two people would necessarily agree on the highlight in a dance. If, however, these moments come to fruition in one big climax and this is the intention of the composer, then everyone should see and agree that this is the climax. It depends upon the nature of the dance and the idea whether there is one climax or several climaxes or whether these are merely highlights without the especially noticeable features of a 'super' climax. These latter features may emerge with a sudden attack, or build up slowly to an explosive moment. For example, if the dance has been earthbound and

stretching will make a contrast which is also a climax. On the other hand, a climax could be seen as the ultimate development of a motif. In all events, if it is a real climax it should stand out very prominently. Highlights appear like little sparks of interest, and exist through the composer's exposition of artistic, skilled and beautifully conceived movement ideas which stand out as such to the onlooker.

Some of the means by which climaxes or highlights can be achieved in movement are illustrated in Table 4.

Table 4
Some ideas on how climax or highlight might be achieved

<p>ACTION</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Special emphasis on one or a few actions within the motif through: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. repetition b. enlargement by means of development c. defined by stillness before or after the action/s 2. Change in action content 3. Interesting development or variation through addition of action content 	<p>QUALITY</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Sudden or subtle change of qualities 2. Build up in force or time or both <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sudden accents – short continuous dynamic passages 3. Repetition of rhythmic pattern – change of rhythmic pattern 4. Contrast in flow
<p>SPACE</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Sudden or subtle change or contrast in: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. amount of space used, b. placing in space, c. focus in space, d. space pattern – size, level direction, pathway 2. Special enlargement or development of the spatial aspects of the motif 	<p>RELATIONSHIP</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Variation or contrast of group relationship moving 2. Addition in number 3. Particular juxtapositioning of the movements within the motifs, phrases or sections

Proportion and balance

These are complementary elements of construction. Proportion refers to the size and magnitude of each part in relation to the whole, and balance refers to the equilibrium of content within each of these proportionate parts and the whole.

The proportion of one part of a dance in relation to its other parts has to be right. Equal proportioning of parts may become too boring. It is all too easy to go on developing for too long with one motif or statement or conversely, make too little of a section of movement content thereby losing its significance through lack of repetition. Each part of a dance should be only as long as is necessary. There is no easy answer for a perfect proportion of parts in any dance. It is an intuitive feeling for 'rightness' that guides the use of this element of construction.

Similar comments can be made in reference to balance. Here the composer must be aware of the balance which exists in the *choice* of movement content within one part of the dance in relation to the choice in another. Within the range of material that the composer deems suitable for the total dance, it is important to consider the proportionate use so that the whole is balanced. A beginning 'packed with delights' and then trailing away to an uninteresting end is unbalanced, whereas a dance which has its contrasts, climaxes or highlights, repetitions and variations in movement content spread out throughout its duration may well be judged as a balanced form and should succeed in sustaining interest. The composer's aim is to achieve equilibrium of parts so that a unity becomes apparent. For example, the gentle flowing parts of the dance should not be made insignificant in relation to the strong dominant parts. The section of the dance performed by a soloist should stand as significant in comparison to the section in which a large group performs. All parts must enhance the idea and be inseparable from the whole.

In a more specific sense, the proportion element of construction could refer to how many dancers are performing and the proportionate divisions within the number. The balance element could refer to where they are in relation to each other and the space. (Some detail on this is included in *Methods of construction* 3.) It is important that proportion of numbers is relevant and enhances the dance idea, and that these must change to keep it an interesting feature. Similarly, the balance and placing of the groups in relation to each other have expressive significance. The arrangement and placing of dancers and props in the stage

are also governed by a need for a certain or an unbalanced balance which is

determined by the composer's treatment of the theme. The composer should also consider the proportionate use of the stage space to give a balanced effect within the environment.

Transition

The composer must use this element of construction to link all the parts and effectively create a whole. Transitions are very important and perhaps the most difficult aspects of the composition.

There are no set ways of making transitions from one part of a dance to another. The composer usually works on these in an intuitive way. Finding an answer to a problem of movement can only be achieved by moving through all the possibilities until it feels and looks right.

