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The Architecture of Movement

Emma Gregory

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Preface

The process of drawing parallels between styles of ballet pedagogy and eras of art history unfolded quite unexpectedly through a few specific moments of brief inspiration, fueled largely by my personal experiences as a dancer and artist. Through my dance experience, which began at the age of three, I spent many years in front of a mirror considering how certain physical movements appear aesthetically, learning to manipulate my body to create a desired visual, and internalizing established rules for moving. One of these moments of inspiration occurred in a ballet class one afternoon when my instructor gave the class the correction to imagine energy shooting from our fingertips across the room to encourage us to reach further, essentially creating the illusion of a line extending beyond the space we physically occupied. In that moment, I recognized a similarity between "extending the line" of an arm or arabesque in ballet and creating implied line in the composition of visual artwork, a concept discussed in a recent design class. Following this realization, I began contemplating the prevalence of the elements of art and principles of design within ballet: line, shape, space, balance, movement, and unity were all concepts familiar to composing and analyzing visual art, but they felt intriguingly present in my experience as a dancer as well. These elements and principles seemed to parallel the rules for moving that I internalized as a dancer. This connection led to a directed study with Dr. Barbara Pemberton, in which we read *Apollo's Angels* by Jennifer Homans. This study included countless fascinating realizations about the historical importance of ballet toward shaping the cultural identity of nations, fostering political relations, and integrating various art forms. Aided by a class on the History of Modern and Contemporary Art with Professor Donnie Copeland the same semester, I soon expanded my comparison between the fundamental elements of art and principles of design and ballet to include a broader consideration of the art world as a whole. As

the semester progressed, a discussion from one class would remind me of the other. I recognized both concrete interpersonal connections between artists and dancers and similarities in the conceptual or philosophical approaches of specific artists and dancers to their respective crafts. The general concept of comparing styles of ballet pedagogy to art movements never occurred to me until the similarities between the specific styles and movements arose in my mind. Before any concrete parallels crystalized, I detected a similar artistic essence at the heart of Vaganova's style of ballet and Baroque art, a shared elevation of both skilled excellence and passionate expression. While comparing Balanchine's style to modern art occurred more naturally, as these occurred simultaneously in history, determining the artists whose conceptual approaches best matched Balanchine's work required further investigation.

Introduction

The widely unknown, but immensely fascinating, story of ballet originates in the French courts of the 16th century with the marriage of Henri II and Catherine de Medici, although the ballet of today bears almost no resemblance to what the 16th century French might call "ballet" in appearance or function.[1] However, ballet as an art form holds tradition in highest regard and retains some aspect of nearly every phase of its development, even while it interacts intensely with the political climate of the day. Visual arts are frequently discussed within the context of interactions with the ruling class and church, but the historical exchange between ballet, political influence, and other art forms is far less frequently addressed despite its notable presence. For instance, the regal demeanor ingrained by the early French court setting persists into ballet of the present day. The revolutionary climate later altered ballet in ways still evident today with the introduction of the *corps de ballet*, first established as a product of the French Revolution and initially composed of large numbers of ordinary women dressed in white, representing "a nation cleansed of corruption and greed."[2] Ballet played a diplomatic role in the 20th century, offering hope for peace despite the tensions of the Cold War through international tours between the United States and Soviet Union. In fact, the New York City Ballet performed in Moscow, earning an enthusiastic reception from Soviet audiences, even as the Cuban Missile Crisis unfolded on the other side of the world.[3] Much like the visual arts alter as they spread geographically, the center of influence in the ballet world shifted around Europe over time,

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1. Jennifer Homans. *Apollo's Angels: A History of Ballet.* (NY: Random House Trade Paperbacks, 2010), 3-4.

2. Ibid., 112-13.

3. Ibid., 377-78.

eventually settling in Russia for a miniature “Renaissance” of ballet. In Russia, the French, Italian, and Danish traditions fused into a distinguished classicism of etiquette, virtuosity, and elegance. From here, Agrippina Vaganova, a talented ballerina and prolific pedagogue, fused these elements of influence into a unified system, transforming the ballet world definitively. George Balanchine, also trained in Imperial Russia, followed only years later with a uniquely neoclassical approach to choreography and pedagogy, retaining similar elements of etiquette, virtuosity, and elegance with alterations to suit his distinct vision. While Vaganova sought to uphold the integrity of classical ballet as a valued cultural art throughout a threatening period of national turmoil, Balanchine aimed to build a distinctly American ballet, integrating his Russian heritage and balletic tradition with uniquely American values.

The more familiar but inexhaustibly extensive history of the visual arts follows similar cycles of tradition and innovation, accompanied by political influence and rebellion. Two eras of interest for purposes of comparison to the ballet world are the Baroque and Modernist eras. As a successor to the Renaissance, the Baroque period features architecture, sculpture, and painting of spectacular representation, expression, and composition. Modernism approaches art from a more conceptual perspective, a questioning of how to define the construct of art itself and what the experience of art ought to be for the viewer. Agrippina Vaganova’s ballet technique and pedagogy, and their resulting influence on Soviet dance, capture the essence of the Baroque era of visual arts: both Vaganova’s methodology and Baroque art employ the refined technical capacities developed in the preceding eras to exhibit dramatic expression on a grand scale. Similarly, George Balanchine’s neoclassical choreography parallels the artistic mindset of the modernist era of visual arts, with an emphasis on a philosophical approach to one’s work and the present experience, finding similarities in the work of Wassily Kandinsky and Mark Rothko.

Agrippina Vaganova

Synonymous with Russian ballet, Agrippina Vaganova crafted a legacy through her career of dancing and pedagogy that lasts into the present. Perhaps the most essential figure in defining Russian ballet, Vaganova trained during the Imperial era, working under legends such as Petipa and Ivanov, endured the Russian Revolution, and steered the art of ballet through the transition into the Soviet era. Remembered most notably for her contributions to the pedagogical system, the Vaganova Academy in St. Petersburg reveres her methodology as the foundation of classical training for upcoming generations of dancers.

Vaganova's analytical mind fueled the formulation of her systematic methodology. At the time of her training in the late 19th century, Russian ballet exhibited influences of both French and Italian technique, and while the dancers were noted for their "rich emotionality,"[4] the art lacked a distinct style. Inspired by her somewhat disjointed training and her personal challenges as a dancer, Vaganova sought to extract the most valuable elements from the French and Italian styles and combine them into a coherent and distinguished system. Physically, Vaganova excelled with jumps, often noted by critics for her lightness and strength, but she was not naturally gifted with expression or artistry.[5] This challenge inspired rather than hindered her work in pedagogy, as Vaganova carefully codified the coordination of the entire body, combining the head, port de bras, torso, and even wrists, essentially embedding artistry into the heart of her technique.[6] Ludmila Blok describes Vaganova's style as the "architecture of

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4. Catherine E. Pawlick. *Vaganova Today: The Preservation of Pedagogical Tradition*. (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2011), 6.

5. Ibid., 17, 20-21, 23.

6. Ibid., 31.

movement" saying, "all is thought out in advance, all is a complete whole, solid, reliable, and economical . . . All of the movement leads to one goal."[7]

Initially imported from France and Italy in the 18th century, ballet arrived in Russia to foster the etiquette of the elite rather than to entertain or function as a creative art. Its Parisian origin connoted prestige, as Peter the Great sought to Westernize Russian culture. The nobility, and their children, sought to absorb the aristocratic carriage associated with French classical ballet, viewing it as a "physical comportment to be emulated and internalized—an idealized way of behaving."[8] This reverence for foreign ballet masters and the accompanying noble comportment from the French court persevered over the next century, even as the art form declined in Europe and found its progression in Russia. In fact, French-born ballet master and choreographer Marius Petipa became a central figure in shaping Russian ballet as a distinct art through works such as *The Sleeping Beauty, The Nutcracker*, and *Swan Lake*, all classics performed into the present day.[9] A young Agrippina Vaganova began her balletic training amidst this era of tradition-building, even performing a small role with other first year students in the premiere of *The Sleeping Beauty,* considered to be the "first truly Russian ballet."[10]

Vaganova's varied instruction throughout her years of training later inspired her methodology, as she borrowed the effective approaches of her pedagogues and avoided those that frustrated her as a student. For instance, Lev Ivanov, one of the earliest influential

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7. Ibid., 38.

8. Homans, 247.

9. Ibid., 288.

10. Homans, 277; Vera Krasovskaya. *Vaganova: A Dance Journey from Petersburg to Leningrad,* trans. Vera M. Siegel. (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2005), 13.

choreographers from Russia who was noted particularly for his choreography of the snow scene in Petipa's version of *The Nutcracker,* taught some of the younger classes at the school. He approached his instruction rather apathetically, frequently arriving to his lessons late and unprepared and rarely offering corrections to students.[11] In contrast, Ekaterina Vazem, pedagogue for the intermediate classes, offered detailed analysis of movements, requiring students to engage their entire body. Vaganova appreciated the discipline and detailed instruction offered in Vazem's class, and she often repeated the exercises on her own over summer vacation. For Vazem, softness in movement was essential to classical ballet, a quality Vaganova did not possess naturally. Although Vaganova only studied under Vazem for one year rather than the expected three years, her influence is evident in Vaganova's approach to pedagogy, particularly in their shared ability to observe all students in a class simultaneously, allowing no mistakes to escape their notice.[12] Vaganova also studied under Christian Johansson, a Danish dancer and student of Bournonville, from whom she improved her technical skills in pointework and jumps, but she was frustrated by his lack of clear explanations. By the time Vaganova took class from him, Johansson regularly "demonstrated" exercises with his violin, using his bow to represent the working leg, a method that often resulted in confusion for students. Even in her youth, Vaganova craved a deep understanding of the reason for each movement beginning from the moment the step is initiated.[13] Perhaps the most influential instruction for Vaganova's dancing and pedagogy she received from Olga Preobrajenska, a fellow dancer who mentored Vaganova once she joined

11. Krasovskaya, 11-12.

12. Krasovskaya, 18-19; Pawlick, 7.

13. Krasovskaya, 20-21; Pawlick, 8.

the Mariinsky Theater, the prominent ballet company affiliated with the Imperial Ballet School from which Vaganova graduated. Vaganova said of Preobrajenska's instruction that her "explanation of the Italian exercises forced my body to work in a new way, activating every muscle that had been dormant up until then. Those few lessons that I took with her led me to a single journey, forcing me to think in dance, and to approach each movement with great consciousness."[14] Other students of Preobrajenska recall that she placed great emphasis on the details of footwork, turnout, and coordination, attending to even the wrists, and that she considered the strengths of individual students when choreographing for student performances. Vaganova's methodology reflects these values, particularly through analytical awareness of engaging the entire body in dance.[15]

