Dance and Music Cooperation in the Acquisition of Cultural Continuity

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Abstract
Throughout the ages, the fascinating world of dance and music has always been crucial point in an individual’s search for beauty, harmony and unity, balancing the social life through the serenity it has created. These artistic activities as a whole of physical and emotional fiction, which have sometimes stood against the cases of social disintegration, have also been the store of social memory, or sometimes the phenomenon of collective passion, or the guarantee of cultural continuity on some occasions. Inferences regarding the theoretical depths of these phenomena with aesthetic depth attract the attention to the social function of art under the responsibility of forming the ground for integration. This study constructed on the basis of integrality that is created as a result of the cooperation between dance and music in the acquisition of cultural continuity is framed in line with the phenomena of art, man and culture and supported with the ‘Cultural Continuity Model’. The concepts of dance and music are generally discussed in the local context.

Keywords: cultural continuity, art, dance, rhythm, music

INTRODUCTION
Having reached beyond boundaries throughout the ages, the fascinating world of dance and music has always been an individual’s nodal point in his/her search for beauty, harmony and unity, balancing the social life through the serenity it has created. These artistic activities as a whole of physical and emotional fiction, which have sometimes stood against the cases of social disintegration, have also been the store of social memory, or sometimes the phenomenon of collective passion, or the guarantee of cultural continuity on some occasions.

The artistic expressions shaped through the mankind’s emotions, undoubtedly, produce an effect on the cultural identity of societies and present their buildup again to the mankind through their complementary potential. By its nature, the integral quality formed in the synthesis of rhythm and music with dance, having completed their process of nature-based formation, is shaped under the cooperation of dance and music on the basis of spontaneity principle. Inferences regarding the theoretical depths of these phenomena with aesthetic depth attract the attention to the social function of art under the responsibility of forming the ground for integration.

Tolstoy says, ‘art is not a kind of pleasure, consolation or entertainment; it is something highly noble. Art is an organ of human life that transfers people’s consciousness and mind to their emotional sphere (Tolstoy, 1898/2003). Since health problems to arise in this organ may affect the whole body, it may be of vital importance in case they are left untreated. Such an outcome may also pave the way for interruptions in the functioning of the social role of art, leading to diversions in the art-society interaction.

In the context of the social role of art, the integrality of music, rhythm and dance is a whole of meanings which has had profound influences on societies and formed their languages. Dance is more than an art. It is one of the most powerful tools for fusing the split between the two functions of the brain-the fusing of the logical with the intuitive, the fusing of the analytical perceptions with the sensorial perceptions, the fusing of holistic understanding with step-by-step thinking. It is a discipline which within itself deals with the basic understanding of human experience, and conceptualization (Synder, 1974 as cited in Laws, 2002, p. 6). For dance, Akgül (2006) suggests:

It is the existence of communication in the artistic dimension. It is an art of communication. The reason for its existence and survival is its productivity, which is also the basis that has been underlying this form of communication for centuries. It is the reflection of social facts as well as one of the keystones in art. As a resultant of the two significant components in art, that is movement and music, which eliminate discriminations of class, language, religion and race, dance is the common passion among the world societies. The reasoning behind its quality as a passion is revealed by the interdependence between dance and music, which have not left man alone
throughout the history of humanity. This art of communication, powered by the two branches of art taking back-support from societies, has witnessed not only the communication of individuals, but also that of cultures, even the communication of generations (p. 6).

The fact that some of the conclusions concerning the relationship between culture and dance, which creates a medium for intercultural communication, have changed in the course of time can be interpreted as the reflection of a dynamic life. While the relationship between dance and culture cannot be debased, it was assumed by early studies carried out by anthropologists that there has always been a direct and simple link between dance and culture in contrast to the studies conducted today. In addition, it has been claimed that simple communities had simple dances. Moreover, as dance used to be considered a simple reply, early evolutionists claimed that dance had a greater meaning for early human beings, but this meaning would vanish with the advent of civilization. A more realistic attitude has emerged about the function of dance within the community when social and cultural studies are taken into account together. Instead of regarding the simplicity or complexity of dance as a function of the society or their cultural level, anthropologists concluded that it has a great many functions depending on cultural conditions. As the changes that have occurred at various rates in the meaning and shape of dance cannot be comprehended without depending on cultural conditions, new studies have been designed so that the complex relationship between dance and culture can be clearly comprehended (Royce, 2002). Despite the fact that dance, among all branches of art, is the least understood, it stands at a far closer point to life experiences (Martin, 2004).

