

Isadora Duncan made it the very center and source of her practices, and the so-called modern dance was born.

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From THE MODERN DANCE

METAKINESIS

Movement, then, in and of itself is a medium for the transference of an aesthetic and emotional concept from the consciousness of one individual to that of another. This should not be as strange an idea as it seems to be. Back as far as Plato, and perhaps farther, it has been toyed with by the metaphysical philosophers. Kinesis is the name they gave to physical movement; and in an obscure footnote in Webster's Dictionary—so common a source of reference as that!—we find that there is correlated with kinesis a supposed psychic accompaniment called metakinesis, this correlation growing from the theory that the physical and the psychical are merely two aspects of a single underlying reality.

We are not here concerned with theories of metaphysics, and it makes very little difference what we may choose to believe about the relation in general between the physical and the psychical. It is extremely important, however, that we see in the dance the relation that exists between physical movement and mental—or psychical, if you will—intention. Metakinesis is perhaps a formidable word, but it is the only one the dictionary yields for the expression of one of the vital points of the modern dance.

A few minutes ago, it was said that the discovery of movement as the substance of the dance in the same sense that sound is the substance of music, was one of the four important discoveries of the modern dance. The second of these discoveries is that of metakinesis. Nobody invented it, it has always been true. It was true when the early man of savagery conveyed his sense of the

mystery of death, and when he stirred a whole tribe into warlike frenzy by leading them into a particular kind of dance. It was true, and recognised in a degree, in the great days of the Greek theatre, where movement was an important feature of drama. Indeed, the Greek tragic chorus, which at moments of highest tragedy sought refuge in chanting songs of deep fervour and dancing to them, was used, as Gilbert Murray has said somewhere, to express the "inexpressible residue of emotion" which mere rationality—words and pantomime—could not convey. It was also true during the many years of the classic ballet. Without it audiences would have had no more delight in watching a ballerina balance herself on one toe in defiance of gravity than they would have had in watching feathers float on the air. It was their own consciousness of gravity which held them to the earth that made them applaud the feat of some one else in defying it. But no conscious artistic use was made of metakinesis until the modern dance arose. You will still find many dancers who will laugh at it—while their audiences slip rapidly away into the performances of their colleagues who have not such keen senses of humour.

The Germans have realised the value of it to such an extent that they have named their type of dancing in general "expressionistic," or the kind of dancing which expresses through movement the dancer's feeling.

Because of this close relationship between movement and personal experience, temperament, mental and emotional equipment, it is manifestly impossible for every one to be taught to do the same type of movement. The ideal dance education, therefore, is that which trains the student to find his own type of movement. Rudolf von Laban, the German theorist, has divided all people into three general types, according to their style of movement, much as singers are divided into such general types as soprano, tenor, bass, etc. He has arrived at certain interesting conclusions, based on physiological and psychological research, and coloured always with a sense of metakinesis. Certain individuals, he has found, are tall and thin and move in a certain manner, always more or less alike. These he calls "high dancers." Others are short and squat and move in another manner. These he calls "low dancers." Between them are the "middle dancers." Now the reason they move in certain fashions is not that they are of a certain stature, and their stature is not what it is because of their type of movement. Both are the result of some personal, mental, psychological characteristics. This is a complete verifi-

cation, as far as it goes, of the metaphysicians' theory that kinesis and metakinesis are two aspects of a single underlying reality.

EXTENSION OF RANGE

It is easy to see what this metakinetic concept did in the way of extending the range of the dance. So long as the entire emphasis was laid upon design, the colour of dancing was exceedingly limited. Design, no matter how well wrought and ingenious, can never as an abstract element be productive of anything even at its best beyond pleasure to the eye, a certain aesthetic satisfaction which results from contact with completeness of form, and to a degree of kinesthetic satisfaction in vicarious muscular experience for its own sake.

These ingredients obviously wear thin very easily. By the time Noverre came upon the scene in the middle of the eighteenth century they had already worn so thin that he bent his every effort toward restoring their lost substance. This he felt could be done by making the dance an "imitative art" like the drama. Almost everybody who has come after him has accepted his theory and continued the campaign of likeness to acting, until the theory was finally exploded in the experiments of the modernists, among them Diaghileff.