Despite her stellar technique, the progression of Vaganova's dancing career was far from effortless. Physically, her head reportedly appeared too large for her body, and she lacked the soft elegance of dancers such as Anna Pavlova, an aesthetic valued over her strength and boundless vigor in her contemporary ballet world. Petipa, the First Ballet Master of the theater, preferred his ballerinas to exhibit "grace and femininity,"[16] and therefore often disregarded Vaganova's other strengths, even calling her "horrible" in his diary.[17] While never naturally gifted in artistry, Vaganova improved substantially through dissecting each element of a step, isolating everything from the fingers and arms to the eyes and head and coordinating their

14. Pawlick, 15.

15. Ibid., 15.

16. Krasovskaya, 47.

17. Pawlick, 16.

precise movement.[18] This approach eventually became the cornerstone of her pedagogical methodology, as she emphasized coordination between all parts of the body to a further extent than anyone before her. With time, more opportunities for solo variations arose, particularly when Nikolai Legat replaced Petipa at the theater, and these performances, which showcased her technical strength, drew recognition from critics. In fact, after praise for her variation in *La Bayadère,* especially noted for the "lightness in her *cabrioles*,"[19] Vaganova danced her first ballerina role in *La Source,* personally partnered by Legat.[20] Following this success, Vaganova requested the role of Odette-Odile in *Swan Lake* and was granted the opportunity, again partnered by Legat. Her fiery disposition and mastery as a technician suited the choreography of Odile as she completed steps rarely performed by women with ease. The Odette portion of her role offered a greater challenge, and Vaganova worked diligently to imbue her dancing with fluidity to accompany her natural strength. Later as a pedagogue, she advised her ballerinas to move so that the "wings" grow from the shoulder blades, an approach that replaces the delicate fragility of prior portrayals of Odette with regal strength. Evidently, her efforts were not in vain, as critics commented on her arms and head, one writing that, "each detail in Vaganova's performance is a small world of choreography, distinguished by internal consistency."[21]

18. Ibid., 48.

19. Ibid., 20.

20. Krasovskaya, 62-63.

21. Ibid., 71.

Figure 1. Agrippina Vaganova in *La Esmeralda* circa 1910.[22]

22. Photo Attribution: Wikimedia Commons contributors, "File:Agrippina Vaganova - Esmeralda 1910.jpg," *Wikimedia Commons, the free media repository,* https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?title=File:Agrippina_Vaganova_-Esmeralda_1910.jpg&oldid=636795362 (accessed April 22, 2022).

Through success in a great number of other variations, Vaganova became known as the "Queen of Variations," and according to Legat, she often received such enthusiastic curtain calls that she had to repeat her variation.[23] Vaganova danced many lead roles throughout her career and exhibited prolific technical prowess. While certainly never considered a modern dancer, her analytical emphasis on pure technique and the resulting power she brought to the stage was somewhat unconventional for her era. She received the title of "ballerina" in 1915, just one month before retiring from the stage at the age of thirty-six. The passion for ballet that sustained her through the more challenging moments of her career remained constant in her life. In response to her retirement, Vaganova wrote: "After all that I had lived to that point, everything was over. To lose art, to leave it, after all, is frightening. For me, a retired artist of the Imperial Theatres, nothing remains, aside from caring for the family. And that to me seems more bitter than death."[24]

After her retirement, Vaganova's path to pedagogy wound uncertainly through the era of political turmoil surrounding the Russian Revolution and the transition to Soviet control. The Soviet regime suspended her guaranteed pension from the Imperial Ballet, and her husband, in danger of unwelcome notice from the nation's new leadership, shot himself in their living room on Christmas Eve. These events left Vaganova few financial resources to care for her family. The theater and school likewise suffered under the abysmal conditions. Ballet persevered only through immense efforts, particularly through the winter of 1919. Food shortages decreased the size of rations at the school, and dancers, including the retired Vaganova, often performed

23. Pawlick, 23.

24. Ibid., 26.

outside the theater for extra money, even gratefully accepting bread in exchange for their performance at times. Unsurprisingly, many dancers left the Mariinsky for the enticing and abundant opportunities abroad, which placed even greater strain on the remaining dancers, whose overworked bodies faced additional risk of injury from the cold of an unheated theater. Vaganova, while not actively employed by the theater or the school at the time, refused a position dancing in a Danish company, preferring to remain in St. Petersburg.[25] While the struggling school or theater might have benefited from her expertise, her first opportunity to teach ballet arose elsewhere, in a school headed by the ballet critic Volynsky, a loyal supporter of Vaganova's stage career, which he founded in response to the falling standards he perceived at the former Imperial Ballet School. Eventually, the State Academic Theatre of Opera and Ballet, formerly the Mariinsky Theater, invited Vaganova to teach the "Class of Perfection" to dancers at the theater, as well as the younger classes at the associated Academic Ballet School. She initially found instructing the "Class of Perfection" to be a challenging task, as all the dancers had their own style and often approached the class apathetically, completing only exercises they personally found beneficial.[26] However, working with the young students at the school, Vaganova discovered her true calling.

25. Krasovskaya, 82-92.

26. Ibid., 95.

Figure 2. Mariinsky Theater in the early 20th century.[27]

Even after the dreadful conditions brought about by the chaos of the Revolution stabilized, the Soviet regime continued to influence the course of events, including artistic content, in ballet. While Soviet ideology might have posed a massive threat to the existence of ballet as an art form within the Soviet Union altogether—as the values ingrained by the traditional origins of ballet from the French court era are the antithesis of the Bolshevik ideology—the support of Anatoly Lunacharsky, the official over cultural affairs, persuaded Lenin that ballet could be transformed into something for the masses.[28] In consequence, ballet flourished into a national pride and nothing at the ballet ever escaped the notice of Soviet

27. Photo Attribution: «Следы времени», Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Maryinsky_Theater_in_1900s.jpg.

28. Homans, 321-22.

officials. Vaganova remained a central presence and preserver of the essence of classical ballet through various phases of experimentation, which sought to transform ballet into an "international and classless art."[29] The Soviets believed that "revolutionary reality should be reflected in the art of ballet,"[30] a preference that brought forth the genre of dramballet under Stalin's decree requiring socialist realism in the arts in 1932.[31] Socialist realism mandates that the message of arts, including ballet, align with the values of the state, and often the stories portrayed in these works glorify the life of the common man. Vaganova, while heavily involved in such productions as artistic director of the theater during this era, considered the genre of dramballet, which often relied more heavily on acting than classical dance, a threat to classical tradition. Accordingly, she instructed her students at the school on classical technique with steadfast vigor. Surprisingly, the Kremlin preferred Petipa's classical ballets, with the removal of all references to the Imperial era, to Fokine's modern choreography, which they deemed immoral.[32] In the 1930s, the center of cultural influence shifted from Leningrad to Moscow near the Kremlin, placing the Bolshoi Ballet the spotlight. However, fewer Soviet eyes on the Kirov Theater offered slightly greater artistic liberty, and in conjunction the school and the theater continued to produce the most advanced dancers and ballets. Oftentimes, these dancers, largely trained by Vaganova, and the dances were transported to the Bolshoi, where ballet demonstrated the pinnacle of Soviet artistry to both Russians and international dignitaries. In a sense, Soviet

29. Ibid., 322.

30. Krasovskaya, 111.

31. Pawlick, 49.

32. Homans, 322.

ballet developed in Leningrad, while the Bolshoi exhibited their progress worldwide.[33] The theater, under Vaganova's direction, restaged Petipa's *Swan Lake* in 1933. They found a new emphasis in the psychological drama aspect of the plot to replace any connotations to the Imperial era, including lengthy pantomime scenes, which made little sense to the contemporary audience. Vaganova personally choreographed the additional choreography, thriving amidst this new opportunity for creativity. In fact, she added the active yet fluid movement of the wrists now closely associated with the swans.[34] Vaganova, by no means fundamentally opposed to progress in ballet, wrote that "between the conventionality of classical dance and the demands of 'realism' there is no contradiction . . . we only need to understand this [classical] dance as movement that is socially and emotionally sensible . . . building upon it the actions and movements of an artistic image."[35]

Although she had a few relatively successful ventures into choreography during her tenure as artistic director of the theater, the epitome of her talent, and passion, flourished in the world of pedagogy. Vaganova's challenges as a dancer shaped her approach to pedagogy, as she infused her technique with expression and artistry through intellectual analysis of the component parts of each step, how movement is initiated and executed with the entire body. She considered the strengths of various sources and synthesized them into a coherent system of dancing, retaining virtuosity from the Italian method, refined precision from the French, and lyrical *port*

33. Ibid., 346.

34. Pawlick, 54.

35. Ibid., 57.

de bras from Fokine's choreography, for instance.[36] While she insisted her students understand the elements of each exercise, correcting details as minor as how they held the barre, the greatest strength of Vaganova's methodology lies in the complete coordination of movement and freedom of artistic expression through mastery of technique.[37] Ballerina Alla Shelest reflects that by teaching them "to go deeply into the image of this or that movement, to understand what the work of the torso and arms serve . . . she taught us to give meaning to dance in all its harmony."[38] To foster such independent thought, Vaganova's classes required vigilant attention, as even her barre was "a fully developed dance,"[39] with constantly changing combinations to elicit coordination and artistry from students more quickly than mindless repetition.[40] Every step served a purpose: a breath accompanies the preparation, *rond de jambe en l'air* strengthens the meniscus when isolated properly without allowing the leg to move in the knee joint, and *grande jetés* prepare the hip joint.[41] She favored students whose diligence matched her own, preferring work ethic and a quick mind over natural talent.[42] Yet despite her demands for precision and uniformity, Vaganova's technique brought forth rather than suppressed individuality, and her students emphasize that pure technique was never the primary objective. In class, Vaganova

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36. Ibid., 33.