According to Socrates, deeds supposed to be right are those that are really beneficial for people and make them happy (Altar, 1996). The present position of dance located in the triangle of sports, recreation and art is equipped with a capacity that will bring people happiness from each angle. For man, who has traditionally utilized his body only to a limited extent, dance has presented him the opportunity to discover his body.

On the other hand from the past to the present the art of music has assumed a substantial role in human experiences. For centuries individuals have made use of music as a means of help with their daily activities. In the ancient city of Babylon, the horn was used to be played by musicians while masses of slaves were being drifted to their places; in Russian songs were sung on Volga while boats were being towed along the river. With a similar purpose, today workers are also accompanied by drummers during any kind of work in the village, fields or at the harbor (Siegmeister, 1961).

A similar tradition is also observed in the cooperative activities (called imece) done by the villagers who live on agriculture. Yarma (bulled wheat) or bulgur, after their shells have been removed, is placed into a hollow large stone called soku. Then, women pound the stuff with big wooden pestles simultaneously through the rhythm that is created with the accompaniment of folksongs sung in chorus. These constitute the rhythmic songs with which women perform dances using casseroles as their instruments to keep rhythm during wedding ceremonies. Motives activated by the cooperation between rhythm and music, perform their functions as if they were competing with each other to meet any circumstances towards the reaction of the body. This occurs to such an extent that the individual is led by these motives to react by nature, thereby eliminating any need to learn or adapt. What highlights this fact here is seen in the little swings of a little baby.

As societies are shaped by the culture in which they are born, they also give shape to that environment. What is experienced is a kind of mutual interaction. This process, which can also be called acculturation process, is the result of many reasons. The interaction of societies living together is the reason for synthesis. According to Akgül (2007), “Expression of the pure emotions of societies coming from thousands of years of tradition has affected cultural synthesis and represented the structural properties of societies. These values, which are invaluable remains of cultural heritage, play a vital role in the unique identities of societies” (p. 47) because these identities have undertaken the potential to protect the national characteristics of societies through their privilege, enabling the opportunity for the continuity of cultural values. Attempts to weaken the national characteristics of societies have been reinforced with the tendency of emphasis on social differences, and the individual has been forced to meet his/her instinct of belonging through smaller groups. National, regional, ethnic and cultural differences as well as gender differences have been perceived as the reasons for criticism.

Endeavors for universalism and differentiation are, in the real sense, the two facets of the understanding that is at the disposal of the sovereign powers. The awaiting end is the same: consumed identities. Both approaches have a wearisome, even a destructive character for the originality of identity. However, societies are privileged with their original characteristics; the elimination of this privilege also means the isolation of artistic expressions that ensure the continuity of cultural identity, despite its complementary function, from the cultural lives of societies.
As a result of the intentional politics as well as a recreation-based lifestyle imposed upon societies, degenerated communities of a single type, who are less reflective and inquisitive, more easily manageable, isolated from the facts and deprived of originality are intended to be transformed into an artificial common culture. At this point, while art is damaged as a tool of ill-intentioned agents, individual and social values also receive their share just as historical experiences do. The life style centered on recreation, distracting individuals’ attention, not only renders them unresponsive to the happenings around, but it also contributes to their habit of frequent consumption. Hence, there has emerged a mass of individuals, who cannot satisfy, regenerate or develop themselves. Given this fact, like several branches of art, dance is also influenced negatively to a great extent. Today dance, attributed to crazy jumps for joy, concealing its artistic and cultural dimensions, has merely been rendered into a recreation-aimed form. What accompanies the art of dance contextualized in this sense is the understanding of music that is interpreted under the profound impact of the popular culture and defined almost as a monotype approach.

However, as a result of witnessing human life throughout the historical process through their acquired cumulative qualities, dance and music, which are characterized with a social identity, have become the language of humanity in several cases where the mankind has needed to reveal his emotions. The human being, who has chosen to express his/her feelings, such as reproach, anger, grief, longing, uprising, love, enthusiasm, passion, expectations, dreams etc., by means of his/her body and music, has therefore qualified the art, which provides this opportunity, as an integral part of life and been left under its impact, because the individual has found his/her inner self inside it.

