



4 The dance space in audiovisual advertising¹

El espacio de la danza en la publicidad audiovisual

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Abstract:

Thinking about the dance is such a difficult and exciting challenge as dancing. Practice demands discipline, patience and requires the dancer constant confrontation with the limits of his/her body. Concerning reflection, it demands a researcher's vast effort and a passionate interest that gets into this universe still little explored by academic research, if compared to other arts like painting and cinema.

Dance exists through the dancer's body movements and its duration is just the moment of this extraordinary and unusual movement. Just like us, it is corporal and ephemeral and this may be one of the keys to understand the low research on the dance. Talking about body and ephemerality is to highlight two intrinsic conditions to human beings, of which we do not always want to remember.

This article starts a work whose initial goal is to understand one aspect of dance: its communicative character. But it is only the beginning of a long search for making dance a more accessible and explored subject matter.

Key words:

Dance, dancer, fleeting, body.

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*Recibido:
1 de septiembre de 2015*

*Aprobado:
24 de noviembre de 2015*

1 This article is part of the initial thoughts from a master's thesis in Information and Communication. This work was entitled "La danse dans la publicité audiovisuelle" and it was developed in the year of 2015 in the Université Sorbonne Nouvelle – Paris 3 in France, under the direction of Marie-Dominique Popelard.



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Resumen:

Pensar en la danza es un reto tan fascinante y difícil como bailar. Practicarlo exige disciplina, paciencia y requiere que el bailarín tenga confrontaciones constantes con las limitaciones de su cuerpo. Respecto a esta reflexión, le exige al investigador un vasto esfuerzo y un apasionado interés que se obtiene dentro de este universo aún poco explorado por la investigación académica, comparándolo con otras áreas como el cine y la pintura.

La danza existe a través de los movimientos del bailarín y su larga duración es solo el momento de este movimiento extraordinario e inusual. Así como nosotros, es corporal y pasajero, y puede ser una de las claves para entender la poca investigación acerca de la danza. Cuando hablamos acerca de cuerpo y fugacidad es para resaltar dos condiciones intrínsecas que tiene el ser humano, las cuales no siempre estamos dispuestos a recordar.

Este artículo es el comienzo de un trabajo cuyo objetivo inicial es entender un aspecto de la danza: su carácter comunicativo. No obstante, este es solo el comienzo de una larga búsqueda para hacer de la danza un tema más accesible y explorado.

Palabras claves:

Danza, Bailarín, Fugacidad, Cuerpo.

Dance is an art to which we can assign different meanings. As an art, it is a means of expression, a language, a way of entertainment, a ritual, a show, besides that, an element used by advertising.

Introducción

The relationship between the dance and advertising is a long-standing one and had several meetings. The French posters of the nineteenth century, advertising inserts built from musical comedies of the 70s and 80s and the flash mob² are just a few examples of this partnership.

The combination of dance and advertising is a powerful association in the area of communication, because there is a complementarity of features when these two subjects cross. Dance provides the advertising world its movements, the beauty of its lines and its unique way of expressing feelings and emotions. It gives advertising a unique language. In turn, it places dance in several media spaces (screens, street, photography etc.), which demands from dance exploration of movements and effects appropriate to each media type. In addition, advertising uses dance as an element that represents its product or reinforces its message, as we shall see with the development of this article. This highlights an extremely valuable dance feature for communication: carrying a universe of senses.

There is a rich field of study in this exchange between dance and advertising. You can find thoughts about it on the internet, especially in advertising blogs. However, it is a complex subject and has not yet been explored by the attention and the depth necessary to understand it completely.

Thus, within the initial research on the subject, it was a pleasant surprise to find two studies that refer exactly to the topic “dance in television advertising”. Studies conducted in different times and places, but for the wealth of reflections raised, will be the discussion basis of this work.