The added range which was so greatly needed was supplied by these innovators in a measure by the introduction of pantomime in a more emphasised manner. This theoretically allowed for the expression of every human emotion and every conceivable dramatic situation which did not depend upon words. But the incongruousness of such a theory is apparent. To attempt to express dramatic ideas and personal experiences while standing with the feet in the fifth position, moving the arms in arbitrary arcs, is likely to be absurd. It is like trying to combine pure decoration and portraiture; to the extent that the result is pure decoration it is not portraiture and vice versa. Stereotyped movements can only express stereotyped concepts of emotion. As the highly individual shadings and gradations of personal emotion begin to colour these movements, they lose their classical perfection and become bad dancing. Thus the canvas has been marred two ways: to a certain extent we have limited the integrity of the emotion to conform to an arbitrary code, and at the same time we have deviated from the arbitrary code in order to conform to emotional integrity.

Diaghileff evidently realised the fallacy of this theory very clearly and up to the time of his death worked incessantly to supplant it with something sound. The glory of the Ballet Russe in 1909 was not due to the discovery of any final form, of any permanent rule of procedure; it was only one more step in the endless progression which constitutes the history of every art. Though there are those who maintain that the dance has gone steadily downward since the days of "Scheherazade" and "Cleopatra" and "The Fire Bird," Diaghileff knew better. His later productions employed the services of choreographers, artists, musicians, who would aid him in the discovery of new forms suitable to the expression of new ideas. His experiments never achieved their goal and many of them remained tentative, and what the possibilities may be in his method of procedure we can only surmise. Certainly they would seem worth the effort of further pursuit, if any artist can be found capable of pursuing them.

In the meantime, the modern dancer has answered the riddle by discarding completely the theory of arbitrary forms and building on the principle that emotional experience can express itself through movement directly. Thus for the first time it has become possible to have a creative tragic dance as well as an abstract lyrical one. The theatre has its tragedies as well as its comedies, music is full of tragic compositions; but until Isadora Duncan convinced the world against its will, there was never a vision of a tragic dance such as the Greeks and their forebears knew. If she did not see clearly through to its creation, she at least saw its possibilities and made many glorious, unruly, lawless efforts at achieving them.

FORM AND METAKINESIS

Thus far we have discussed purely physical aspects of dance form. With metakinesis we come to the most intangible as well as the most important of its considerations. The dancer's ability or inclination to use the overtones of movements to convey his intention determines to a very large extent—indeed, almost entirely—his type of dancing.

At its highest point of development we find the so-called expressionistic dancing with Mary Wigman as an outstanding practitioner. This class of dance is in effect the modern dance in its purest manifestation. The basis of each composition in this medium lies in a vision of something in human experience

which touches the sublime. Its externalisation in some form which can be apprehended by others comes not by intellectual planning but by "feeling through" with a sensitive body. The first result of such creation is the appearance of certain entirely authentic movements which are as closely allied to the emotional experience as an instinctive recoil is to an experience of fear. In this process are evolved movements which may never have been seen before in a dance but which are nevertheless the inevitable material for this particular composition. When these movements have been arranged in rhythmic relation to each other, the arrangement dictated still by the logic of the inner feeling but at the same time productive of an aesthetic reaction in an onlooker, the composition is complete. This type of dance is generally of the utmost simplicity. It cannot permit of ornamentation, for that would only defeat its purpose of expression. Frequently it establishes its rhythms with great clarity and thereafter touches only the high spots of its design, leaving it to you to fill in the space and complete the form. When this is accomplished, the highest type of aesthetic reaction has been produced.

It has sometimes been said of dancing of this sort that it lacks variety, but this is a misstatement of the case. It may not reveal its variety to certain spectators who are not equipped to see it. The man who is looking for routines, for "steps" and "tricks," of course will not find them, and because he does not know how to look for anything else he will naturally miss the almost unlimited variety which is before him.

Metakinesis is sometimes applied literally through pantomime, generally in dances with a literary program. The pantomimic or literary dance is not a pure type of dancing, but is a leaning toward that subdivision of dancing which we call acting. In dances of this description the considerations of time and space patterns are of minor importance. The process of composition develops through a series of incidents generally concerned with external agencies. Its form is governed by dramatic laws, and movement serves a secondary purpose.

At the farthest extreme from the purely pantomimic dance we find that type of composition which seeks its effects through abstractions and ignores as far as may be all metakinetic considerations. Between these types there are to be found any number of variations, and any of them is good when it produces its effect.

To be sure, no dancer when he sets out to make a dance sits down and calculates all the various types of patterns and rhythms and dimensions he must work with. The technique of