

# RUMINATIONS ON FORM AND CONTENT

by Paul D. Bloom

Dance is a language. Its purpose is communication.

Dance is a deliberate creation by a conscious being. It is not a natural object. As a work of art, dance stands beside nature on equal terms — as an autonomous organism. Natural beauty is not a condition of a work of art. The aesthetics of natural beauty are different from the aesthetics of a work of art.

There has always been an elemental need of man to imitate natural beauty. The primitive impulse to imitation stands below aesthetics, and its gratification has nothing to do with art.

The halo that envelops the concept of art, all the reverent devotion it has always enjoyed can be understood only by the idea of an art which, having arisen from spiritual needs, gratifies spiritual needs. Only in this sense does the history of art acquire a significance almost equal to the history of religion.

If one accepts that dance is a language whose purpose is communication, arising from spiritual needs, to gratify spiritual needs, then the contemporary argument of form and content loses all meaning. Artistic form cannot exist without content. Content exists before form, and is independent of form. Form is the physical servant of content. A dance is an idea carved into physical form on human beings in time and in space.

“In the Beginning God created the heaven and the earth, And the earth was without form and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters. And God said: Let there be light, and there was light.”

The spirit moved and created form from the void. The form did not exist before the spirit created it. Form does not create the spirit. Spirit creates the form.

After eating the apple in the garden of Eden, man not only suffered the fall, but acquired the possibility of art. “The

Lord God said: “Behold the man has become as one of us, to know good and evil.” Having become as one of us, man now possessed the same will to form which God manifested in the creation itself, that the spirit that stirs to seek expression in physical form.

This “will to form” is a primary factor in all artistic creation, and in its innermost essence, every work of art is an objectification of this “a priori” existent absolute artistic volition.

The dominant historical development of the 20th century has been assault and conquest of spiritual values by technology. Dance has not escaped this corruption. Instead of the awesome responsibility of turning inwards to listen for what Martha Graham called the “divine turbulence”, instead of Dante’s tortuous pilgrimage through Inferno, Purgatorio, and Paradiso in search of his soul, we debase

ourselves worshipping at the golden calf of physical beauty, high extensions and more pirouettes.

The less mankind has succeeded, by virtue of its spiritual cognition, in entering into a relationship of friendly confidence with the outer world, and with its inner emotional world, the more it will emphasise technical forms. Like primitive people tormented by the entangled inter-relationship and flux of phenomena of the outer world, and the turbulence of our inner emotional world, we seek false comfort in the artificial world of symmetry and technique.

Technicians and bureaucrats sell paintings by numbers, computer music and their dance equivalents. Martha Graham once said that only two things can stop someone from being a dancer: a weak heart and a weak head — form and content.

If one has something to say, if one must speak, the right words can be found. If there is a real honest movement of the spirit, then with diligence and discipline the right movement, the right form will be found.

If one has nothing to say, no amount of formal brilliance can breathe life into the inert void. □