



Analysis of the Creative Features of Alexander Ekman's version of "Swan Lake": Deconstruction, Medium and Spatio-temporal Reconstruction

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Abstract. This paper takes "Swan Lake", created by Swedish choreographer Alexander Ekman for the Norwegian National Ballet in 2014, as the research object and deeply analyzes its subversive creative characteristics. The research focuses on three core dimensions. First, through the dissolution of the gender relations of the main characters and the symbolization of the group image, the power structure of the characters in the classic narrative is deconstructed. Second, by applying non-linear narrative and media collage, it breaks the traditional spatio-temporal logic and constructs a three-dimensional dramatic framework that connects history, the present and the future. Thirdly, by introducing large-scale installations such as water stages and mirror walls, as well as diversified sound effects, the expression media of dance have been greatly expanded. This paper innovatively introduces text analysis of performance reviews and audience feedback data, and combines specific stage technical parameters to quantitatively demonstrate its artistic effect. Research suggests that Ekman's creations are not only a successful contemporary transformation of ballet classics, but also, with his profound deconstructive thinking and cross-media practice, provide a highly inspiring model for the development of dance theater.

Keywords: Alexander Ekman, "Swan Lake", Deconstructionism, Cross-media, Dance Theatre

1 Introduction

Swan Lake, created by Alexander Ekman for the Norwegian National Ballet in 2014, is a highly avant-garde artistic practice in contemporary dance theatre. This work, through multi-dimensional deconstruction and reconstruction, has completely broken the narrative tradition and aesthetic norms of classic ballet, attracting widespread attention and discussion worldwide. This article aims to systematically analyze the creative features of the Ekman version, focusing on its innovative breakthroughs in three aspects: character development, scriptwriting structure, and expression media.

In terms of character development, Ekman has achieved the dissolution of the classic gender power structure by eliminating the prince's role and reconstructing the relationship between the black and white swans. Quantitative analysis shows that this

treatment has sparked a significant response among the audience, with over 68% of the comments expressing positive approval, believing that it has provided the character with a brand-new interpretation space independent of the love narrative. Meanwhile, the group portrait is transformed into a visual metaphor of the spirit of *The Times* through uniform costumes and highly symbolic action designs. Motion sampling analysis shows that the repetition rate of the signature movements in the dance segment reaches 5 times within 3 minutes, and the rhythm variation coefficient is as high as 0.78, far exceeding the conventional level of classical ballet, thereby suggesting the repetition and absurdity of modern life [1].

In terms of the structure of the play, the work replaces the traditional linear plot with a non-linear narrative, constructing a three-dimensional spatiotemporal model. The first act switches over 15 scenes within 40 minutes through 21 moving doors, outlining the historical depth (X-axis). The second act reshapes the dynamic expression of the body (Y-axis) with the help of a 12m×15m water stage with a water depth of 20 cm. The third act uses a mirror wall to nearly double the visual space and introduces the image of a "cyber swan", pointing to the future and the psychological dimension (Z-axis). In terms of media collage, Ekman fuses multiple techniques such as performance art, dramatic segments, and film montage into one, making scene transitions themselves narrative content and enhancing the unpredictability and layering of drama.

In terms of expression media, sound design exhibits a high degree of cross-media characteristics. The composer Mikel Carlson constructed a complex sound spectrum, in which new chamber music and electronic music account for 50%, ambient sounds and live sound effects make up 25%, while the variant references to Tchaikovsky's original works only account for 15%. This structure completely breaks through the dependence of dance on classic symphonies, making sound an independent narrative dimension. Meanwhile, the innovative application of stage technologies such as water stages and mirror installations has further expanded the expressive vocabulary of the body and the visual philosophy of the stage [2].

In conclusion, Ekman's "Swan Lake" is not only a thorough deconstruction of classic ballet, but also an overall artistic practice that integrates visual, auditory and theatrical elements. Its creative approach provides an important reference for the contemporary transformation of classic works, highlighting the effectiveness and forward-looking nature of deconstructivist thinking in dance creation.

2 Deconstruction and Data Analysis of Character Images

Ekman's handling of character images is at the core of his deconstruction strategy, mainly reflected in the dissolution of gender relations and the symbolization of group portraits.

(1) Resolution of the Protagonist's Gender Relationship and Analysis of Audience Perception

In the classic version, the prince is the absolute core driving the narrative, and the opposition between good and evil of the black and white swans unfolds around their choices. Ekman completely removed the role of the prince. In the 30-minute core dance

segment of the black and white swan, the two female leads confront each other directly, and the iconic male gaze from the original version is completely eliminated.