37. Krasovskaya, 97; Pawlick, 62.

38. Pawlick, 35.

39. Homans, 355.

40. Pawlick, 36-37.

41. Ibid., 94.

42. Krasovskaya, 100.

noticed every student simultaneously and tailored her instruction to the individual, always moving throughout the room demonstrating correct form and sometimes exaggerating the mistakes of students.[43] Once a dancer internalizes classical technique to perfection, she is free to imbue her dancing with greater nuance. Without minimizing the importance of light and effortless execution, Vaganova claims this "is not the definitive victory of an artist," adding that "expression, meaningfulness, that is what we aim for."[44] Although current trends in the ballet world require increasingly high legs in *développé* and *arabesque*, students of Vaganova prioritize the emotional aspect of movement, insisting that a "masterful artist" must choose the height of the leg without compromising the aesthetic line.[45] The impeccable technique exhibited by masters of Vaganova's methodology allows dancers to expose their artistic soul: As Irina Trofimova exclaims, "Russian dance in essence is flight, with soul added to it."[46]

Vaganova trained the most prolific ballerinas of the USSR, and these dancers exemplified the genius of her pedagogy. Marina Semenova, one of her earliest students and perhaps her all-time favorite, demonstrated the merits of her methodology. Watching Semenova execute her first adagio in her class, Vaganova recalls that she "almost screamed with admiration" for the young dancer, already exhibiting abounding potential.[47] Semenova brought to fruition through her dancing many of the qualities Vaganova personally struggled with as a dancer but sought to codify in her pedagogy. Although her physique and technique differ substantially from present-

43. Krasovskaya, 101, 162; Pawlick, 61.

44. Pawlick, 76-77.

45. Ibid., 99.

46. Ibid., 114.

47. Krasovskaya, 99.

day classical conventions, Semenova's musicality and conscientious blending of virtuosity and emotion moved audiences even while she danced as a student. Dancing *La Source* for her graduation performance, she "returned classical purity to ballet,"[48] reminding audiences of the traditional art's relevance to Russia's post-revolutionary era.[49] Another dancer exhibited the universality of Vaganova's pedagogy to dancers with dramatically different natural tendencies than Vaganova herself: Galina Ulanova. Naturally gentle and reserved in temperament, Ulanova appeared delicate, and almost fragile, on the stage, though she possessed the impeccable technique characteristic of Vaganova's students. Vaganova uncovered the "expansiveness and freedom"[50] in her dancing, and Ulanova brought to life the emotional intensity of the dramballet, dancing so that the "steps appeared to contain her deepest thoughts and to unfold spontaneously."[51]

48. Ibid., 122.

49. Ibid., 122-23.

50. Ibid., 141.

51. Homans, 352.

Figure 3. Galina Ulanova and Yury Zhdanov in *Romeo and Juliet.*[52]

52. Photo Attribution: RIA Novosti archive, image #11591 / Umnov / CC-BY-SA 3.0, CC BY-SA 3.0 <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0>, via Wikimedia Commons.

The variety of expressions of Vaganova's methodology through the distinct personalities and natural inclinations of her students suggests the fluidity with which her pedagogy thrives. While certainly a guardian of classical tradition, Vaganova herself constantly refined and altered her approach to dancing, experimenting with new techniques, retaining the effective and discarding mere trends. For example, Alla Osipenko reflects that when she was a student, Nora Krasotka, a student initially trained abroad, performed her pirouettes with the working leg in *passé* instead of *coup de pied* as Vaganova had always instructed. Vaganova preferred Krasotka's method and began instructing all her students in this manner.[53] Even when the acrobatic tendencies of the theater exceeded her personal tastes, she trained her students to be prepared for any choreography they might be presented with.[54] Though Vaganova considered dramballet a threat to classical tradition when the genre delved into an emphasis on acting over dancing, she supported the innovations of young choreographers in her role as artistic director, and the integration of expression within her technique prepared her dancers to perform the roles well.[55] Through all the various phases of innovative experimentation, Vaganova preserved the essence of the Russian tradition she helped craft, characterized by an internalization of classical technique that manifests dramatic expression and soulful artistry.

53. Pawlick, 91.

54. Krasovskaya, 128, 135-36.

55. Homans, 355; Krasovskaya, 166.

Baroque Art: A Comparison to Vaganova's Pedagogy

Preceding Vaganova's work in ballet pedagogy by over two centuries, the Baroque era of visual art embodies many of the artistic ideals encapsulated in Vaganova's methodology through the media of architecture, sculpture, and painting. The Baroque era, as defined by art historians, begins in 17th century Rome and spreads throughout Europe and Latin America, fusing with local tendencies and artistic schools to develop a unique timbre in each region. While great diversity exists among nations and even individual artists of the Baroque era, overall themes include movement, light, and the merging of art forms, for example, in the integration of ceiling painting and sculpture within architecture.[56] Following the Renaissance, throughout which artists refined principles of perspective, proportion, shadow, and composition, artists of the Baroque era employed these devices to compose active works of drama, movement, and grandeur. The progression of ballet technique in the 20th century Soviet Union mimics this development, as the defined conventions of technique established through Vaganova's system enabled a fuller manifestation of artistic expression.

Baroque architecture is distinguished by grand exuberance, evident in the illusionary movement of curving walls, the aesthetic integration of light, and frescoes that appear to expand the ceiling. Architects of this era approached their plans almost as more of a large sculpture than a building of composite parts, carving spaces out of a solid mass instead of assembling around them.[57] The movement and unity that this approach yields parallels the harmony that Vaganova achieved through coordinating all movements seamlessly and continuously, with a focus on

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56. Flavio Conti, *How to Recognize Baroque Art* (Penguin Original. New York: Penguin Books, 1979), 3-4.

57. Ibid., 8-10.

active fluidity over static poses. The Church of San Lorenzo in Turin by architect Guarino Guarini exemplifies this integration of space with its complex, geometrically based layout, including a square nave with walls that curve inward, guiding the focus upward toward the dome to attain balance.[58] This dome again integrates seamlessly with its architectural surroundings and draws natural light into the structure, as it is largely composed of windows.[59] Inspired by the weightless quality of Gothic architecture, San Lorenzo appears to challenge the laws of gravity by concealing structural supports within its layout, endowing the space with a sense of "divine mystery."[60] Guarini's architecture likens the interior of the structure to "a piece of music,"[61] adorning the walls with colored marble, frescos, altarpieces, sculptures, and carved entablatures, which enliven and define the space.[62] While not unique to the era altogether, the abundance of these features, along with elaborate volutes and scrolls decorating the capitals, distinguish Baroque architecture with characteristic style. The significance of these details compares to Vaganova's thoughtful attention to the dancer's fingers, head, and gaze, almost adorning her movements with imperceptible nuance.

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58. Henry A. Millon, *Baroque & Rococo Architecture*. The Great Ages of World Architecture (New York: George Braziller, 1961), 21.

59. Conti, 15.

60. Gauvin A. Bailey, *Baroque & Rococo* (New York, NY: Phaidon Press Limited, 2012), 185.

61. Germain Bazin, *Baroque and Rococo,* trans. Jonathan Griffin (New York, NY: Thames and Hudson Inc., 1985), 23.

62. Bailey, 185.

Figure 4. *Dome of the Church of San Lorenzo* (1666-79) by Guarino Guarini. Turin, Italy.[63]

Similarly, illusionistic ceiling painting heightens the awe of Baroque architecture. *Allegory of the Missionary Work of the Society of Jesus* by Andrea Pozzo blends architecture and painting by merging physical and imaginary space.[64] Through mastery of perspective, light, and color, the Jesuit priest Pozzo crafted the mystifying illusion of a vaulted ceiling exposing open sky through the roof of the Church of St. Ignazio, an illusion most evident from the center of the room.[65] The countless detailed figures resting near the columns, floating in the sky, and receding

63. Photo attribution: Livioandronico2013 at English Wikipedia, CC BY-SA 4.0 <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0>, via Wikimedia Commons.

64. John R. Martin, *Baroque* (New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1977), 14.

65. Bazin, 39.

into the atmospheric haze inspire wonder and contemplation, plus admiration for the artistic feat itself. This concept of illusion is firmly embedded in the art of ballet as well, most notably through pointework, which aids in the illusion of a dancer's weightlessness and ability to gracefully skim the floor. Ever since 19th century ballerina Marie Taglioni appeared to "hover eternally between" the "human and supernatural worlds"[66] in *La Sylphide* by standing on the tips of her toes in an early, homemade precursor to the modern pointe shoe, dancers have expanded this illusion of floating across the stage. This manipulation of perspective on the stage corresponds to the soaring figures of Pozzo's fresco, suspended in imaginary space.

Figure 5. *Allegory of the Missionary Work of the Society of Jesus* (1691-94) by Andrea Pozzo. Church of St. Ignazio, Rome.[67]

66. Homans, 156.

67. Andrea Pozzo, *Allegory of the Missionary Work of the Society of Jesus*, 1691-94, fresco, Church of St. Ignazio, Rome, Italy, Public Domain,

Integral to architecture and worthy of admiration independently, sculpture of the Baroque era "[considers] art as a means of expressing the passions of the soul."[68] Bernini, a prolific Italian artist of the 17th century, explored this intersection of art forms with impressive success in his Cornaro Chapel, a tomb chapel for the church of S. Maria della Vittoria in Rome.[69] Bernini's sculpture often took on the naturalistic advances of painting as he infused the marble with "a quivering quality of life" through technical excellence and climactic motion.[70] His approach to *The Ecstasy of St. Teresa*, the altarpiece of Cornaro Chapel, manifests these creative innovations brilliantly. Bernini brought the traditionally painted altarpiece into three dimensions by sculpting the figures, yet he presented the masterpiece almost like a painting by framing the sculpture with columns on either side and an intricate triangular pediment on the top. The sculptural depiction concentrates our focus on the figures themselves, lacking the extensive details and additional characters typically present in an altarpiece painting. The narrative of the composition depicts an autobiographical account of the 16th century mystic St. Teresa of Avila, in which she recounts an ecstatic experience during which an angel plunged the spear of divine love into her heart, paradoxically causing extreme pain and spiritual sweetness. This altarpiece "celebrates visionary ecstasy as a path to divine communion,"[71] connoting the heavenly through billowing fabric and floating cloud beneath St. Teresa's feet and portraying the dramatic intensity of the supernatural

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https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Andrea_Pozzo_-_Allegory_of_the_Jesuits%27_Missionary_Work_-_WGA18353.jpg.

68. Bazin, 23.

69. Bailey, 161.

70. Bazin, 26.

71. Bailey, 163.

encounter through the facial expressions and physical positioning of St. Teresa and the angel.[72] This dramatic expression and narrative motion distinguish Bernini's work from the idealized but stoic figures of Renaissance sculpture.[73] *Apollo and Daphne* further epitomizes Bernini's prowess in preserving the pinnacle of dramatic action, capturing the moment the mythological Daphne morphs into a tree to escape the pursuing Apollo. His three-dimensional rendering of these figures nears technical perfection, employing the compositional device *figura serpentinata*, a positioning of the figures in spiral motion, and he expertly softened the marble to suggest translucent skin and fluidly moving hair and drapery.[74] The life-like depiction of human figures enabled by Bernini's technical mastery foreshadows the expressive dancing of Soviet ballerinas, who likewise find expression through the technical perfection of their craft. Vaganova Academy graduate and coach Irina Chistiakova emphasizes that dancers must develop vision and emotion for a role, and rehearsals address "which head turn expresses those emotions . . . when to breathe in order to hit the musical accent . . . because our emotions express beauty, and what [dancers] feel inside is important to express through the plasticity."[75] Despite the separation of time and geographical location, and the differing artistic media, both Baroque sculpture as refined by Bernini and Soviet ballet as upheld by Vaganova value the dramatic expression of human emotion as central to their artistry.

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72. Bailey, 163-66.

