

A Study on the Modes of Narrative Representation and Structural Logic in Artistic Performance Dance in Dance Sport

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Abstract: As Dance Sport has gradually shifted from competitive display toward stage-oriented artistic expression, Artistic Performance Dance has evolved into a key dimension for assessing the comprehensive aesthetic capacity and choreographic sophistication of the field. Unlike the traditional performance paradigm centered on technical display, Artistic Performance Dance places greater emphasis on the refinement of thematic meaning, the creation of situational atmosphere, the portrayal of character relationships, and the progression of the overall structure. As a result, narrativity has increasingly emerged as an indispensable artistic attribute of this genre. Taking Artistic Performance Dance in Dance Sport as its object of analysis, this paper integrates dance narrative theory, dance signification theory, and relevant research on the creation of Artistic Performance Dance. From the perspectives of thematic construction, character interaction, movement language, musical rhythm, spatial arrangement, and visual symbolism, it systematically examines the major modes of narrative representation and further explores their underlying structural logic. This study argues that narrativity in Artistic Performance Dance in Dance Sport is not merely a matter of 'telling a story'; rather, it is a dynamic narrative chain of 'theme establishment–situational development–conflict progression–emotional intensification–closure of meaning,' generated through the ordered integration of body language and stage vocabulary within an established movement system. Narrativity not only enhances the intellectual depth and emotional appeal of a work, but also plays a significant role in promoting the transformation of Dance Sport from formulaic technical display into a complex form of stage art. This study contributes to a deeper theoretical understanding of Artistic Performance Dance in Dance Sport and also provides a feasible point of reference for creative practice and pedagogical training in this field.

Keywords: dance sport; artistic performance dance; narrativity; modes of representation; structural logic

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1. Introduction

As a form of bodily culture integrating normativity, artistry, competitiveness, and spectatorship, Dance Sport has gradually developed a relatively complete system of movement vocabulary and a comparatively stable aesthetic paradigm through its long-term evolution. Traditionally, stage presentations of Dance Sport have tended to emphasize the precision of footwork, the coordination of rhythm, bodily control, and the degree of mutual understanding in partnered collaboration. To a large extent, its stage appeal has been rooted in the aesthetic satisfaction generated by formal rigor and stylistic purity. However, with the continuous renewal of stage-art concepts, contemporary audiences have long moved beyond evaluating dance works merely in terms of whether technical movements are executed accurately. Instead, they are increasingly concerned with whether a work possesses a clear thematic orientation, rich emotional layers, and a complete and unified mode of expression. It is precisely within this shifting context that Dance Sport has gradually broken away from the traditional model dominated by technical display and expanded toward a more integrated artistic construction. Artistic Performance Dance has therefore become an important developmental path in this field that cannot be ignored. Compared with traditional routine-based presentation, Artistic Performance Dance places greater emphasis on the internal unity of the work. Movement is no longer merely technical material to be executed; rather, it begins to form an expressive system together with music, characters, space, and stage atmosphere. In other words, the central questions facing the creator are no longer simply 'how should the movements be arranged,' but rather 'what does the work express,' 'how is this expression established,' and 'why can it persuade the audience.' In this sense, the emergence of Artistic Performance Dance represents not merely an expansion of the performance forms of Dance Sport, but also a shift in creative thinking. (Tian Yanyu, 2020)

It is precisely in this process of transformation that narrativity has gradually come to demonstrate its unique value. Compared with works that rely purely on lyricism, narrative expression is more likely to generate clear structural progression and emotional development, thereby enhancing the overall coherence and dramatic tension of stage performance. At the same time, the introduction of narrativity enables viewers to grasp more smoothly the relationships between characters, the evolution of situations, and the direction of thematic development, thus improving the intelligibility of the work. This is sufficient to show that narrativity does not simply mean the inclusion of plot; rather, it suggests that a work begins to organize meaning in a more directed way. At present, research on Artistic Performance Dance in Dance Sport has already addressed a range of topics, including the creation of realistic themes, the construction of stage time and space, and the factors influencing choreography. However, dedicated discussion of narrativity itself remains relatively insufficient. Of particular significance is the fact that Dance Sport, as an art form, possesses highly distinctive normative requirements and a unique mode of partnered interaction. Its narrative logic can neither be equated with narrative dance in the general sense nor reduced to the logic of dramatic stage works driven primarily by plot progression. In light of this, the present study seeks, on the basis of existing scholarship, to offer a more systematic examination of narrativity in Artistic Performance Dance in Dance Sport, with particular attention to the specific modes through which this quality is manifested and to the structural logic thereby constructed within the work.