Transitions can be very short or quite long. Indeed, a transition from one part to another may be effected by merely *holding still* before moving into the new part. This has the effect of holding on to something for a second or two whilst an impression is formed by the audience before changing the subject. Or, the transition may be made as a *hesitation* between movements or phrases or as anticipation of movement to follow – for example, a lean of the body into a direction before actually travelling on that pathway. Transitions hold parts together by bridging and, therefore, help to create the overall rhythmical framework. The longer transition, lasting perhaps as long as a *phrase*, usually acts as a link between sections.

The subtle transitions from one position to another, and the more obvious transitions from one section of the dance to another, all play an important unifying role. Movement tied to movement should be logical, clear and, above all, appear to be easily performed. Movements of a transition between sections should, perhaps, have a lingering flavour of the preceding section and act as an introductory passage to the succeeding section.

Logical development

Logical development becomes apparent by virtue of repetition, climax, transition, contrast and variety in the dance. When we speak of logical development, we

is logical it also has meaning and *raison d'être* throughout its existence. The beginning of the dance starts a line of thought for the onlooker and from this, ideas shoot off in many directions, while all retain a common thread. The common thread is the basis upon which logical development depends, and is more than just the idea, story or motivational stimulus of the dance. The common thread is initiated through the beginning motif which is a *movement interpretation* of the motivation or idea behind the dance. This movement interpretation has an identity in terms of action, qualities, space and perhaps relationships. The rest of the dance, or a part of the dance, discloses more of this identity through repetition, variation and contrast. The pursuit of form created from the identity of the foundational motifs determines logical development. In this way all the movements appear relevant and part of the growth of the dance. The climaxes are in the right places and have the right kind of initiation to fulfil their purpose. The whole leads perfectly to its end which seems right as an outcome. Not inevitable, but right. In fact the end of a dance is probably the most important part: if the end fails – the dance fails.

To summarise: logical development of the dance ensures unification whereby each part is linked to the common thread through the composer's interpretation of the idea. If the constructional elements of motifs, developments, variations, contrasts, climaxes or highlights, and above all transitions, are successfully employed, then the dance appears to have a logical development which in turn produces unity.

Unity

This is the overall constructional element. The final shape that emerges when the dance is over is realised through unity. To make an analogy: if all the parts fit into the jigsaw puzzle it finally produces a whole picture within its round or square frame. The movement content with its inherent meaning and the way in which the constructional elements have been employed form the pieces of the jigsaw and its overall shape or dance form (eg, ternary form) forms the frame. The pieces knitted together become unified within the frame and also form the frame which produces unity. If even one piece is missing or does not fit then the whole never becomes a whole and unity is lost.

The dance composer must aim for unity. To understand how, it is reached in

a dance requires a good deal of experience and artistic awareness, but it can be recognised by laymen and even by children. Somehow a good dance is appreciated as an entity which has meaning and significance beyond the scope of its pieces. A dance which has the quality of unity is likely to be successful.

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Style

Understanding the term 'style'

In dance, the terms style and technique can mean the same thing because the word technique often means the content of the idiom, not merely how it is manipulated/presented. Thus we have ballet, jazz, contemporary techniques which produce these particular styles. For some, use of the word genre to describe the idiom or type of dance – ballet, jazz, contemporary – provides a solution since each can be articulated in many stylistic flavours. For example, a contemporary dance might be labelled jazzy in style, balletic or neo-classical, ethnic or as having a particular social dance flavour.

The word technique is also used in most dance contexts when discussing physical skill and, to a dancer, technique means acquiring skill through attending class, exercising the body and practising movements to achieve perfection. The class invariably is taken in a specific technique, ie, to become skilled in ballet one goes to ballet classes. So at class level, the words technique and style often do mean the same thing. Genre is a word which is not in common usage in dance.

It is interesting to study how new techniques, or changes of emphasis in traditional techniques, form particular styles. All choreographers try to invent new styles and even if a traditional style is used, rather than merely rearranging the prescribed content, the choreographer will probably take elements from the traditional style and embrace them within a style more relevant to the choreographer's own time.

Balanchine, as an example of a master classicist, abstracted the pure classical syntax of movement from ballet and developed it into modern-formalism. This term describes a style which has been created through a process of abstraction. From the traditional theatrical spectacle of ballet, Balanchine abstracted the 'bare-bones' austerity of ballet essence. In exploring the essence of ballet Balanchine