73. Bazin, 27.

74. Conti, 60; Martin, 48.

75. Pawlick, 144.

Artists of the Baroque era embraced naturalism, retaining appreciation for the classicism of antiquity but applying technical advances in painting to the portrayal of ordinary figures, often appearing more life-like than ever with the emphasis on movement and removal of idealism in depiction.[76] Replacing the calculated analysis of the natural world from the Renaissance, Baroque painters exhibited a "preoccupation with 'the passions of the soul'" in exploring greater depths of human emotion, making their work more than an "artless transcription of reality."[77] While aesthetic interests remain central to classical ballet, Soviet ballet performed similar edits to revered history, replacing scenes of pantomime and references to the Imperial past with psychological drama, a practice evident in Vaganova's revision of *Swan Lake.* Vaganova happily made such alterations if "editing Ivanov and Petipa meant preserving the classical heritage."[78] Painters of particular interest in developing the conventions of Baroque painting include Caravaggio and Peter Paul Rubens, each representing a different region geographically and contributing uniquely to their craft.

76. Martin, 13.

77. Ibid., 13, 40.

78. Pawlick, 54.

Figure 6. *The Conversion on the Way to Damascus* (1601) by Caravaggio. Santa Maria del Popolo, Rome.[79]

79. Caravaggio, *Conversion on the Way to Damascus*, 1601, oil on canvas, 90.5 in x 68.8 in (230 cm x 175 cm), Santa Maria del Popolo, Rome, Italy, Public Domain, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Conversion_on_the_Way_to_Damascus-Caravaggio_(c.1600-1).jpg.

Caravaggio, perhaps the name most rapidly associated with Baroque painting, fostered technical and stylistic innovations that altered the trajectory for painting of this era as his practices spread throughout Europe. He defined his work with *chiaroscuro,* a technique that utilizes dramatic contrast in lighting, illuminating the most significant regions of the composition.[80] In contrast to the Renaissance, when artists viewed shadow as subordinate to light, primarily including cast shadows and shading to compose analytically perfected portrayals, Caravaggio highlighted the human figure in his work as it emerges from a background of darkness, so that the human presence defines the space of the entire canvas.[81] *The Conversion on the Way to Damascus*, painted in 1601, demonstrates this principle, as light appears to shine on the figure of Paul from above, intensifying the action of the composition by both illuminating Paul's figure and indicating the interaction with the supernatural.[82] The brilliant contrast between the deep black background and glowing highlights on Paul's face and arms present in this painting do not reflect lighting typical of the natural world as the traditional Renaissance artist might prefer, yet Caravaggio's artistic discretion in this rendering heightens the supernatural connotations and drama of the scene. Caravaggio induced another break with tradition by depicting ordinary people in the place of saints and apostles rather than working from aristocratic models, as was precedented in the Renaissance era. *The Calling of St. Matthew* showcases this aspect of naturalism, placing a biblical story into the context of the present and returning "to the

80. Conti, 41.

81. Bazin, 30.

82. Martin, 226.

spirit of the Gospels" by implying that "the humble are nearer in spirit to the truth."[83] Caravaggio further integrated the story into a contemporary setting by depicting Jesus and His disciple in antique tunics while Matthew and his companions feature a 17th century Italian wardrobe.[84] As an originator of naturalism in Baroque, especially religious, painting, art critics of his day criticized Caravaggio's abandon of idealistic treatment of the human figure, believing his work too carefully resembled his models.[85] *The Calling of St. Matthew* surpasses *The Conversion on the Way to Damascus* in sharpness of contrast. Shadows partially obscure faces and gestures vital to the narrative, forcing viewers to examine the painting more closely, thus engaging them thoughtfully with the story. Although Soviet ballet of Vaganova's time lacked this element of spirituality present in Baroque painting, the genre of socialist realism, required by Stalin in the arts, similarly produced narratives featuring ordinary people. The genre of dramballet likewise elicited a level of dramatic expression matched in the paintings of Caravaggio. Whereas Caravaggio achieved this level of drama through intense lighting and rendering of facial expressions, dancers conveyed emotion through expansive, fluid movement as well as facial expressions refined through acting lessons. Vaganova's revision of *Swan Lake,* which replaced pantomime with new choreography and emphasized the psychological drama of the characters, exemplifies this comparison.[86] Galina Ulanova's "direct and human"[87] movement as the Swan

83. Bazin, 30.

84. Martin, 58.

85. Bailey, 57.

86. Krasovskaya, 170.

87. Homans, 352.

Queen enchanted audiences, while Konstantin Sergeyev, her partner, "guided the elusive chiaroscuro in her dancing . . . like a cloud floating above the water."[88]

The painting of Flemish artist Peter Paul Rubens represents the evolution of style throughout the Baroque era as artistic values travelled from Italy to the rest of Europe. While his work clearly draws on the conventions of the High Renaissance, blended with Caravaggio's naturalism, Rubens pressed the action and unity of composition further and "personified the exuberant, theatrical, courtly side of Baroque art."[89] Rubens' religious paintings exemplify the art of 17th century Flanders and the Catholic Counter-Reformation, which viewed the arts as "manifestations of the goodness of God" which "could inspire and help the worshipper."[90] Rubens, a faithful Catholic, frequently fulfilled religious commissions for patrons and churches. He completed one such work, *The Miracles of St. Ignatius Loyola*, an altarpiece commissioned by the Jesuits of the Society of Jesus for their first church in Antwerp, in the 1620s. This complex composition depicts St. Ignatius Loyola, the founder of this influential order, exorcising demons from the chaotic crowd below.[91]

88. Krasovskaya, 178.

89. Conti, 46; Martin, 45.

90. C. V. Wedgwood and Time-Life Books, *The World of Rubens, 1577-1640*. Time-Life Library of Art (New York: Time, 1967), 73.

91. Ibid., 64.

Figure 7. *The Miracles of St. Ignatius Loyola* (1617-18) by Peter Paul Rubens. Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna.[92]

92. Peter Paul Rubens, *The Miracles of St. Ignatius Loyola*, 1617-18, oil, 17.5 ft x 12.9 ft (535 cm x 395 cm), Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna, Austria, Public Domain, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Peter_Paul_Rubens33.jpg.

The intricacy of the composition and precision in rendering match the Renaissance and early Baroque traditions of Italy, perhaps a reflection of Rubens' time studying Venetian painting from 1600 to 1609. Through his studies in Italy, Rubens gained expertise in the portrayal of the human figure and in large-scale composition, a progression from the small-scale painting of Flemish tradition.[93] *The Miracles of St. Ignatius Loyola* further showcases Rubens' compositional expertise in its approach to space by merging the foreground and background while retaining hierarchical separation. Furthermore, Rubens shares the Italians' emphasis on light, but his approach contrasts with that of Caravaggio's chiaroscuro: instead of employing harsh shadows to highlight a compositional focus, light becomes "the very fluid with which he imbues his colors."[94]

A personal painting from later in Rubens' life, *Helene Fourment with Children,* captures his young wife interacting with two of their children. This painting embodies characteristic features of Rubens' style that are absent in some of his earlier formal commissions. For instance, he employs looser brushwork, which maintains movement in the composition, without sacrificing the quality of his rendering. The simplicity of this composition in comparison to other works does not diminish the depth of content, as the fluid treatment of the paint freezes "a moment in the existence of the space in which we live."[95] Similarly, Rubens abandoned the analytical compositional approach of the Renaissance, yet his mastery in arranging figures and

93. Bazin, 64-65.

94. Ibid., 66-67.

95. Ibid., 66.

elements within his work allow for the "dynamic expression" of real life.[96] Both *The Miracles of St. Ignatius Loyola* and *Helene Fourment with Children* demonstrate Rubens' ability to guide viewers' eye throughout the canvas with his energetic brushwork and thoughtful composition. Vaganova inspired a similarly thoughtful approach to ballet, emphasizing a visual harmony through the coordination of the body that mirrors the principle of unity found in Rubens' painting. While ballet embodies movement by nature, the boundless energy Vaganova brought to her dancing, later eliciting that same energy from her students' dancing, further parallels the intensity of movement found in Rubens' work. Uliana Lopatkina, considered "the single purest representative of true Vaganova style in the Mariinsky Ballet today,"[97] defines Vaganova's technique as "a harmonious composition of all poses, the movement of the head, arms, and legs,"[98] through which a dancer finds "free and strong movement."[99] Thus, rather than limit expression, Vaganova's detailed codification enables artistry, much like Rubens' loose brushwork and freedom in composition enhance his artistic content.

96. Ibid., 66.

97. Pawlick, 152.

98. Ibid., 155.

99. Ibid., 155.

George Balanchine

George Balanchine likewise began his balletic training at the Imperial Ballet School of pre-revolutionary Russia, though initially he ventured onto this course rather unwillingly. He enrolled unexpectedly when accompanying his older sister to an audition and found himself alone in St. Petersburg at the age of nine, as his family lived three hours away. His acceptance relieved financial strain from his struggling parents and set him up for a promising and stable future. Initially, the young Balanchine, lacking exposure to the art of ballet prior to his enrollment, found himself bored with the repetitive and simplistic movements of the first year of training.[100] However, he quickly became enthralled with the art form when he played Cupid in Petipa's *The Sleeping Beauty* with the Mariinsky Theater in his second year of study, a customary experience for young students.[101] The Russian Revolution consumed Balanchine's last years in the school and transition into the *corps de ballet* of the Mariinsky, but the Imperial aura of his early training remained with him throughout his choreographic career, infusing even his most modern works with the elegance of court etiquette.[102] Amidst the chaos and suffering of the Revolution—Balanchine reports that dancers in the corps wore long-sleeves underneath their costumes in the unheated theater, while the ballerinas frequently got pneumonia from the cold—the young dancer displayed promise as a choreographer even as a student, choreographing a piece for a graduation performance at the age of sixteen.[103] While dancing in the *corps de ballet,*

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100. Robert Gottlieb, *George Balanchine: The Ballet Maker* (New York, NY: Harper Perennial, 2010), 12-13.