2. The Theoretical Connotations of Narrativity in Artistic Performance Dance in Dance Sport

From a broad perspective, narrative is not the exclusive domain of literature and drama. Any art form capable of organizing temporal sequences, constructing networks of relationships, and generating meaningful directionality contains, to varying degrees, the latent possibility of narrativity.

Although dance cannot directly explain character background or causal chains of events through written language or spoken dialogue, it can nevertheless create specific situations, suggest relationships between characters, and propel emotional development through the arrangement of bodily movement, the variation of rhythmic flow, the organization of stage space, and the use of visual symbols. For this reason, narrative in dance is not accomplished through 'telling,' but is gradually generated through 'presentation.' This fundamental characteristic also determines that dance narrative relies more heavily on perceptual immediacy, holistic integration, and the symbolic power of imagery. For a long time, dance has often been described as 'strong in lyricism but weak in narrative.' This judgment, to some extent, reveals the limitations of movement language in directly expressing logical or causal relations, but it does not mean that dance is incapable of narrative expression. (Wang Lei, 2012) In fact, with the renewal of choreographic concepts, narrativity has become an important means through which many works enhance dramatic tension and structural layering. (Xiao Yi, 2026) This study argues that dance is by no means incapable of narration; rather, it cannot simply transplant narrative models from literature or drama. Dance narrative must be rooted in the medium-specific nature of body language and therefore depends more heavily on the interrelatedness of movements, the continuity of emotional flow, and the organic coordination of overall structural progression. This understanding is also in line with broader discussions on narrativity in performance studies.

When considered in relation to the specific genre of Artistic Performance Dance in Dance Sport, narrativity presents even more distinctive ontological features. First, Dance Sport possesses a rigorous system of movement norms and clearly defined stylistic boundaries among dance forms. This means that narrativity cannot exist independently of the ontology of the dance genre itself, but can only be realized through the reorganization of the existing movement system and

the translation of its meaning. Second, Dance Sport is inherently characterized by partnered collaboration and interaction. This interactive relationship is not only the basis on which technical coordination becomes possible, but also potentially provides the conditions for the formation of character relationships. Many movements, while fulfilling functions of leading, following, and counteraction, simultaneously and imperceptibly construct the psychological distance and emotional tension between figures. At the same time, the stage-oriented developmental trajectory unique to Artistic Performance Dance creates broader possibilities for the full unfolding of narrativity. Once a work begins to emphasize thematic conception, character construction, situational atmosphere, spatial arrangement, and the overall effect of visual presentation, movement no longer serves merely as a vehicle for technical display, but is incorporated into a more complex system of signification. Within this system, movement, music, and space are no longer parallel compositional materials; rather, they become organic elements that jointly participate in the production of meaning and interact with one another.

Based on the above analysis, this study argues that narrativity in Artistic Performance Dance in Dance Sport refers to the process by which creators, on the basis of the Dance Sport movement system and stage vocabulary, systematically integrate multiple artistic elements so that, within a limited temporal span, a work may generate a clearly directed theme, perceptible transformations in character relationships, and a progressively unfolding trajectory of emotional development, thereby achieving a fundamental transformation from technical display at the formal level to artistic expression at the level of meaning.

3. Major Modes of Narrative Representation in Artistic Performance Dance in Dance Sport

3.1 Thematic Conception: The Point of Departure for Narrative Formation

Thematic conception constitutes the point of departure for narrative formation. Without a clear theme, even a work rich in movement material is likely to remain at the level of segmental juxtaposition and emotional accumulation, making it difficult to achieve a truly integrated expression. In Artistic Performance Dance in Dance Sport, the theme determines not only what the work expresses, but also how that expression unfolds. The selection of movement, the configuration of character relationships, the shaping of musical temperament, and even the mode of spatial arrangement are all influenced by the thematic orientation. (Wang Lin, 2020)

