

Aesthetic preference of dance movements and positions in different cultures and different levels of proficiency. A review of dance styles and perspectives for future paradigms in intercultural experimental dance aesthetics

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Dance is as old as humanity and has often been considered a crucial cohesion element in human cultures (Wiltermuth and Heath 2009). However, it is a well known fact that dance is not an unitary phenomena; it has as many faces, facets and styles as there are human cultures in the world (Kogan 1997; Hanna 2003; DeFrantz 2005; Anakesa and Jeannin 2008). Accordingly, the aesthetic preference of dance positions and movements vary across cultures, making dance an important identification element between members of the same culture. Additionally, one must consider the influence of proficiency in a particular dance style in the aesthetic preference and judgment. The possible implication of neural underpinnings of such preferences, mediated by experience in a particular dance style, is evidenced even by a differential neural response to dance stimuli by proficient ballet dancers and naïve individuals (Calvo-Merino, Glaser et al. 2005). Possessing knowledge about the correct execution of, for instance, a ballet movement activates subsequent brain areas. When the execution of the movement isn't correct, though, this perception might be disturbed and the movement is not judged as aesthetic any longer. And in this case, which would be the judgment of an individual, naïve to ballet technique?

We present a review of the main dance styles, cultures and subcultures within styles in order to provide theoretical background for future studies of aesthetic preference in dance. In particular, we review the following styles: Ballet (Europe), African and oriental dances (Asia, India and Arabian) in terms of their main distinctive elements leading to aesthetic experience in proficient individuals of the particular style. Furthermore, we discuss possible future perspectives of study conditions in the field. On one hand side, obviously, proficiency versus non-proficiency must be taken into account as well as the cultural background of the individual carrying out the aesthetic judgment of a stimulus of a particular dance style. On the other hand side, the following conditions should be considered. The influence on the aesthetic judgment of variables such as: Complements of the dance style (costumes, fans, colours, body painting, etc.) (Halg 2006), accompaniment by music or not (Freeman 1997), the role of the facial expression of the dancers (or even presence versus absence of face), age and gender of the observer, etc. And as a final remark: Since dance is such an ancient human habit, could there be an universal aesthetic preference to some basic element of dance, in spite of cultural influence and level of proficiency of the observer?

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