101. Ibid., 15.

102. Homans, 324.

103. Gottlieb, 18, 20.

Balanchine also choreographed outside the theater for Young Ballet, creating dances with acrobatic elements such as high *arabesques* and contorted back bends. He was eventually expelled from the theater for creating such choreography, and dancers from the theater performing his work were threatened with expulsion as well.[104] With the tightening grip of political powers over artistry in the Soviet Union, Balanchine left the nation in 1924 for a tour through Europe with a few like-minded dancers from which they never returned.[105]

After essentially wandering about Europe and performing sporadically for a few months, the small Soviet troupe garnered the attention of Sergei Diaghilev, founder and director of Ballet Russes, an avant-garde ballet company that featured Russian culture and modernist choreography. Diaghilev grew up in Russia while also immersed in European culture, with paintings by Raphael and Rembrandt in his childhood home. Yet he also treasured his Russian heritage and sought to showcase these fading traditions to Europe. His ambitions were influenced by the German composer Wagner's concept of *Gesamtkumstwerk*, which entails integrating poetry, art, and music into a complete masterpiece.[106] In fact, Diaghilev encouraged Balanchine to study painting and art, an influence evident in the sculptural quality of Balanchine's choreography.[107] By the time the twenty-year-old Balanchine joined Diaghilev in 1924, the Ballet Russes stood firmly established, but in need of a new choreographer. By far the most prolific ballet produced in Balanchine's time with Ballet Russes was *Apollon Musagète,* later

104. Gottlieb, 24-25; Homans, 326.

105. Gottlieb, 26-27.

106. Homans, 296.

107. Ibid., 336.

renamed *Apollo,* a project that initiated the iconic artistic partnership of Balanchine and composer Igor Stravinsky. The piece served as a turning point for both Stravinsky's music and Balanchine's choreography.[108] Loosely, the plot entails Apollo's birth, dancing with three muses—Calliope, Polyhymnia, and Terpsichore—and ascent to Parnassus, but the ingenuity of the ballet exists in interplay between the score and steps.[109] Both Stravinsky and Balanchine viewed music and dance, respectively, as the "simple, elegant expressions of the manipulation of time and space."[110] Stravinsky based the score on 17th century poetic rhyme and meter, as well as his personal quest for religious understanding, which embeds the music with a sense of classical order and purity. In consequence, Balanchine came to the realization that he "could dare not to use everything" [111] in the choreography, instead reflecting simplicity and thoughtfulness in the steps. The choreography itself came quite naturally to Balanchine, but Danilova, one of the original dancers of Terpsichore, indicates that the steps were initially challenging for the dancers.[112] Turned-in legs, flexed feet, distorted torsos, and fluid travelling mesh classical and modern technique into a new method of moving.[113] *Apollo* among other ballets of Balanchine's

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108. Charles M. Joseph, *Stravinsky and Balanchine: A Journey of Invention* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 74, ProQuest Ebook Central.

109. Ibid., 78-79.

110. Ibid., 2.

111. Homans, 337; Joseph, 75.

112. Gottlieb, 49.

113. Homans, 337; Joseph, 87-88.

impressed Lincoln Kirstein, a new figure on the scene, during his travels and Europe, inspiring Kirstein to partner with Balanchine in bringing ballet to America.[114]

The path to establishing the New York City Ballet, still one of the most renowned ballet companies in the world nearly forty years after George Balanchine's death, took many detours on its way to grand success. However, upon arriving in America, Balanchine insisted first on establishing the School of American Ballet, an institution that opened in 1934 and exists in the present day. Based on the Russian model of Balanchine's youth, the school initially featured Russian instructors such as Danilova and Doubrovska, ballerinas who emulated the essence of a dancer to students and treated the studio and stage as sacred, just as Balanchine did.[115] While distinctly American in students and style, the culture of the school, and later company, mimicked the Imperial court, with Balanchine revered as the "tsar" by devoted dancers, in whom the required etiquette instilled manners and discipline.[116] Edward Villella recalls that when he was ten years old, Mr. Balanchine walked into his class and seemed to be surrounded by dignity and awe, a presence that conveyed greatness.[117] Establishing a sustainable ballet company presented a greater challenge: Kirstein and Balanchine partnered on two short-lived companies, first Ballet Theater and later Ballet Society, before a performance by Ballet Society found a powerful supporter in Morton Baum, the financial director of City Center. Baum guided the transition from Ballet Society to the New York City Ballet as the resident company of City Center in 1948,

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111. Gottlieb, 68-69.

115. Gottlieb, 194; Homans, 376, 460.

116. Homans, 507.

117. "Conversations with Megan, featuring Edward Villella," YouTube video, 1:19:02, posted by "Megan Fairchild," January 22, 2021, https://youtu.be/Dda0rW9IGT4.

a move that provided Balanchine with stability and artistic liberty that prior arrangements lacked.[118] Choreographing became easier for Balanchine as students from SAB trained to his specific preferences gradually filtered into the company.[119] Eventually, the company transitioned to Lincoln Center in 1964, a theater built to Balanchine's specifications, and collaborations with architect Philip Johnson produced a structure consistent with Balanchine's practical and stylistic values.[120] Villella remembers that Balanchine called him to the theater to test his jumps on the floor while in the construction process, and he explains that Balanchine's choreography became easier once performing in the new theater, as if Balanchine always had a larger stage in mind while choreographing.[121] Although Balanchine never concerned himself with acclaim, the international import of his work in the contemporary ballet world was realized in 1962 when NYCB toured the Soviet Union, widely considered the epicenter of classical ballet. Personally, the prospect of returning to the Soviet Union did not appeal to Balanchine, as he stood firmly anti-Communist and lamented the destruction of the Russia of his childhood.[122] Nevertheless, NYCB became the first American company to dance on the Bolshoi stage, and audiences received them with fervent enthusiasm. Even *Agon,* one of Balanchine's more abstract and daring works, found favor, and their dancing exhibited that Soviet domination of the art was not absolute.[123]

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118. Gottlieb, 113.

119. Ibid., 152.

120. Homans, 467.

121. "Conversations with Megan, featuring Edward Villella."

121. Homans, 377.

123. Gottlieb, 165; Homans, 378.

Figure 8. Edward Villella and Violet Verdy dancing at a State Dinner.[124]

As with every art form, technique serves as a foundation on which artistry may build. In a 1965 article in Life magazine, Balanchine defines technique as "the ability to have agility and the mechanics to express it."[125] As evident in his collaborations with Stravinsky, Balanchine considers ballet inseparable from and subservient to the music. He considered music the "most

124. Photo Attribution: National Archives and Records Administration, Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons.

125. Gottlieb, 206.

sacred of the arts"[126] and always refrained from directly interpreting the music, instead allowing the choreography to highlight the "musical structure" as the music and dance coexist in time, in harmony but distinct.[127] Such an integrated approach to the relationship between music and choreography necessitates an emphasis on precision and musicality. Balanchine valued the "physical geometry of ballet," [128] with immense concern for the details, such as precisely placing the pointed foot in front of the nose in *tendu*. Maria Tallchief describes how when lifting to *coup de pied* from the back the toes must reach first, which prepares a perfectly pointed foot for *arabesque*. Similarly, she stresses that in *pas de cheval*, the foot must be carefully placed to prepare to step onto pointe, with hips perfectly square. Such detail extends to the upper body as well, with consideration given to each finger and to the eyes gazing exactly one foot above the front hand in *arabesque*.[129] In keeping with the notion of physical geometry, Balanchine also allows the hip of the working leg to open in *arabesque*, enabling a higher leg, elongated line, and sense of asymmetry. Yet, while maintaining this precision, the true emphasis lies on fluid movement rather than position. Long balances are uncommon in Balanchine choreography, and preparations for jumps and turns seemingly disappear.[130] Balanchine instructed dancers to focus solely on the steps rather than acting, and Tallchief recollects that he never discussed the story,

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126. Homans, 508.

127. Joseph, 105.

128. Homans, 509.

129. *Maria Tallchief Coaching Excerpts from Apollo and Swan Lake*, Films On Demand, 1997, https://fod.infobase.com/PortalPlaylists.aspx?wID=103627&xtid=202987; *Maria Tallchief Coaching Excerpts from George Balanchine's The Nutcracker®Music: By Peter Ilyitch Tchaikovsky*, Films On Demand, 1995, https://fod.infobase.com/PortalPlaylists.aspx?wID=103627&xtid=202971.

130. Homans, 532.

even in ballets that contained a narrative component; instead, the dancer would stand behind Balanchine and observe the angles of his body as he demonstrated. For example, oftentimes the head may turn to the side so far as to be obscured from view, only to be revealed more dramatically when the dancer turns back toward the front.[131] Expressing drama through movement corresponds to the intense energy required of Balanchine dancers. Every movement is grand and reaching, yet quick and articulated. Balanchine instructed dancers to place all of their energy into the present moment, moment after moment while dancing, instead of reserving energy for later in the rehearsal or performance.[132] This mindset ties ballet to Balanchine's philosophy about life, likely shaped by days of struggle to survive in Russia and lifelong battles with illness. After experiencing particularly frightening complications from pneumonia and tuberculosis because of which doctors wanted to remove his lung, Balanchine concluded, "I was supposed to die and I didn't, and so now everything I do is second chance."[133]

Although dancers highly revered Balanchine, they also genuinely enjoyed working with him in rehearsal and choreography. According to Edward Villella, Balanchine's choreography felt comfortable because he crafted the steps with the strengths of the particular dancer in mind.[134] While he always challenged dancers, he integrated their personalities and quirks into the dance so seamlessly that they claimed he was "choreographing their lives."[135] In rehearsals, the choreography seemed to flow from him spontaneously, and dancers were involved in

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131. *Maria Tallchief Coaching Excerpts from Apollo and Swan Lake*.

132. Homans, 508.

133. Gottlieb, 58.

134. "Conversations with Megan, featuring Edward Villella."

135. Homans, 512-13.

experimentation, yet the sessions remained efficient.[136] He communicated his intentions with his body rather than words, gesturing the general impression of what he desired as opposed to a full demonstration. Ruthanna Boris, one of the original students on which he choreographed *Serenade*, a ballet that began as a teaching device but continues to be performed extensively, compares his demonstrations to a kaleidoscope, "fluid, flexible, free."[137] He might supplement this instruction with a brief analogy such as comparing the foot to "an elephant's trunk" to describe the boneless, supple quality he expected.[138] Additionally, Balanchine possessed a thorough understanding of pointework and partnering, and expected the same from the male dancers of the company. For Balanchine, a *pas de deux* highlights the woman, and a good partner should disappear. Balanchine famously proclaimed, "ballet is woman," [139] elevating her accordingly in his choreography and drawing on the characteristic restraint of the Danish style for his male dancers. Paul Mejia, a successful NYCB dancer, took classes with the women to better understand their technique per Balanchine's request.[140] Similarly, Arthur Mitchell, who first danced the *pas de deux* of *Agon*, explains that Balanchine constantly discussed presenting the woman to the audience and taught him to use his fingers to gently and effectively guide her.[141]

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136. Gottlieb, 79; *Arthur Mitchell Coaching the Pas De Deux from Agon,* Films On Demand, 2002, https://fod.infobase.com/PortalPlaylists.aspx?wID=103627&xtid=202993.