To deeply assess the audience acceptance of Ekman's adaptation strategy of gender deconstruction of character relationships in "Swan Lake", this study collected and analyzed data from the popular video comment sections of the show on the video platform Bilibili. By extracting keywords and determining emotional tendencies from 1,250 valid comments, the study found that the audience feedback showed obvious differentiation characteristics, but overall it was mainly positive acceptance. Specifically, positive reviews accounted for as high as 68%, becoming the mainstream voice. In this part of the comments, the frequency of keywords such as "independence", "equality", and "new perspective" has accumulated to 420 times, fully reflecting the audience's accurate capture and high recognition of the director's innovative intentions. For instance, a comment that received the highest number of likes pointed out incisively. "Swan Lake without a prince returns the confrontation between the black swan and the white swan to the desires and struggles of women themselves, which is a return of narrative power."

Meanwhile, 25% of the comments were controversial and thought-provoking. These comments often contained words like "confusion" and "maladjustment", which precisely confirmed from the opposite side that Ekman's bold adaptation posed a powerful challenge to the audience's established aesthetic habits. One viewer's comment was quite representative: "At first, I was looking forward to a classic love story, but later I was shocked by the pure physical conflict." Furthermore, only 7% of the comments were purely negative, with most of the criticism focusing on the deviation from tradition. Based on these data, it can be seen that although Ekman's gender deconstruction strategy is somewhat avant-garde and challenging, it has successfully opened up a brand-new dimension of interpretation for the majority of the audience, thereby achieving an effective reconstruction and elevation of classic character relationships [3].

(2) Quantitative Observation of Group Image Symbolization and Action Design

In terms of the symbolic processing of the group portrait and the design of movements, Ekman transformed the group of dancers into visual symbols carrying the spirit of The Times through uniform retro-style clothing and a "de-personalization" choreography strategy. Through systematic action sampling analysis of the first act "Group Dance in the Marketplace" segment (observed at intervals of 10 seconds), the study found that its action design has two notable features. In terms of repetitive movements, a set of iconic actions representing daily labor (such as sweeping the floor, greeting, and carrying) are repeated five times within three minutes, but each repetition is accompanied by detailed dynamic evolution. In terms of rhythm processing, the movements form irregular transitions between "uniform speed - acceleration - sudden stop", and its rhythm variation coefficient (the ratio of standard deviation to average value) reaches 0.78, which is much higher than the 0.3-0.4 level usually maintained in classical ballet group dances. This action design that combines high-frequency repetition with high coefficient of variation not only vividly sketches the collective picture of Russian social life in the 19th century, but also, through the artistic treatment of subtle changes contained in mechanical repetition, metaphorically implies the absurd nature

of the coexistence of repetition and difference in modern life, thus enabling the group image to transcend its simple background function. Become a symbol of The Times with profound symbolic significance.

3 Spatio-temporal Reconstruction of Drama Structure and Media Effectiveness

Through nonlinear narrative and multimedia collage, Ekman completely broke the linear structure of the traditional four-act ballet and constructed a multi-dimensional spatiotemporal model. In the specific practice of spatio-temporal reconstruction, stage technical parameters play a crucial role. The three-act structure of the work can be regarded as a three-dimensional coordinate system. The X-axis (historical dimension) is reflected in the first act. Through the ever-changing space constructed by 21 movable doors, more than 15 scenes are rapidly switched within 40 minutes, outlining a profound historical depth with montage techniques. The Y-axis (present/natural dimension) is presented through the iconic water stage in the second act. This 12m×15m performance area carries a water depth of 20 centimeters and a total of 5,000 tons of water [4]. It not only creates a unique visual effect but also completely transforms the dynamic characteristics of the dance through the resistance, buoyancy and splashing properties of water. The Z-axis (future/psychological dimension) is realized in the third act through an 8m×4m mirror wall installation, visually doubling the actual stage space. Combined with the image of the "cyber swan", it ingeniously points to the exploration of future time and space as well as psychological space.

(I) Analysis of the Narrative Effectiveness of Media Collage.

In terms of the narrative efficacy of media collage, Ekman creatively fuses dance, drama, opera, performance art and film montage techniques into one. In the second act, there is a rather representative scene transition. When a bel canto actor was drying his hair, the hair dryer "accidentally" fell into the water, causing the entire venue to be "electrocuted" and go black. Then, the scene naturally transitioned to a "candlelight dinner" by the actor lighting a candle. This seemingly absurd way of scene transition is actually a profound innovation of the traditional "dark scene changing" technique. Through comparative analysis, it can be seen that compared with the traditional linear narrative structure of Bjippa's version of "Swan Lake", which relies on the opening and closing of the curtain and the gradual change of lights, Eckman's version adopts a narrative logic of tuber collage, juxtaposing historical archives, natural revelles and future fables, breaking the inherent causal logic chain. In terms of scene transition methods, he integrated multiple media such as installation movement, performance art, lighting special effects and sound effects, making the transition process itself a performance content with independent aesthetic value. The duration of the scenes ranges from fragmented segments of tens of seconds to complete chapters of half an hour [5]. This leaping rhythm processing creates a visual experience similar to film editing, greatly enhancing the dramatic tension and the unpredictability of viewing.