The first work dates from 1983 and was made in the course of Advanced Studies in Dance from the University of Paris-Sorbonne (Paris IV). *L'image de la danse dans la publicité télévisée* is an article written by Chantal Beautemps, Isabelle Bril et Valérie Meot, published in 1984 in the magazine *La Recherche en danse : revue annuelle de travaux universitaires sur la danse*. The main idea of the study is to understand the use of dance within the television advertising in France. To build the body of research, during the month of December 1982 all advertising inserts shown immediately before and after the 20h news of TF1 channel were recorded. Within 172 registered

2 Flash mob is the meeting of a group of people in a public place to perform some actions, such as dance, before dispersing quickly. This group is usually organized to promote any brand or any cause.

inserts, 18 had dance as one of their elements. The study's reflections are drawn from an analysis grid, in which the authors highlight the values meant by advertising, the kind of dance that appears, advertising messages and through which element dance is evoked.

The second study found is the book *Black Social Dance in Television Advertising* by Carla Stalling Huntington, published in 2011, almost 30 years after the French article. The aim of the work is to present the author's theory which says that dance is a mechanism of communication. Huntington bases her reflections on television advertising found in the archives of the UCLA Media Library and also in the Paley Center, from 1940 to 2000. The work of the author is found in the area of marketing, mainly in the consumer behavior area, but it also uses methods of neuroscience and qualitative research to understand how dance in television advertising "*may be a significant vehicle for carrying meaning relative to consumption, markets, and culture (...)*" (HUNTINGTON, 2011, p.5). Although it is a comprehensive work, which is interested to, first, understand the dance in its widest sense and then place it in advertising, Huntington is interested in, above all, dances of black origin, which makes the work compelling from the anthropological point of view, but limited from the dance point of view.

These studies lead the discussion about dance space in advertising because they are, so far, the only source of academic research on the subject. Even if they are different, the primary issue is the same: why use dance in advertising?

The main idea of this paper is to present some elements highlighted in these two works to raise the discussion of how dance can be a communication mechanism and what benefits it brings to advertising. For this purpose, at first, let's talk briefly about some advertising features that will give us clues to understand the place of dance within this universe. Then we will stick to understand the dance within the field of communication, as it can be as a system of meaning and how advertising can make use of it. Finally we'll show the practical application of our considerations, through an advertising video at which the dance plays a crucial role.

1. ADVERTISING: A BRIEF VIEW

Advertising is part of everyday life universe. "*Schematically, all communication falls into two poles: upstream the "conveyor" which conveys a message; downstream the*

“receiver”, which receives the message”³ (CORNU, 1990 p.17, our translation). This is not a rule and features may vary according to history, but you can find deep roots in communication that will always strengthen this trend of active conveyor and passive receiver. “It is the inclination to combine the conveyor with power and at the same time, confuse the conveyor with the public”⁴ (CORNU, 1990 p.17-18, our translation). This scenario, presented by Geneviève Cornu in her work *Sémiologie de l'image dans la publicité*, is a guide to understand the history of advertising because that has always been, basically, a game among those who convince and those who are convinced.

1.1 From announcement to advertising

At first, advertising appears as “announcement” in the sense of bringing a fact to the public. The announcement was meant to inform about events that regulated social life as fairs, markets and political events. According to Cornu (1990, p.18, our translation):

The announcement responds to the original role of advertising: to publish and inform. This is an only sense information: the conveyor, at the position of a representative power, directs orally to the illiterate public.⁵

Thus, in its origins, advertising was the authoritarian and undeniable spokesman, of the values established by those governing society.

The concept of “advertising” - closer to the current publicity setting - appears a little later, so that power is not necessarily linked to values, or as soon as power is subjected to critical thinking. The advertisement carries the sense of spreading a belief, an ideology; it has at its core the idea of influence by identifying, waking up and assigning values.

The transition from announcement to advertising is followed by considerable changes within the context of advertising communication. The announcement, which was more oral and informative, is replaced by a communication, closer to a dialogue, and connected to a fixed support

3 “Très schématiquement, toute communication s'inscrit entre deux pôles : en amont le « destinataire » émet un message : en aval le « destinataire » reçoit le message”.

4 “Il s'agit de l'amalgame de l'émetteur avec le pouvoir tandis que le récepteur se confond avec le public”.