This study argues that, in Artistic Performance Dance, theme is the spiritual core of the work. It provides all internal elements of the work with a shared direction, thereby preventing movement from being reduced to mere technical arrangement. Particularly in the process of the artistic development of Dance Sport, the subject matter of works has gradually shifted from traditional formulaic aesthetics toward lived experience, cultural memory, and spiritual symbolism. (Jin Hua, 2022) This indicates that theme is no longer a superficial ornament, but has become the conceptual foundation upon which narrative structure develops. For this very reason, mature works tend to organize movement on the premise that the theme is established first, rather than attempting to impose meaning retrospectively after the movement has already been arranged. (He Huaming, 2013)

From the perspective of the sources through which thematic conception is generated, the themes of Artistic Performance Dance in Dance Sport may generally be divided into three categories. The first is derived from pre-existing narrative resources found in literary classics, film and television works,

or folk legends. Through the selection and recreation of such original materials, choreographers reshape them into story structures compatible with the expressive logic of the bodily vocabulary of Dance Sport. The second arises from the choreographer's own observations of social reality and the sedimentation of personal life experience. Such themes often carry a strong sense of emotional authenticity and social concern, as seen in artistic explorations of universal human subjects such as familial affection, reunion and separation, and the growth of life. The third begins with the imagistic treatment of specific cultural symbols or collective historical memories. In such cases, the choreographer does not insist on the reproduction of a complete plot, but instead seeks to evoke cultural association and emotional resonance through the repeated appearance and formal transformation of core images.

It should be emphasized that in Artistic Performance Dance in Dance Sport, thematic conception does not become fixed once established. Rather, throughout the creative process, it remains in dynamic interaction with the movement vocabulary system, the emotional qualities of the music, and the structure of stage space. Put differently, the theme on the one hand provides overarching guidance and directional coherence for the artistic elements of the work, while on the other hand it is continuously adjusted, enriched, and deepened through specific choreographic practice. This bidirectional mechanism means that theme is no longer an abstract presupposition detached from the creative process, but is gradually internalized into the organic whole of the work as the spiritual line running through it from beginning to end. For the choreographer, the establishment of thematic conception is essentially a process of continuously posing and repeatedly responding to the fundamental question of what irreplaceable emotional experience or intellectual meaning the work is intended to convey. Moreover, the degree of clarity in thematic conception directly affects how audiences understand and receive the narrativity of the work. If the theme is overly obscure or lacks clear

orientation, audiences are likely to lose the central clue through which meaning may be grasped, making it difficult to sustain coherent expectations of significance. Conversely, if the theme is expressed too plainly or in an overtly didactic manner, the openness of interpretation and multiplicity of meaning that dance as an art form ought to preserve may be weakened. Accordingly, how to strike an appropriate balance between clarity and richness of implication remains an important question requiring sustained exploration in the choreographic practice of Artistic Performance Dance in Dance Sport.

3.2 Character Relationships: The Central Driving Force of Narrative Progression

Character relationships constitute the central driving force of narrative development in Artistic Performance Dance in Dance Sport. As the duet is the most representative performance form in this field, bodily interaction between performers is inherently relational and directional. Proximity and distance, attachment and release, guidance and resistance not only reflect the technical characteristics of the dance genre, but also gradually translate into emotional change and psychological tension in the course of spectatorship. In this context, characters do not necessarily rely on a fully developed narrative background in order to be established. In many cases, the audience may not know exactly who the stage figures are, yet can still perceive the nature of their relationship through bodily states, modes of interaction, and rhythmic variation. This suggests that character construction in Dance Sport depends primarily on relational logic rather than verbal explanation. This study argues that only when the partner relationship in Artistic Performance Dance is elevated to the level of a narrative relationship can the work acquire the internal momentum necessary for sustained development. Otherwise, however complex the coordination may be, it remains at the level of technical display and fails to generate deeper expressive meaning.

3.3 Movement Language: The True Carrier of Narrative Content

Movement is the ontological medium of dance; accordingly, narrative must ultimately be realized through movement language. In Artistic Performance Dance in Dance Sport, if theme, emotion, and relationship cannot be genuinely borne at the level of movement, they remain only at the level of concept and intention and cannot be transformed into effective stage expression. It should be noted that the narrative meaning of movement is not fixed. The same turn, pause, extension, or separation may convey entirely different emotional meanings in different works. Movement is able to bear narrative not only because of its own formal qualities, but also because of its position within the work, its relation to preceding and subsequent movements, and the way it is integrated with character state and musical rhythm. For this reason, truly mature movement design does not simply pursue technical difficulty or novelty, but rather seeks precision of expression, allowing movement to enter fully into the immediate situation of the work.