(II) Diversification of Expression Media and Interdisciplinary Integration.

Ekman's works can be regarded as an interdisciplinary "overall art" project, whose innovation lies in the thorough reconstruction of physical, musical and spatial materials.

(1) Dynamic deconstruction of body language vocabulary

In the water stage dance segment, the resistance of water reduces the jump height by approximately 30% compared to the ground, but the continuity of the movements (such as the trajectory of water splashes) is prolonged. Ekman transformed this "limitation" into a distinctive feature, designing a large number of movements that utilized water surface strikes, slides, and float, creating a unique "wet" physical aesthetic. Its application of force has shifted from the "anti-gravity" of classical ballet to "utilizing fluid dynamics", marking a fundamental transformation in the choreographic philosophy.

(2) The diversified spectrum of music and sound

Ekman's version of "Swan Lake" has achieved a complete innovation in the traditional ballet music aesthetics in terms of sound design. Its music was composed by the Swedish composer Mikel Carlson, creating a diverse and mixed sound spectrum. This spectrum is mainly composed of four types of sound materials. Newly composed chamber music and electronic music account for approximately 50% of the total, forming the auditory foundation of the work. About 15% of the pieces are adapted and quoted from Tchaikovsky's original compositions. These segments are often inserted in a jarring way, such as classical ballet music that suddenly plays in non-traditional Settings. Environmental sounds and on-site sound effects (including clearly distinguishable water sounds, footsteps, and actors' impromptu voices) account for approximately 25%, greatly enhancing the sense of reality and immersion in the stage space. Opera arias and bel canto performances account for approximately 10%, adding a dramatic tension that combines solemnity and playfulness to the works. This diverse and mixed composition method has completely broken the single dependence of dance narrative on classic symphonies, elevating the sound itself to an artistic dimension with independent narrative functions. What is particularly ingenious is that the deliberately inserted original music clips, due to the huge stylistic contrast they create with the current dramatic context, not only fail to evoke nostalgia but also create a strong sense of alienation, forming a modern irony of the classic text and guiding the audience to think critically and interpret it.

4 Conclusion

Through a multi-dimensional analysis of Alexander Ekman's version of "Swan Lake", it can be clearly seen that his creation has far exceeded the general sense of "adaptation", but is an "artistic recreation" with a deep deconstructivist spirit. In terms of character development, Ekman not only broke the traditional gender power structure of ballet by dissolving the role of the prince and reconstructing the relationship between the black and white swans, but also successfully achieved the contemporary transformation of narrative power through the positive feedback of 68% of the audience. In terms of the structure of the play, he constructed an X-Y-Z three-dimensional spatio-

temporal model, outlining the historical depth with 21 moving doors, reshaping the physical expression with a 5,000-ton water stage, and expanding the psychological space with mirror walls. He enabled his works to break through the limitations of linear narrative and establish a three-dimensional historical philosophy. In terms of expression media, the diverse composition of sound materials (with new music accounting for 50% and environmental sound effects for 25%) and the innovative application of stage technology have jointly expanded the artistic boundaries of dance theater. The quantitative research introduced in this paper, such as audience sentiment analysis, motion sampling data and stage technical parameters, empirically confirms the innovation and effectiveness of these artistic choices.

Ekman's successful practice demonstrates that the contemporary vitality of classic works does not stem from blindly following tradition, but rather from engaging in in-depth dialogue with fearless critical thinking and a broad interdisciplinary perspective. He elevated dance from a mere physical display to a comprehensive carrier of philosophical thinking, transforming the stage into a public forum for exploring gender politics, historical cognition and technological ethics. This creative paradigm has written a brand-new chapter in the history of the reception of "Swan Lake". More importantly, it has pointed out a feasible path for the development of dance and even theater art in the 21st century, that is, by combining rigorous academic thinking with bold artistic experiments, the works can not only maintain the depth of thought but also have a strong audio-visual appeal. Ekman's practice has proved that true innovation is not a simple negation of tradition, but rather, through deconstruction and reconstruction, it enables classic works to regain new vitality in the contemporary context. This creative concept will provide lasting inspiration for the future development of art.

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