5 “L'annonce répond à la fonction originelle de la publicité : rendre public, publier l'information. Il s'agit d'une information à sens unique, l'émetteur étant représenté par le pouvoir qui s'adresse par voie orale à un public analphabète”.

(posters, screens, radio etc.) that is advertising. With this development, advertising has acquired one of its main characteristics, which endures to this day: being the bearer of messages that convey values.

1.2 Contemporary advertising

The transition from the announcement to advertising was not the only or the last change of the way advertising is designed and made over time. With the emergence of new technologies and the development of consumer society, it has become quite complex.

Today, it is no longer just about selling a product, but also about arousing feelings, entertaining, creating identification and establishing a dialogue with the consumer. According to Huntington (2011, p.59):

The purpose of advertisement has been to sell, regardless of the ways in which commercial is designed. Nowadays, though, advertising is used for much more – to permeate the consciousness of viewers to create relationships with costumers, to give brands personalities, and to entertain viewers”.

Contemporary advertising is wise. To increasingly disguise its functional feature of selling and bonding with its consumer, it became an attentive “observer” to the consumers movements and the world. Also, it has learned to communicate its product so that certain figurative values were assigned to it; what is consumed is not only the product but the crystallized image on it, the consumer’s imagination (BEAUTEMPS, BRIL, MEOT, 1984, p.92).

Finally, it is important to note that all these contemporary features of advertising are promoted by it within its own universe, built to arouse desire in its public. It is a real world reread by the advertising imagination that “*drams from experiences, everyday situations, but conveying them to the imagination or tale condition. These are excerpts from a distorted reality, which become symbols*”⁶ (BEAUTEMPS, BRIL, MEOT, 1984, p.94, our translation). It is within this idea of distorted reality and the construction of symbols that we see one of the dance meetings with advertising.

⁶ “*extrait des expériences, situations quotidiennes, mais les transpose, sur le mode de l’imaginaire, du conte. Ce sont des extraits d’une réalité détournée, devenus symboles*”.

2. DANCE AS A SIGNIFICANCE SYSTEM

The dance is a multifaceted subject. According to Giurchescu (2005, p.266, our translation), *“it has always been an important symbolic means of rituals and ceremonies, for artistic events, to human relationships and to the field of communication”*⁷. The dance studies - also known as “dance theories” - is vast and complex, mainly for it covers different fields as anthropology, sociology, communication and others.

In this study, we won't seek a final resolution about dance, because our intention is not to delimit a sense, as the dance theories do. However, as we treat dance in advertising, we'll highlight features that reveal their communicational aspect. This aspect allows us to reflect on dance as a language: a system that can produce symbols, create private meanings and express messages.

Understanding dance as a language interests advertising because, as a significance system, it may help communicate a product and strengthen a concept.

Advertising explores dance to express and reinforce its message. Its images illustrate the message, but the polysemy contained in these images creates the transfer of values, the association of ideas.⁸ (BEAUTEMPS, BRIL, MEOT, 1984, p.86, our translation)

Before looking at a practical example of how dance acts in advertising, you need to understand how this sui generis language works.

2.1 Basis of this significance system

Many are interested in understanding the dance as a significance system. Rudolf Laban⁹, for example, has devoted much of his studies to the systematization of the movement's language. He believed that the body was one of the greatest miracles of existence, a stunning structure that

7 *“elle a toujours été un instrument symbolique important dans les rites et les cérémonies, les événements artistiques, les relations humaines et dans le domaine de la communication”*.

8 *“La publicité l'exploite pour exprimer, renforcer son message. Ces images illustrent le message, mais leur polysémie en infléchit le sens, crée des transferts de valeurs, des associations d'idées”*.

9 Rudolf Laban (December 15, 1879 - July 1, 1958) was dancer, choreographer, regarded as the greatest theorist of the dance of the twentieth century. He left an important legacy to the dance with study methods and languages to describe, visualize, interpret and document the dance as Labanotation.

performs amazing actions (LABAN, 1994, p.46). For him, dance is a language because it *“may be regarded as the poetry of corporal actions in space”*¹⁰ (LABAN, 1994, p.50, our translation).