From a structural perspective, repetition, progression, contrast, and transformation in movement constitute important means by which a sense of narrativity is formed. In practice, the same movement phrase may shift from smooth continuity to visibly restrained or interrupted execution, thereby allowing the audience to perceive a change in emotional state rather than merely a variation of form. When movement ceases to be a flat arrangement of isolated units and instead accumulates meaning through its connections across time, the audience begins to perceive that some form of change is taking place. This study argues that narrativity in Artistic Performance Dance in Dance Sport is not something added externally to movement, but rather the result of the continual growth of meaning within movement language itself. This is also one of the important features distinguishing Artistic Performance Dance from general technical display.

3.4 Musical Rhythm: The Force that Propels Narrative Time

In Artistic Performance Dance in Dance Sport, music not only provides rhythmic support, but also undertakes the important task of organizing narrative time and shaping emotional atmosphere. It determines how a work begins, and also influences how it turns, accumulates, and moves toward climax. (Tian Yanyu, 2020) From the perspective of performance and reception, music is often the first perceptual point of entry through which the audience enters the work. The texture of melody, the speed of rhythm, and the layering of sound can establish a particular emotional tone within a very short period of time, thereby creating the initial narrative situation of the work. (Jin Dezha, 2023) As the work progresses, changes in music continue to signal internal transitions and tensions, giving movement a clearer sense of direction. If music remains only at the level of matching the beat and does not enter into the emotional organization and structural progression of the work, even rich movement material can easily appear fragmented and flat. By contrast, when music genuinely participates in emotional preparation and the accumulation of conflict, it becomes the implicit narrator of the work. (Liu Lian, 2013)

3.5 Spatial Arrangement: The Visual Unfolding of Narrative Situation

Narrative unfolds not only in movement and music, but also in space. The stronger the theatrical quality of Artistic Performance Dance in Dance Sport, the more evident the role of spatial arrangement becomes in narrative expression. Space is not a neutral background; rather, it is an important condition through which changes in relationships, emotional transitions, and scene construction are made visible. Changes in the distance between two performers constitute the most direct form of spatial narrative. Movement from distance to proximity often signifies the establishment of relationship and emotional convergence, whereas movement from

proximity to distance may suggest dislocation, estrangement, or loss. When group dance is introduced into a work, the spatial structure becomes even more complex. Encirclement and dispersal, interweaving and obstruction, as well as the constant shifting between center and periphery, all contribute to different situational meanings on stage. (Fu Fangman, 2020) Thus, the significance of spatial arrangement lies not simply in deciding where performers stand, but in enabling emotion, relationship, and theme to acquire visual order and layering. This study argues that only when spatial relations are fully integrated into the overall logic of the work does the stage cease to be merely a site of movement display and become instead a field in which narrative takes place.

3.6 Visual Symbols: The Auxiliary Construction of Narrative Atmosphere

Visual symbols such as costumes, props, lighting, and bodily styling constitute an important auxiliary system in the narrative expression of Artistic Performance Dance in Dance Sport. Their value does not lie in directly replacing movement as a means of conveying content, but in helping audiences enter the context of the work more quickly and in reinforcing its sense of historical period, identity, and emotional tone. (Wang Lin, 2020) At the same time, however, visual symbols can only function in a supportive capacity and cannot substitute for the ontological expression of the work itself. If a work relies excessively on costumes and props to indicate its content, this often suggests that its movement semantics and structural progression have not yet been fully established. This study argues that mature Artistic Performance Dance should employ visual elements to supplement environmental signification only after movement and relational logic have already been effectively established. In other words, the function of visual symbols is not to explain the work, but to strengthen it, making its narrative atmosphere more complete and its stage impression more vivid. (Ren Wenhui, 2009)

4. The Structural Logic of Narrativity in Artistic Performance Dance in Dance Sport

If the previous section has examined the concrete elements through which narrativity is represented, a further question arises: how do these elements form an organic relationship of progression within the work itself? A genuinely well-constructed narrative work must not only produce in the audience an intuitive sense that it contains a story, but must also present, at the structural level, a dynamic process of continuous unfolding, layered accumulation, and eventual completion. This study argues that the narrative structure of Artistic Performance Dance in Dance Sport may be understood as a sequence of functions that are closely connected but not always strictly separated in practice: theme generation, situational unfolding, conflict progression, emotional climax, and closure of meaning.