137. Gottlieb, 78.

138. Ibid., 191-93.

139. Homans, 513-14.

140. *Maria Tallchief Coaching Excerpts from Apollo and Swan Lake.*

141. *Arthur Mitchell Coaching the Pas De Deux from Agon.*

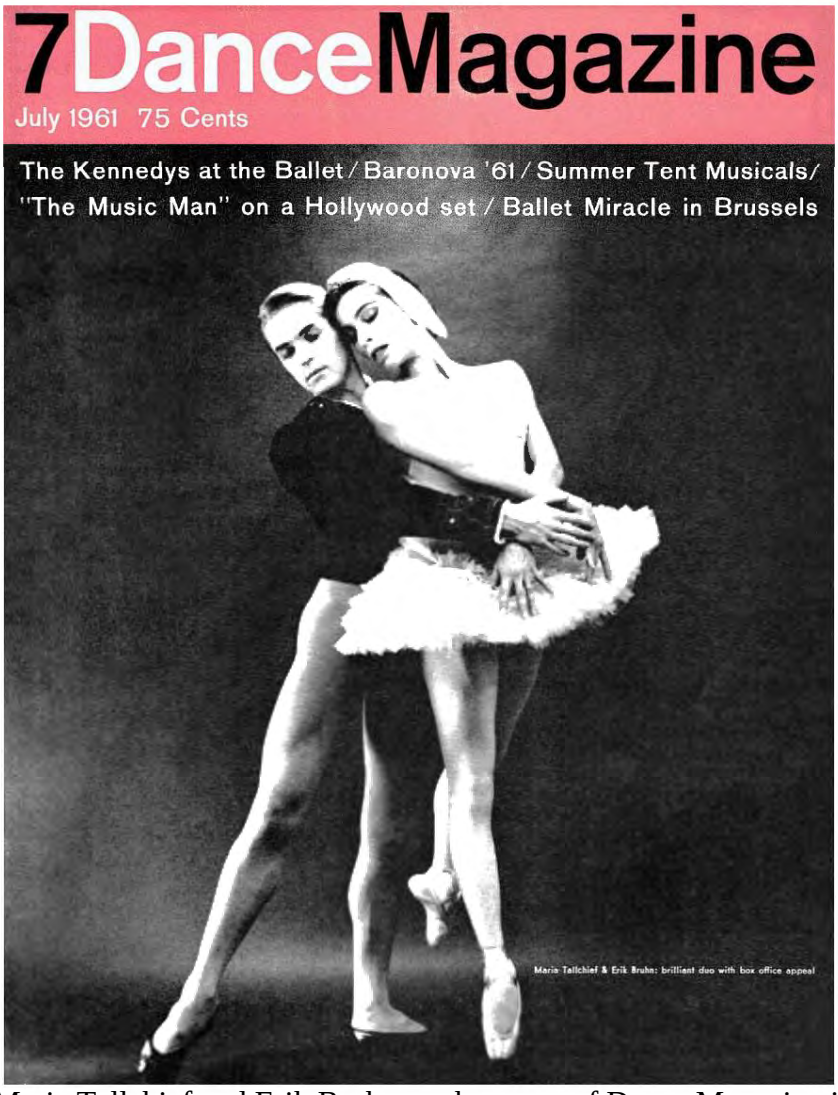

Figure 9. Maria Tallchief and Erik Bruhn on the cover of Dance Magazine in 1961.[142]

Maria Tallchief, an Osage Native American and a stellar example of Balanchine's ideals realized, first studied ballet under Bronislava Nijinska and quickly excelled at a young age, joining Denham's Ballet Russe at the age of seventeen. Tallchief and Balanchine first met when Balanchine choreographed for Denham's Ballet Russe, one of many offshoots from Diaghilev's, and quickly noticed one another. Tallchief, noted for musicality herself, found fascination in the

142. Photo Attribution: Unknown photographer, Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Dance_Magazine_July_1961_cover.png.

interplay between Balanchine's choreography and the music. Likewise, Balanchine noticed her grasp of his musical approach but informed her she must retrain herself in his style of dancing.[143] Doing so, Tallchief flourished under Balanchine's generous instruction. She danced countless substantial roles created specifically for her, one of the most notable being *Firebird.* In describing a particular instant in this choreography in which bounds across the stage to land upside-down in her partner's arms with her head nearly touching the ground, Tallchief says: "The second before I had been at one end of the stage standing upright, yet now here I was at the other side, suspended in Frank's arms . . . His genius had never been as clear to me as it was in that instant."[144] Another notable ballerina of Balanchine's, Suzanne Farrell, joined the company in 1960, and her career was distinguished by her absolute trust in her choreographer.[145] She willingly attempted anything Balanchine asked of her, and he asked her to try things he had never asked of anyone else. Though over four decades older than Farrell, Balanchine displayed obvious attachment to the young dancer both artistically and personally. In fact, when he staged *Don Quixote* with Farrell as Dulcinea, he personally played Don Quixote in the opening performance. According to Farrell, this performance became a defining moment for her dancing, establishing her absolute trust in Balanchine.[146] Farrell adopted much more from Balanchine than ballet technique, allowing him in many ways to shape her fundamental approach to life. She views their partnership as a product of destiny and clings to his fascination with the present

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143. Gottlieb, 107-08.

144. Ibid., 119.

145. Ibid., 130.

146. Gottlieb, 131; "Suzanne Farrell, Academy Class of 1987, Full Interview," YouTube video, 1:20:01, posted by "Academy of Achievement," November 17, 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UqXjzTxrKME.

moment, claiming that her favorite ballet is whichever one she is presently dancing, as to wish she were doing something else would be ungrateful.[147]

Figure 10. Suzanne Farrell and George Balanchine in Don Quixote.[148]

The apex of collaboration between Balanchine and Stravinsky came to fruition in the 1957 ballet *Agon,* an abstract production performed in black and white leotards that manifests the culmination of Balanchine's artistic convictions. The ballet centered around a masterful *pas de deux* between Arthur Mitchell, a black man and future founder of the Dance Theatre of Harlem, and Diana Adams, a pale ballerina of the company noted for her class and elegance. The pairing

147. "Suzanne Farrell, Academy Class of 1987, Full Interview."

148. Photo Attribution: Orlando Fernandez, World Telegram staff photographer, Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons.

both sent a political message in 1950s America and created visual contrast and symmetry from an artistic perspective.[149] Mitchell describes rehearsals full of experimentation that required trust in Balanchine to communicate ideas that could not be translated through the terminology of classical ballet. While not considered classical in a traditional sense, court dances served as a source of inspiration and only classically trained dancers could perform the choreography correctly. The score contains immensely complex rhythms that reflect both Stravinsky's and Balanchine's interest in jazz. Syncopation became a theme in the ballet, making the choreography nearly impossible to count.[150] The choreography itself strayed from convention, comprised largely of transitions—always of particular interest for Balanchine—and using pointe to dig into the ground rather than elevate the dancer.[151] While the angular, off-balance positions contradict balletic tradition, both dancers trained classically and naturally continued with daily class outside of rehearsal to maintain a sense of their center while dancing any style.[152] Oftentimes, works of great historical import fail to obtain immediate recognition, but *Agon* captivated audiences from the premiere, instantly assuming its role as the pinnacle of neoclassical ballet.[153]

The legacy of Balanchine's choreography lies in the fusion between his modern, daring manipulations of the human body, through which even the most acrobatic steps submit to a

149. Homans, 530-31.

150. *Arthur Mitchell Coaching the Pas De Deux from Agon.*

151. Homans, 530.

152. *Arthur Mitchell Coaching the Pas De Deux from Agon.*

153. Gottlieb, 126-27.

predetermined visual unity, and the inherent classicism ingrained through an appreciation of ballet's court and Imperial heritage. While he cherished his American citizenship, Balanchine also preserved the refined elegance and grandeur of Petipa's Imperial Ballet from his childhood. Additionally, his ballets draw inspiration from the Greek and Renaissance arts, almost bringing to life the sculptures of antiquity.[154] Balanchine esteemed ballet as "the art of angels," [155] appreciating the beauty of the steps and movement of the human figure as the focus of his craft, apart from narrative. His work as a choreographer intertwined with his philosophies about life and his enduring Orthodox faith: he famously considered his role in choreography as secondary, saying "God creates, I assemble," [156] and his artistic approach mimics the emphasis on finding God through the senses with musical and visual beauty in Russian Orthodoxy. While Balanchine's ballets are preserved into the present, not only performed in NYCB but in companies worldwide, he himself believed that he would be remembered as a teacher rather than a choreographer, a position consistent with his preoccupation with the present, as he claimed, "only with these people now, on stage, does it exist. It is not sad at all. It is wonderful, it is now."[157]

154. Homans, 338.

155. Ibid., 504.

156. Ibid., 508-09.

157. Gottlieb, 194, 206.

Modernism: A Comparison to Balanchine's Choreography

Comprised of a multitude of artists with diverse techniques, motives, and manifestos across numerous movements of brief duration, the era of modern art distinguishes itself with an atmosphere of unprecedented experimentation and redefinition of the very purpose and character of art itself. Some artists, such as Wassily Kandinsky, authored extensive writings on their approach to art, swimming into deep philosophy regarding the human experience of life and the arts. Others, including Mark Rothko, likewise emphasized the experiential nature of observing a work of art but preferred to communicate primarily through paint alone. These artists shared an interest in working beyond the historical aim of the arts in reflecting reality through two dimensions, instead reflecting the internal human experience, sending viewers on a journey within themselves. Creating within a relatively contemporary timeframe, George Balanchine revolutionized ballet with a similarly adventurous spirit, stretching the conventions of his artform to an extent that resounds with the daring nature of the modern art world. Matching the philosophical contemplations of modern artists, Balanchine approached ballet as a way of life, tying his artistic imaginations to past experiences while eliminating narrative.