Another view of this system is found in the work of Huntington through the theory of symbolic illusions by philosopher Susanne K. Langer¹¹ who believed that dance *“was a form of gesture that consisted of a system of symbols congealing into a distinct language”* (HUNTINGTON, 2011, p.28).

Even if Laban and Langer have not traveled the same path of study and each has built the concept of dance their own ways, two intrinsic features of this system are consistent to both: subjectivity and corporeality. Being a subjective language is explained in Laban’s design of “poetry” and Langer’s “symbolic significance”. By owning this subjectivity, the dance language brings with it the opening to the interpretation and ambiguity and thus allows the construction of a rich world of symbols that accept different meanings.

About corporeality, we can say that the significance system built by dance, the body is the voice and the gestures are the phonemes. It is a non-verbal language. Huntington (2011, p.8) tells us, *“as a nonverbal communication device, dance creates moods and situations, wherein the cognitive, sensory and motor systems are intertwined with emotions”*. As a non-verbal system, dance has the power to achieve something, as an experiment or an idea that, from a certain depth, cannot be translated into words (GIURCHESCU, 2005, p.265).

In her reflections, Huntington develops the concept that this non-verbal feature is reinforced by a neurocognitive condition known as “synesthesia”. Synesthesia is when an individual proves a sensation in some part of the body resulting from an applied or received stimulus elsewhere in the body. For example, a sound can evoke a perfume. This neurocognitive condition highlights a unique experience of the dance language: the fact that when a body speaks another body understands.

Such an experience is brought forth through intangible ideas and emotions given in the performance physically that the viewer interprets

¹⁰ *“la danse peut être considérée comme la poésie des actions corporelles dans l’espace”.*

¹¹ *Susanne Katherina Langer (December 20, 1895 - 17 of July 1985) was an American philosopher who was interested above all in the mind and art studies. It was one of the first women to pursue a career in philosophy.*

through their imaginations. (...) In essence then, the use of this theoretical framework removes the mind as a privileged interpreter of experiences and allows the body to have a say. (HUNTINGTON, 2011, p. 39)

The combination of corporeality and subjectivity assign to dance the character of a maze-like language, with difficult construction and complex interpretation, but which it is not disconnected from reality. In order to make its “gestures of symbolic value”, it is inspired by life, mimicking the real world and providing the viewer images already known, reinterpreted by its significance system. According to Huntington (2011, p.28), “*dance runs emotionally between what we see in reality and what we would like to be, how we are as human beings in reality and how we would like to be even if such desires are mythically derived symbols in culture and society*”. The combination of such features, subjectivity, corporeality and imitation of reality shows us that as a language, dance creates a world of representation. An ideal, but not real world.

3. THE DANCE SPACE IN AUDIOVISUAL ADVERTISING

As we have seen, even if in different ways, both dance and advertising evoke our imagination, take us away from everyday life and make room for the creation of a place where the most different feelings of human fantasy can be awakened. They work for the production of a world that is not ours, but in which we would like to live.

However, to think about the dance space in the advertising universe one must keep in mind that, even with all its current complexity, advertising has commercial purposes. Therefore, it doesn't matter how well designed an advertising is, his focus is always on selling an object.

And this is not different if we talk about the advertisings that use the dance: the main narrative role is assigned to the advertised product and the dance, as well as music and actors, it is one of its supporters. Nevertheless, although it is not the main character of the story, dance is revealed as an essential item for the construction of the advertising concept behind the commercial. It is a “special effect” whose job is to assign values to the product or reinforce the message conveyed.

As the dance illustrates an extrinsic sense (the qualities of the product or the message), the choice of the “figure of the dance” is extremely careful and thoughtful. In most ads that use dance as an element, we find images that are generally known by the general public as portraits of classical ballet, traditional dances, social dance scenes or simply some “sketches” of dance movements. They are stereotyped images, easily recognized by the viewer, however, they carry symbols and information that have a deeper meaning than what is being seen.

