MOVEMENT AS THEOLOGY
EXPRESSING THE SACRED THROUGH DANCE

An Honors 499 Thesis By
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Abstract

This choreography project presented four different ways of viewing divinity through dance. These were monotheism, polytheism, dualism, and pantheism. These religious ideas were presented within the context of the juxtaposition of ancient philosophical concepts with a highly technological world. In this paper, I will discuss the different aspects of the project including the music, software, choreography, costuming as well as the relevance of this project and the growth of the project from beginning to end.
Acknowledgements

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The presentation, which took place May 1, 1999, was structured like a six paragraph paper, with an introduction, four points, and a closing, called the "Outroduction" in my presentation (see appendix B for program). The introduction set up the juxtaposition of ancient philosophical ideas and a technological world. The four following sections, the bulk of the project, expressed monotheism, polytheism, dualism, and pantheism. The outroduction then reprised the introduction. There were many aspects and themes involved within the project. Some were universal and were present in every part of the presentation and some were specific to individual sections as well as part of a universal theme.

The aspects that were universal were costuming and software. The costumes were based loosely on sketches of ancient Greek dress and were made of silver liquid lamé. In this was a juxtaposition of old with new, mirroring and symbolizing the juxtaposition of ancient philosophical views with a technological world. All performers wore this throughout the entire performance. Another aspect that ran the length of the performance was the software. Monitors were placed on either side of the stage facing the audience playing computer-generated visuals on a video. The video was created using Nullsoft Winamp v 2.09 and plug-ins made by independent programmers which add visual effects to the basic program. The plug-ins used were Tripex 1.1 by Ben Marsh, GEISS by Ryan M. Geiss, and Albedo 1.04 by Imad Jureidini. These were then spliced together onto a videotape using Adobe Premiere 4.2. These visual effects were used to create a peripheral source of technology which ran throughout the piece, to retain the contrast between the theology and the technology.
The aspects that were specific to individual sections and were part of a universal theme were music and choreography. The music was all within the same genre, techno, which is produced electronically. I used this as a universal theme, like the software, to represent the technological world we live in, but I also chose the music based upon the theologies that would be represented. In the monotheism section, I used “Children” by Robert Miles because it utilized basically one melodic theme and one variation on that theme. I interpreted this single melodic theme to express monotheism. In the pantheism section, I used “Born Slippy.NUXX” by Underworld. In this song, the only one with lyrics in my presentation, there was a continual flow of words that have little or nothing to do with one another, but in this song, are connected to create a complete song. In pantheism, everything is connected even when it seems to be otherwise. For instance, a tree and a human may seem to have very little in common, but are connected in that they are both part of God. I used the flow of meaningless lyrics that create a whole song to represent the seemingly meaningless connections that make up God in pantheistic thought. In the polytheism section, I used “Halcyon” by Orbital because it contained three different melodies within the song. I used the multiple melodies to represent the multiple deities one finds coexisting in polytheistic religions. In the dualism section, I used “My Kingdom” by The Future Sound of London. This song contained both ethereal vocals and a strong, rhythmic undercurrent, which I used to represent the opposing, but complementary aspects of dualism. Other songs used were excerpts from “Second Bad Vilbel” by Autechre in the introduction and outroduction, and “Philosophy by Numbers” by Orbital which served as a prelude to the presentation.
The choreography, too, had a universal theme but was created for the specific sections of the performance. The one choreographic theme was a particular arm position or positions, depending on the theology, in a given section. In all sections, this "sacred" arm position was one arm outstretched with the other bent at the elbow. In the monotheism section, all the dancers had one "sacred" arm position, representing the singularity of the sacred in monotheistic thought, which was at a 45 degree angle to the ground pointing up. In the polytheism section, the dancers had three different "sacred" arm positions, representing the multiplicity of the sacred within polytheistic thought. One was straight up, another was at a 45 degree to the ground pointing down, and the third was straight to the side. In the dualism section, there were two "sacred" arm positions, representing the contrasting but complimentary idea that forms dualism. Both were straight to the front with the hand bent at the wrist, but one turned the elbows out and had rounded arms, and the other had straight arms with the elbows left turned in. Lastly, the pantheism section had one arm pushed straight out in front, with the palm out and hand bent at the wrist, and the other arm was rounded with the palm facing toward the body representing the connectedness of God both inside and outside the body.

Within the different sections, there were very specific movements used to give the theologies three-dimensional form. In the monotheism section, the symbolic space, that is the physical space on the stage that is chosen to represent something, was everything shoulder level and above. I drew on my knowledge of monotheistic religions and split the choreography into two parts. In monotheistic religions, one is able to have a private sacred time in any given day, but also attends a worship service on a specified day. Because of this, I had an "everyday" part, in which each of the four dancers performed
choreography in the symbolic space apart from everyone else one at a time. At the same time, the other three performed fast-paced choreography below the symbolic space, representing the busy activities of a normal day, which stood in sharp contrast to the slow, sustained movement in the symbolic space. The dancers then performed the “worship” part, a canon which picked up another dancer each time it was repeated. By the end of the “worship” part, all four dancers were performing the same movement. The “everyday” part was then reprised and the movement within the symbolic space from both part were then blended to end the monotheism section.