German composer Richard Wagner proposed the concept of *Gesamtkunstwerk,* or "total work of art," through bringing together various art forms into "one sublime creative entity"[158] that would surpass the impact of previous creative endeavors in any one media. He viewed various art forms in relation to the "artistic man" considering music, poetry, and dance to come from within man, while painting, sculpture, and architecture rely more heavily on the natural world, and he hoped interactions between these categories would manifest the highest potential

158. Will Gompertz, *What are You Looking At?* (New York, NY: Penguin Group, 2012), 154.

of each.[159] One might argue that all creative output, no matter how abstract, depends rather heavily on the external world, as even the most creative individual produces work from a synthesis of personal experiences, conversations, acquired knowledge, and cultural perspective. Nevertheless, Wagner's ideal reached other art forms through Wassily Kandinsky and Sergei Diaghilev, who both aspired toward this perfected culmination in their work. A testament to how well Wagner infused his artistic ideals into his musical compositions, Kandinsky attended Wagner's opera *Lohengrin* at the Bolshoi in 1896 while working in Moscow as a law professor, and while listening, envisioned Moscow "stylized as a fairytale city, rooted in the folklore and folk art of Russia."[160] Following this experience, plus a visit to an exhibit by French Impressionists at which he was deeply impacted by Monet's painting, Kandinsky moved to Munich and began expanding his work as an amateur artist, hoping to develop his artistic career after Wagner's *Gesamtkunstwerk* ideal.[161] He considered music an "emancipated art," essentially abstract when not accompanied by words and not relying on the natural world for inspiration, and Kandinsky sought to similarly "emancipate" painting by communicating solely through form and color.[162] He compared artistic theory to the rules guiding musical composition—ever-present but ever-fluctuating—and aspired to equate color to musical notes and artistic composition to

159. Ibid., 155.

160. Ibid., 155.

161. Ibid., 155-56.

162. Gompertz, 154; Peter Selz, *Art in a Turbulent Era* (Ann Arbor, MI: U.M.I. Press, 1985), 117-18.

musical tonality in his work.[163] This approach parallels Balanchine's relationship to music as a choreographer in his insistence that choreography must not attempt to illustrate the music. Instead, the choreography and score exist as distinct entities that complement one another while they unfold simultaneously in time. Furthermore, Balanchine's regard for music as the "most sacred of the arts"[164] matches Kandinsky's view of music as "emancipated."[165]

For an artist more focused on the inner experience of an artwork than the product itself, Kandinsky has much to say about his approach to painting, which he articulates most extensively in his book *On the Spiritual in Art,* first published in 1911. While his expositions on the work of an artist in the era of transition toward abstraction become convoluted and esoteric at times, he acknowledges that he has "always turned to reason and intellect least of all."[166] He opens his discourse on movement with a complex analogy centered on a triangle of spiritual understanding which continually presses upward with the most visionary man alone at the apex, misunderstood by those of lesser understanding.[167] He says of such men:

> Those lonely souls who hunger and possess the power of vision are mocked or regarded as mentally abnormal. But the voices of those rare souls who cannot be smothered in sleep and who feel dark longings for spiritual life, for knowledge and progress, stand out wailing and disconsolate amidst the crude chorus of materialism. Spiritual night falls gradually deeper and deeper. Darker and darker it becomes, surrounding such dismayed

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163. Gompertz, 155; Wassily Kandinsky, K. C. Lindsay, and Peter Vergo, *Kandinsky: Complete Writings on Art* (New York, NY: Da Capo Press, Inc., 1982), 197.

164. Homans, 508.

165. Selz, 117.

166. Ibid., 116.

167. Kandinsky, 133-34.

> souls, and their bearers, tortured by doubt and fear, often prefer the sudden violent plunge into blackness to this gradual darkening that surrounds them.[168]

Kandinsky seemingly fathomed himself as a tragically enlightened man, believing himself to be alone in the realization that painting ought to eliminate the objective altogether.[169] Early on, he advocated an approach between representation and abstraction, wishing to distance art from the purely objective but not convinced that audiences, or even artists, possessed the spiritual insight to appreciate or execute work with color and form as the sole means of communication. While encouraging artists to develop their soul alongside their technique, Kandinsky viewed some semblance of the representational world remaining within artwork a necessary transition to pure abstraction to prevent fine arts from deteriorating into empty decoration.[170] *Impression III (Concert),* a painting Kandinsky completed near the time of this publication, exemplifies this grasping toward abstraction. Inspired by a concert featuring the music of composer Arnold Schoenberg, Kandinsky painted *Impression III* within two days, creating an active composition that barely suggests the concert setting, with large portions of yellow and black paint toward the right juxtaposed by brisk lines and shapes representing figures on the left. Finding encouragement in his journey toward abstraction through written correspondence with Schoenberg, Kandinsky emphasized his desire to "develop the same energies as music" [171] in his painting, reiterating once again the powerful role music played in shaping his artistic aspirations.

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168. Ibid., 135.

169. Selz, 113.

170. Kandinsky, 197.

171. Gompertz, 158.

Figure 11. *Impression III (Concert)* (1911) by Wassily Kandinsky. Lenbachhaus Museum, Munich.[172]

Kandinsky dictated specific ideas regarding how he wished audiences to view his transformative work, and artwork in general. Like numerous modern artists, Kandinsky lamented the attempts of viewers and critics to infuse hidden meaning into his work through analyzing the formal elements—lines, shapes, colors, etc.[173] Instead, he longed for a viewer to simply

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172. Wassily Kandinsky, *Impression III (Concert)*, 1911, oil on canvas, 30.9 in x 39.5 in (78.5 cm x 100.5 cm), Lenbachhaus Museum, Munich, Germany, Public Domain, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Wassily_Kandinsky_-_Impression_III_(Concert)_-_Google_Art_Project.jpg.

173. Selz, 114-15.

"experience for himself the inner life of the picture,"[174] comparing this experiencing of art to that of having a conversation. When having a conversation, one must not fixate on the specific words spoken, and the letters that make up each word in the construct of language; rather, one views these words as the means to articulate a deeper idea in the mind of one's companion.[175] Kandinsky's focus on the spiritual and experiential nature of art mirrors the inseparability of Balanchine's life philosophy from his artistic approach to ballet, as well as the influence of his Orthodox faith on his work. In discussing her admiration for Balanchine as a great philosopher, dancer Suzanne Farrell explains that his instruction taught her to experience the full value of life through living in the present and assuming responsibility for her actions, a lesson that shapes her perception of the world within and outside of ballet.[176] His insistence that dancers concentrate all of their energy into the present movement, not conserving energy for the next, facilitates an experiencing of the present moment for both the dancers and audience that recalls Kandinsky's ideal encounter with a work of art.[177]

Kandinsky's alternative to analyzing the formal elements of a composition is focusing on the content, which originates from the "inner necessity"[178] of the artist. Color and form serve as the means through which Kandinsky communicated his content, with compositions nearest total abstraction considered "concrete" or "pure" art in their abandonment of representing the natural

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174. Kandinsky, 202.

175. Ibid., 202.

176. "Suzanne Farrell, Academy Class of 1987, Full Interview."

177. Homans, 508.

178. Selz, 114.

world.[179] While Kandinsky did not consider color an adequate subject matter alone, he recognized, and skillfully exploited, its power to elicit physical sensations from a viewer, while "calling forth a vibration from the soul."[180] This understanding of color presents itself even in Kandinsky's early representational work, evident in his painting *Colorful Life*, completed in 1907. Inspired by his journey through rural Russia, this work incorporates countless stories of the experiences and traditions of the people he encountered in his travels, without centering on a single narrative. Instead, the painting reflects the appreciation he gained for his cultural heritage and counters the Western-facing focus of his contemporary intellectuals and creatives in Russia. Kandinsky said of *Colorful Life*, "I was seeking through the lines and the spread of colored points to express the musical side of Russia." [181] He further challenged the norm in choosing tempera, considered outdated in comparison to oil paint, which allowed for vibrant blocks of color to burst from a black background, creating a jovial and energetic atmosphere.[182]

Kandinsky's work retains, even heightens, this interest in color as it progresses toward complete abstraction, seen in *Yellow, Red, Blue,* which he completed in 1925. While this work was not his first success at total abstraction, *Yellow, Red, Blue* integrates form and color in a particularly intriguing manner.

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179. Ibid., 114.

180. Kandinsky, 156-57.

181. *Colorful Life by Wassily Kandinsky: Smart Secrets of Great Paintings,* Films On Demand, 2015, https://fod.infobase.com/PortalPlaylists.aspx?wID=103627&xtid=114923.

182. Ibid.

Figure 12. *Yellow, Red, Blue* (1925) by Wassily Kandinsky. National Museum of Modern Art, Paris.[183]

His approach to color in this piece draws on the *Theory of Colors* by Johan Wolfgang von Goethe, exploring in particular the contrast between yellow and blue and their emotional connotations.[184] Red bridges the gap between the two near the center of the composition with nearly every color of the spectrum in between, while the contrasting yellow and blue stand in immediate juxtaposition near the outskirts of the canvas. Various lines and shapes fill the space, though in a less cacophonous manner than some of Kandinsky's other works, such as *Composition VII.* In his book *Point and Line to Plane,* Kandinsky explains that a line comes

183. Wassily Kandinsky, *Yellow, Red, Blue,* (1925), oil on canvas, 50.3 in x 79.3 in (128 cm x 201.5 cm), National Museum of Modern Art, Paris, France, Public Domain, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Kandinsky_-_Jaune_Rouge_Bleu.jpg.

184. *Colorful Life by Wassily Kandinsky: Smart Secrets of Great Paintings; Wassily Kandinsky: Invisible Shapes*, Films On Demand, 1994, https://fod.infobase.com/PortalPlaylists.aspx?wID=103627&xtid=31232.

about through forces acting on a point in motion. Lines possess tension and direction, and specific types of lines bring distinct qualities to a composition. For instance, he equates a horizontal line with coldness and a vertical line with warmth, and a diagonal line brings something in between.[185]

Interestingly, Kandinsky addresses "the dance of the future"[186] in *On the Spiritual in Art* as an aspect of the ideal total work of art. According to Kandinsky, "conventional 'beauty' of movement must be thrown overboard" along with narrative in favor of the "inner sense of movement"[187] until we "sense the inner value of every movement, and . . . 'unbeautiful' movements that now suddenly become beautiful [stream] forth at once an undreamed-of power and living strength."[188] Yet, his comparison falls short of a logical parallel in that while he eliminated the objective from his painting, he retained structure through color theory and compositional consideration. In insisting on eliminating "conventional 'beauty'" from ballet, he in essence dismisses balletic technique, the painterly equivalent of which might be haphazardly throwing paint onto a canvas. One might argue that a more perceptive parallel to Kandinsky's abstraction of painting may be found in the choreography of Balanchine. While Balanchine does eliminate narrative in several ballets, he operates from a framework of established technique, which enables clearer communication of intended content, a set of rules to be broken intentionally for effect, and greater aesthetic pleasure, which must not be disregarded altogether

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185. Kandinsky, 572-74.

186. Kandinsky, 205.

187. Ibid., 205.

188. Ibid., 206.

in the arts. In this comparison, we might equate time and space to a blank canvas and technique to color and form. Perhaps technique should not be analyzed as the final objective, but if we eradicate it altogether, we no long have dance. While Balanchine notably focused on "just the steps," [189] an apparent contradiction to Kandinsky's de-emphasis on color and form as subject, an indefinable something greater emerges, perhaps from the soul, when Balanchine's dancers execute his choreography.

Mark Rothko, renowned painter of the 20th century, embarked on a similarly progressive and life-long journey toward abstraction. Much like Kandinsky, Rothko entered the art world later in his young-adult life. Largely self-taught in his craft outside of a few sporadic art classes, Rothko always concerned himself more with the exploration of social and spiritual values than pre-determined design principles or color theory, describing his own work as a "simple expression of complex thought."[190] Rothko shared with Kandinsky the conviction that artwork functions as a catalyst for spiritual experiences, but where Kandinsky felt compelled to author an entire book expounding on the spiritual nature of his work, Rothko refrained from comment, maintaining that the act of experiencing a work of art involves "a fusion of the senses that language lacks the power to express."[191] Rothko experienced a similar alienation as a revolutionary creative to that which Kandinsky described; however, Rothko viewed this artistic isolation as a benefit to his work, saying: "The unfriendliness of society to his activity is difficult for the artist to accept. Yet this very hostility can act as a lever for true liberation. Freed from a

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189. Homans, 508.