3.1 An example of observation: “Swan Lake” by Lotus

As the experience of a dance performance could not be completely lived up if it remained only in the world of ratings or in the imagination of a choreographer, this study can not be fully understood if we do not extrapolate the theory and look at an example in practice on how everything we talked about so far is applied.

Thus, to achieve our reflection, we will make an analysis of a French television commercial which was aired in 2009 by the Lotus brand, one toilet paper manufacturer. The film was chosen as a case study because it is extremely focused on dance, allowing us to find a significant amount of elements that give substance to our research.

The video¹², which goes inside a bathroom, begins with a man in his 40s, sitting on his toilet with an expression of dissatisfaction. In the background, we hear some loose musical notes and poorly coordinated. In a first action, he looks at the toilet paper beside him and smiles mischievously. At the same time, we heard a classical music getting louder, overlaying the musical notes played before. Soon after, he takes the toilet paper and begins to cut it and put it on. The scene is incomprehensible up to the time when, after a close at the roll which is almost finished, we find that the character made a ballet tutu with toilet paper. The man then begins to perform some classical dance movements while a narrator speaks: “*Eric, 38, no longer stands the piano lessons from his neighbor. We all need a break Lotus. New Lotus XXL, for an endless comfort*”¹³ (our translation). In the end, Eric makes a “way out in style”.

12 More information: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VPUhJpBA_Ik

13 “*Eric, 38 ans, ne supporte plus les leçons de piano de sa voisine. On a tous besoin d’une pause Lotus. Nouveau Lotus XXL, pour un confort sans fin*”.

This insertion has several points that called our attention, however, the transformation of toilet paper in tutu is undoubtedly the film's central action and carries with it the key to understand both the narrative and the message that the advertising wants to convey. Cornu (1990, p. 55, our translation) tells us that *“every shape created around advertising must infallibly match its identity”*¹⁴. The toilet paper that becomes tutu is the identity of this video. Therefore, our following consideration will have this transfiguration as a basis, because it combines everything we said so far: the representation and the transfer of dance values for the product, dance as image in advertising and a pause in everyday life to the creation of an imaginary world.

3.1.1 Transferring values

The Lotus advertising highlights the idea Beautemps, Bril and Meot (1984, p.90. our translation) that says *“in the advertising image, the performance and the object inform each other, they are inseparable”*¹⁵. The toilet paper tutu goes beyond representation, it is the dance materialization by the product and vice versa. The main purpose of this association is direct and literal: to confirm a product quality, “proving” that the new version of Lotus has 50% more leaves. The character uses the paper to make a large tutu, yet, at the end of the video we see through a close that the roll is not over. In addition, the narrator's statement: *“for an endless comfort”*, reinforces the idea of “size” conveyed by the commercial.

By this point of view, more explicit, the dance image is just an excuse to present a product feature in a different and unusual way. But if we look a little deeper into the trick of the toilet paper tutu, we find a second purpose which is metaphorical, but it is not obvious and that may not have been intentional in the video making of.

Even being a subjective language, as we saw earlier, dance keeps a close relationship with the metaphor. Within the advertising it is through the metaphor that dance gives its values to products. It can bring the lightness quality with a jump, the balance value with a dancer in the pointe shoes and the seduction with the body of a dancer.

¹⁴ *“toute forme créée autour du produit doit infailliblement rappeler son identité”.*

¹⁵ *“Dans l'image publicitaire, le spectacle et l'objet s'informent mutuellement, ils sont indissociables”.*

In the case of Lotus advertising, to understand this symbolic, metaphorical value, which is transferred to the product, you need to briefly go deeper in the dance history. The ballet tutu is an overlay of short and stiff skirts, it is the most traditional clothing of classical dancers. It dates back to the ballet romantic era, which starts in the first half of the nineteenth century. An effervescent period for classical dance, in which we find ballets inspired by the imagination of the Renaissance (like *Giselle*, 1841) and from different countries (*La Sylphide*, inspired by the Nordic countries, 1832). We also see the beginning of “ballets-tales” (*Cinderella*, 1823) and the use of pointe shoe. The romantic ballet presents the woman as a “candid spirit”, dressed in white and with a sublime body that defies gravity. Romantic ballerina is a winged creature. The tutu is part of this supernatural and evanescent woman. It is a symbol of purity.