The polytheism section had three different areas on the floor (symbolic space), and three different types of movement which symbolized the plurality of divinity. Downstage left followed the female vocals in the music and utilized hip isolations and rolls through the spine. Center stage, right and left, followed a bass line melody and utilized sharp, angular movements. Upstage right followed the choral vocals in the music and utilized suspensions and jumps. These were not a literal interpretation of a polytheistic religion, but an abstract representation of the way in which deities coexist within a polytheistic religion.

The dualism section, too, had symbolic space in the form of a floor pattern, but in this section, the floor pattern was a bit more complicated. In the beginning, the two dancers stay in separate areas of the stage, with a dividing line running in a diagonal from downstage left to upstage right. The two dancers had two different types of movement, symbolizing the complementary thought in dualism. One performed angular movement, following the rhythmic undercurrent, and the other performed round and curvy movement, following the ethereal vocals. They danced one at a time, defining their type
of movement, then performed a section of choreography where they came together. In this section, one dancer blended the diagonal line while the other circled around the stage. Together, they drew a yin-yang on the floor, the symbol for dualism. In the concluding choreography, they danced choreography from each other’s “definition” parts with their own type of movement (angular or round), representing the opposition that is necessary in dualism to make the sacred whole.

In the pantheism section, I once again used symbolic space to give a three-dimensional form to a theology. This time I used three areas of symbolic space, high middle, and low. In this section, one dancer performed choreography that defined high symbolic space (shoulder level and above), middle symbolic space (knees to shoulders), and low symbolic space (below the knees). At the end of each part of the choreography, the dancer came back to the aforementioned “sacred” arm position, symbolizing the pantheistic thought that while finite things may appear to be different, they are simply appearances of the sacred, or God.

The introduction and the outroduction served to present the juxtaposition of ancient religious views with our technological world. In these sections, the dancers performed chunks of choreography out of the four main sections in an ordered pattern. In the introduction, though, the dancers had random facings. In the outroduction, the dancers performed the same pattern with distinct facings, so that the audience could readily recognize the movement from the previous sections.

I initially decided to do this project because I found it interesting to blend my own interests together, but my own curiosity is barely enough to warrant the time and energy
that went into the production of this project. My project has contributed to the field of theology in that I have given theologies a three-dimensional shape. This creates a broadened view of and a new way of understanding this subject. My project has also contributed to the field of dance in that I brought in some new ideas and ways of moving. In retrospect, I am very pleased with what I accomplished in this project and would change nothing but the time spent rehearsing.

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MOVEMENT AS THEOLOGY

EXPRESSING THE SACRED THROUGH DANCE

A Senior Honors Thesis
By
Natalie Proctor
MAY 1, 1999 AT 8:00 PM
In Ball Gym, Room KDS(213)

Featuring Music by:

ORBITAL
THE FUTURE SOUND OF LONDON
UNDERWORLD
ROBERT MILES
AND
AUTECHRE

Followed by a Discussion
and
Refreshments
APPENDIX B: PRESENTATION PROGRAM

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Performed by Jenny Adams, Sarah Bishop, Beth Boldt, Megan Lindsay, Valerie Moore, Jennifer Sheagley, and Karen Zimmerman-Pitchford

Prelude
"Philosophy by Numbers" by Orbital

Introduction
Music: from “Second Bad Vilbel” by Autechre
Cast

Monotheism
Belief in one, personal, transcendent, creative God
Music: “Children” by Robert Miles
Jenny Adams, Beth Boldt, Valerie Moore, and Karen Zimmerman-Pitchford

Polytheism
Sacred power is manifested in diverse forms
Music: “Haleys” by Orbital
Sarah Bishop, Megan Lindsay, and Jen Sheagley

Dualism
Opposites coming together creating a whole
Music: “My Kingdom” by The Future Sound of London
Megan Lindsay and Karen Zimmerman-Pitchford

Pantheism
All that exists is God, and God is all in all
Music: “Born Slippy. NUXX” by Underworld
Valerie Moore

Outroduction
Music: from “Second Bad Vilbel” by Autechre
Cast

Thanks to: Dr. Julia Corbett and Sarah Manglesdorf for their advice and support, C. Scott Proctor for visual effects, Craig Byer for technical assistance, Mama Taylor and Earl Nerger for help with costumes, Tyra Proctor for refreshments, Rachel Kinsler for button-pushing and choreographic quality control, and the dancers for their time and patience