The sound of melody has influenced the mankind not only as a sound, but also as a sign of feelings and affections. Therefore, sounds find meaning on condition that they activate the inner, familiar emotions (Gilbert and Pearson, 1999). Music, which sparks a desire to dance, first addresses the feelings through the senses and starts the act of dancing on the human body as a reaction. The cooperation of these branches of art, the former of which leads to an emotional response, whereas the latter results in a bodily one, provides the opportunity for emotional relief, giving the energy to deal with stress to the mankind, and rendering life more valuable and meaningful to live. However, throughout the historical process this cooperation between the two branches was disrupted, left under the pressure of prohibitions, and each one was also left on its own. For instance, in B.C. 246 the Emperor Shi Huang, who was concerned about the intense involvement of music into the social life in China, one of the civilizations in Central Asia at the time, banned music due to the fact that “it accustomed the society to laziness” (Yener, 1990, p. 213), and started a dark age by deciding on the elimination of the existing instruments and all the written sources (“History of Western Music”, n.d.). On the other hand, Aristotle, in his work titled Politics, highlighted the art of music in terms of its function that helps to provide a kind of training, comfort oneself, develop personality and to improve the ability to think (Şener, 1998).

A similar case concerning dance was observed throughout the Ottoman period. The kanto singers on the stages where comedy plays, instead of drama, were performed in the improvised theatres during the Second Constitutional period of the Empire, were necessarily chosen among the Armenian, Greek or Jewish minorities as it was impossible for Turkish women to make performances on the stage (Saraçoğlu and Dervişoğlu, 2005). The reason was that the Turkish woman was suppressed by some religious restrictions and described as the symbol of a forbidden, visual image taking the mind of man away not with her identity, but her body.

Dance and music, as the branches of art tried to be kept isolated from social life through such prohibitions, have lost their roles in raising the social awareness and shaping the society with the help of their cooperative power. The function in the protection of social order, undertaken by these artistic branches structured with social and religious teachings, has been disregarded and tried to be kept outside the society for some religious or political reasons. As a result, dance and music qualified as the insurance of health in human mind and body, which is also included within the framework of the sense of service for humanity lying on the bases of political, religious, and legal principles, have been labeled as forbidden, and this result has been rendered as a natural end.

Departing from Confucius’ belief that music forms its own tradition in the flow of life (Say, 2006), it turns out to be the facts of society that are forbidden. In the context of artistic education, the discernible change in the individual’s communicative skills accomplished through the contribution to the emotional intelligence enabled by dance education also brings together the element of artistic sensitivity.

The acquired communicative skills and artistic sensitivity require a stricter attitude in the processes of attaching individual care for social communication, achieving cultural continuity and creating social cohesion. This outcome feeds the instinct for the protection of cultural values as a whole and prepares the setting for sensitivity.
The responsibility of art for representing and reviving life (Ponty, 1964/2005) makes it indispensable in social life, strengthening the individual’s ties with the life itself. The dancer accompanies this representation with his/her body and the musician with his/her instrument. As a result of the communication made possible with the dancer’s body and the musician’s instrument, the meeting point between dance and music, created through the transmission of the chain of communication into society, which is strengthened through the new ways of interaction with each other, reinforces the cooperation of dance and music with the cooperation of art and society, highlighting the necessity of art. This necessity is qualified as the prerequisite of continuity.

It is possible to talk about cultural continuity only to the extent of societies’ commitment to their cultural values. The reason for which dance and music find more space compared to the artistic activities related to those such as carpet, tile, clay etc. and take on a responsibility within the continuity is that these branches of art meet the necessity of recreation included by nature within man. Although this situation leaves the other social responsibilities of these artistic branches, they stand out with their mission to enable access to art inside the society, and thus to increase its popularity. The sustainability of these values based on the social ground is at higher levels than that of other cultural values. The continuity of these maintained values and transmission from one generation to another is achieved in a spontaneous cycle. The cycle in question is highlighted under the ‘Cultural Continuity Model’ constructed within the framework of this study.

CONCLUSION

While a critical look is actively involved in the restructuring process, the quality of critique becomes important. Compared to the changes intended to be constructive and beneficial for the humanity, destructive changes of revolutionary character could by no means considered innocent. Conscious attitude in the process of changes constructed with a focus upon categorization and distinction is definitely related to the level of awareness in the society. At this point, the responsibility of art for the enlightenment of society should not be disregarded, but highlighted, and the artistic contribution which activates the process of education should be put into use. The need for intensifying human-to-human communication has come into question so as to minimize the loss brought by technology, which has also brought innovations, and to get rid of the lack of social and interpersonal communication. At this point attention should be drawn to the constructive functional importance of dance and music in the acquisition of cultural continuity, and in this way, a new dimension to design must be aimed to deal with gradually diminishing human relations and society-art relationship must be established on a more widespread and intensified ground not by concealing, but disclosing the privileges presented by art.

REFERENCES