190. Gompertz, 285; Selz, 258-59.

191. Oliver Wick, "Mark Rothko, 'A consummated experience between picture and onlooker,'" in *Mark Rothko,* ed. by Fondation Beyeler (Ostfildern-Ruit, Germany: Hatje Cantz, 2001), 23.

false sense of security and community, transcendental experiences become possible."[192] In line with this interest in experience, Rothko envisioned early on in his artistic career a sanctuary-like setting in which a person could contemplate a single work of art, alone and uninterrupted.[193] His quest for the spiritual in painting draws inspiration from the religious art of Europe; however, lacking shared religious narratives within the larger culture on which to fixate his work, Rothko's paintings seek a rather nebulous spiritual experience within oneself.[194] His works have even been described as "icons that allow us to communicate with the void that surrounds us."[195] Balanchine likewise found inspiration in the spiritual, although his choreography is far less explicitly in pursuit of a spiritual experience and more grounded in a concrete faith tradition, his Russian Orthodox faith. Lincoln Kirstein compared Balanchine's ballets to icons, in that they reflect a search for God through the senses in a manner that recalls the Orthodox tradition's value of musical and visual beauty.[196]

Although Rothko generally refused to comment on his works, he wished for them to be viewed in specific ways, to shape a viewer's perspective of the world to match his own, at least for the moment.[197] Rothko resisted the discussion of formal elements even more than Kandinsky,

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192. Selz, 257-58.

193. Wick, 27.

194. Selz, 257.

195. *Rothko: An Abstract Humanist*, Films On Demand, 2003, https://fod.infobase.com/PortalPlaylists.aspx?wID=103627&xtid=33403.

196. Homans, 509.

197. Wick, 23.

wanting his art to evoke a "spiritual reaction"[198] in the viewer, and he deeply feared his paintings being admired solely for the color or as mere decoration.[199] According to one critic, when viewing Rothko's work, "we no longer look *at* a painting . . . we are meant to enter it, to sink into its atmosphere of mist and light or to draw it around us like a coat."[200] While less authoritative about how his ballets ought to be viewed, Balanchine shared a similar focus on audiences experiencing the ballet, encouraging people to simply watch, and watch again, rather than attempting to understand.[201] In keeping with this spirit, Balanchine engaged in efforts to increase exposure to and appreciation for ballet in all people, offering interviews and demonstrations, and giving ballets to regional companies for free.[202]

Rothko's painting progressed toward abstraction across several decades, and by the early 1950s, his compositions primarily featured rectangular blocks of color, which appeared to float with blurred edges against a uniform background, arranged horizontally across a massive canvas.[203] *No. 12 (Red and Yellow)* completed in 1955, exemplifies this style, with a vibrant yellow, slightly transparent, rectangle occupying the upper two-thirds of the canvas, accompanied by a smaller red rectangle in the space beneath, both superimposed on an orange

198. Gompertz, 283.

199. Wick, 31.

200. Selz, 258.

201. Gottlieb, 201.

202. Homans, 465-66.

203. *Rothko: An Abstract Humanist.*

background and integrated through blurred and imprecise edges.[204] Rothko's colors deepened across the 1950s, taking on a definitively darker, more meditative tone by 1957, possibly to discourage excessive attention to the color itself by viewers. According to Rothko's son Christopher, all of his father's paintings, even those composed of bright colors, address tragedy and the human condition; the darker palette simply encourages a more "meditative, self-exploratory process" [205] in those encountering the work. While Balanchine choreographed more fluidly throughout his career, bouncing between the abstract and narrative, his most abstract ballets forego not only narrative, but elaborate costumes and sets as well, as in his characteristic "leotard ballets." This elimination of excess ornamentation parallels Rothko's stripping of color, and both approaches highlight the intended content of the artist through the removal of distraction.

Another unique feature of Rothko's artistic approach lies in his thorough consideration of the entire space surrounding his artwork. He painted the individual compositions on large canvases, which he felt made them more "intimate and human" [206] and allowed him to put himself into the work. He consistently preferred solo exhibitions over group exhibits, as he enjoyed maximum control over the entire setting, considering the lighting, spacing, and how the pieces interact with each other. In the "15 Americans" exhibit curated by Dorothy Miller at the Museum of Modern Art in 1952, Rothko arranged nine works in a room with bright lighting to accompany his vibrant paintings. As his palette darkened, he preferred dimmer lighting to

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204. Wick, 99.

205. *Rothko: An Abstract Humanist.*

206. Wick, 24.

encourage an "absolute encounter"[207] between the observer and painting.[208] The Rothko Chapel in Houston offers the culmination of Rothko's command of space and fulfills his earlier ideal of providing an opportunity for independent contemplation while surrounded by works of art. Rothko collaborated on all aspects of the octagonal structure, designing the tones for the interior space that his work later filled and establishing the singular light source, a skylight. The eight walls are covered in fourteen darkly pensive paintings stretching from floor to ceiling, infusing the space with the contemplative mood Rothko intended to accompany his work.[209] While choreography by necessity carefully considers the entire space of the stage, Balanchine approached the space somewhat differently than his predecessors. Particularly in his abstract ballets, he confronts viewers with the juxtaposition of complexity and simplicity, rather than filling the space with a sheer volume of people and intricate sets, props, and costumes. As Edward Villella points out, Balanchine created choreography to fill space, even when the steps were initially performing on a smaller stage.[210] With the construction of the Lincoln Center, Balanchine collaborated with architect Philip Johnson to realize a space consistent with his creative ideals. Besides insisting on an enlarged orchestra pit in conjunction with his regard for music, he valued a theater that matched the elegant, clean line of his dancers and welcomed public audiences.[211]

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207. Ibid., 26.

208. Ibid., 24, 26.

209. Gompertz, 284.

210. "Conversations with Megan, featuring Edward Villella."

211. Gottlieb, 158; Homans, 467.

Conclusion

As patrons of the arts, we value each independent art form for its unique approach to manifesting an unarticulated essence of beauty into the world. Yet, we recognize that oftentimes shared commonalities exist between these diverse forms of expression in their ambitions, values, and executions. Considering the two dominant pedagogical approaches to ballet, pioneered by Vaganova and Balanchine, in terms of two historical art movements, Baroque and Modernism, respectively, yields a richer understanding of the creative and aesthetic aspect of this athletic art. Additionally, viewing each style of ballet through the lens of its comparable art movement highlights the distinctions between traditional Vaganova and Balanchine technique from an unconventional, but illuminating, point of view.

Although the era of Baroque art occurred around two centuries before Vaganova's work in ballet pedagogy, the two share the core artistic value of meaningful expression achieved through refined technical excellence. Much as artists of the Renaissance perfected representational rendering, Vaganova deconstructed the mechanics of ballet and reassembled them into a comprehensive understanding of the physicality of movement. Likewise, Baroque artists followed the innovations of their predecessors, implementing their techniques to bring to life narratives of human experience, just as Vaganova's students manifested the full potential of her technique by realizing the power of movement toward storytelling and portrayal of emotion. This parallel progression points to another essential similarity between these two creative eras: an interest in portraying narrative human experience. Biblical stories often served as inspiration for Baroque artists, who capitalized on the drama inherent in the accounts, crafting richly complex compositions of action and emotion. The works of Caravaggio and Rubens exemplify this tendency in Baroque painters, frequently executing spectacular depictions for display in

churches. Similarly, the Soviet era of ballet heightened the psychological drama aspect of performance even within classics, aided by the freedom and individuality possible through mastery of Vaganova's intense and carefully coordinated style of dancing. The dramballet genre of Soviet dance intensified this emphasis of emotional expression even further, yet the impeccable training of Vaganova's dancers such as Galina Ulanova, able to maneuver the duality of acting and dancing, preserved the integrity of classical ballet. For both Baroque art and Vaganova's methodology, flawless technical ability functioned as a tool towards a larger purpose: storytelling and drama. This ambition contrasts with the later work of Balanchine and modernists painters. While also not interested in a perfect *penché* or spectacular shade of blue as the subject matter itself, Balanchine, Kandinsky, and Rothko all explored the removal of nonessential elements of their art to retain only the essence of their intention. This essence centered on the experience within the dancer, artist, or viewer in the moment of creating or partaking of the art, as opposed to portraying the past or imagined emotion and experience of a character.

Although innovators of new movements in the arts break a few rules by nature, and Baroque artists certainly transgressed a few rules of convention, modern artists often obliterate the rules on purpose: Kandinsky practically burned the rulebook and re-wrote his own, while Rothko never read it in the first place. This treatment of tradition alters who the art is created for and how an audience responds. This purposeful stripping away of the excess in both Balanchine's choreography and Kandinsky and Rothko's painting yields an air of simplicity to their respective creations. Certainly, Balanchine's choreography is far from simple in the ability required to perform it, but the absence of heavily embellished costumes, sets, and crowds of dancers onstage at once narrows the focus to the dancers and their movements, and how their

movements interact with the music and space around them. Balanchine's choreography drifts fluidly between steps in a manner attentive to time, which mirrors the floating, vibrating rectangles of Rothko's paintings. Similarly, the apparent simplicity of modern painting often conceals thoughtfully conceptual content. The esoteric nature of Kandinsky and Rothko's intended spiritual experience for viewers of their paintings narrows the scope of the audience who will interact with their work as they hope. Although Balanchine approached the audience's experience with his choreography far more openly, genuinely wanting to bring ballet to the public, the exclusive experience of modern painting mimics the Ballet Society phase of Balanchine's career during which only a select elite attended performances, primarily because his somewhat radical choreography would not appeal to the public. Far differently, both Baroque art and Soviet ballet were typically crafted with ordinary people in mind. Display in churches and public settings made Baroque art ever-present in society, while Bolshevik ideology dictated that ballets be understandable to the masses. While the creative endeavors of these artists certainly involved conceptual depth, the intended content was conveyed more explicitly through representational rendering in Baroque art and elaborate costumes, narrative plots, involved sets in Soviet ballet. Just as Vaganova replaced restraint with power through coordination and energy, Baroque artists replaced static poses and structured formulas with a dynamism that leads the eye through the composition with the content and high contrast. These features present a higher level of apparent complexity and atmosphere of grandeur that counters the contemplative simplicity of Balanchine and modern painting.

The innovations of Vaganova, Baroque artists, Balanchine, and Modern painters all offer unique opportunities for spectacular experiences and contemplation on their content independently. However, viewing these distinctive realms of the arts through frameworks rarely

placed alongside the others encourages an enriched understanding and heightened appreciation for their similarities. Placing the ballet world and art world side by side may facilitate fresh analyses of art and its creators both independently and in a new historical and conceptual context.

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