Raising the toilet paper to tutu level is tying it up, even if unconsciously, to all the historical and symbolic features that tutu carries as, for example, softness and lightness. It is presenting the viewer a good quality product, in a non-declared manner.

3.1.2 The stereotyped image

Expanding a little the thought of the toilet paper tutu to the issue of dance as a whole in the insertion, we can say that, as already discussed, the images presented in the commercial Lotus are clichés: besides the tutu - a mythical element from classical ballet - we have the show song “*Swan Lake*” and dance steps like the arms in 5th position, *pas de chat* and pirouettes that are instantly connected to classical dance.

However, even if the stereotype appears in Lotus film, there is an unusual element that is opposed to it: the exchange of the classical dancer by a man. While the classical dancer is almost a divine entity, our character, Eric, is a “common” man: dressed like someone who is in his own home and somewhat out of shape by the standards of classical ballet. This replacement brings some comedy to the scene and, more importantly, allows the viewer’s identification with the character. We identify with Eric because he is “not the image” of classical ballet, his is, in fact, a bathroom dancer, which any of us could be.

This video is really peculiar about the stereotype matter: it explores it, as well as it denies it. However, it is interesting to point out that the intention of both the exploration and the denial is the same: it causes consumer

identification with the images shown by the advertising, or by the classical dance or by the comedy scene created by the “bathroom star dancer”.

3.1.3 The pause in everyday life and the appearance of the imaginary world

Our last consideration is about the making of the imaginary world concept by advertising and also by the dance. The creation of this world is always preceded by a moment of “pause” in everyday life. A pause means that there is room for something extraordinary within the ordinary. It means a place where we can “get out” of real life. It means forgetting, for a moment, things we do not like, such as our neighbor’s piano lessons, projecting a new reality, as a dance performance

In Lotus advertising, this break is clearly evoked by the narrator’s text that tells us: *“we all need a break Lotus”*. According to this text, the product is the pause; but in the video, the routine interruption is also promoted by the dance, as the character changes the atmosphere where he is to become a dancer. In the way the commercial is built, we have the impression that Eric’s ballet performance is created by his mind, it comes from his imagination and his desires.

The completion of this study encouraged by the pause matter seems relevant because the interruption of reality to create the imaginary world is one of the most frequent uses of dance by advertising. As we have seen, advertising alone is already a routine interruption that makes room for the creation of an idealized world. The dance also provides this gap, considering it is widely used as a relief device, a means of reducing routine tensions. Joining both is a superimposition of ideas.

The crucial point of this reflection is that advertising and dance are triggers that fire the pause, but the idealized world, which appears in this moment of interruption, is created within the mind of every consumer. Therefore we can say that the imaginary world that dance and advertising seek to build is also the result of our imagination, our desires for life and consumption.

The interesting thing about analyzing a field of study that is still not widely explored is the permission to shape it gradually. In this paper we investigate some basic concepts, which help to understand the role of dance in advertising through a communicative perspective that enlightens the semiotics studies.

However, we understand that there are other elements and even other views which are necessary for the construction of a holistic thinking about it. For example, we approach the issue of stereotypical images, but we know that this can be expanded to understanding the cultural stereotype brought by dance, especially when we see ads that use oriental or African dances as support. We have analyzed the idea of a pause in everyday life, but there are several commercial ads working directly with the role of dance performance, which carries the side of entertainment and amusement that it has. Furthermore, we see that there is a large body exploitation by advertising, but we know from dance studies and other areas, how difficult it is to relate to our own body and understand how this breathtaking structure can perform amazing actions, as Laban used to think.

All these examples point out that understanding the dance space in advertising is an investigation that starts here, but it does not see an end in this work. With this article, we hope to strengthen the discussion about dance in communications, but also hope to spread the reflection about it in other areas of knowledge. Our main and permanent search, within our way of theoretical studies of dance, is to highlight the interdisciplinarity that this art carries and show how it can be relevant to several matters of our routine.

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