First, thematic generation constitutes the point of departure for narrative logic. Only when a work establishes, at the outset of its creation, a clear central idea, emotional orientation, and relational focus can the subsequent design of movement, arrangement of sections, and organization of music proceed on a coherent foundation. (Tian Yanyu, 2020) The theme not only defines the overall tone of the work, but also determines the trajectory along which the narrative will unfold. If this level lacks sufficient clarity, the work is likely to lapse into a superficial accumulation of movement vocabulary and emotional fragments, making it difficult to generate the internal momentum necessary for sustained development.

Second, situational unfolding is a key stage in the transition from abstract theme to concrete stage expression. The focus here is not on exhaustively explaining every detail of background information, but on providing the audience with an effective path into the world of the work. Through the establishment of movement style, the rendering of musical atmosphere, the presentation of spatial state, and the preliminary delineation of character relationships, the work gradually constructs an

emotional field that can be sensorially perceived, allowing the audience to grasp its basic expressive orientation. Although this stage may appear relatively moderate in terms of rhythmic momentum, it in fact plays an essential preparatory role for the subsequent development of structure. Without sufficient situational preparation, the later eruption of conflict and the arrival of climax are likely to seem abrupt and insufficiently grounded. Third, conflict progression constitutes the central driving force of narrative development. The 'conflict' referred to here does not necessarily take the form of a clearly dramatic event. It may instead appear as tension and struggle within character relationships, the gradual intensification of movement energy, the strengthening of rhythmic contrast, or even a breakthrough in an already established spatial order. For instance, a shift from synchronized to misaligned movement, or from stable proximity to repeated separation, can make such tension perceptible without relying on explicit plot. The essential function of conflict is to propel the work from a state of equilibrium into a process of change, and from relative stasis into dynamic development. In the absence of this level, the work tends to remain trapped in the repetitive presentation of a single emotional tone and is unable to generate genuine structural tension. As the energy of conflict continues to accumulate, the work gradually moves toward emotional climax. Climax is not the moment of greatest technical difficulty, but rather the moment in which theme, emotion, and relationship become most concentrated and intense. (Tian Yanyu, 2020) At this stage, the density of movement typically increases, the expressive power of the music is significantly heightened, and the interaction between the performers reaches its fullest tension. The audience's deepest emotional memory of a work is often produced precisely at this point. The value of climax lies not merely in its outward impact, but in the fact that it brings all preceding preparation into a concentrated release and eruption, thereby allowing the central meaning of the work to be revealed with maximum force.

Finally, closure of meaning constitutes a necessary stage in the completion of narrative. After reaching climax, a work should not conclude hastily. Instead, through the natural settling of rhythm, the condensed handling of movement, the appropriate repositioning of character relationships, or a meaningful final tableau, the emotional threads and relational lines that have previously unfolded are allowed to settle and resonate, while the theme of the work is retrospectively echoed and elevated at the conclusion. A genuinely effective ending is not achieved by piling up more information, but through a measured act of gathering and condensation that guides the work from external progression toward internal spiritual completion. For this reason, the narrative structure of Artistic Performance Dance in Dance Sport is not a mechanical imitation of dramatic templates, but the product of a fusion between the ontological structure of dance and the logic of meaning progression.

5. The Value of Narrative Construction and Its Practical Implications

The continuing reinforcement of narrativity has brought about a profound shift in the artistic focus of Artistic Performance Dance in Dance Sport. Such works are no longer confined to the one-dimensional presentation of training outcomes and technical competence; rather, they increasingly assume the functions of thematic articulation and emotional expression. This means that, while preserving its inherent normative beauty, Dance Sport has also acquired a more substantial capacity for intellectual expression and a more powerful effect of stage communication. In this sense, the introduction of narrativity has not weakened the ontological characteristics of Dance Sport; on the contrary, it has endowed its formal beauty with a deeper and more compelling foundation of meaning.

As a nonverbal art form, dance is inherently marked by a certain degree of abstraction, while the presence of narrativity enables audiences to grasp the internal logic of a work more readily through character

relationships, changes in movement, and spatial transitions. (Wang Yantong & Cai Yimeng, 2025) From the perspective of communicative effectiveness, the introduction of narrativity effectively narrows the psychological distance between the work and its audience. Although viewers may not be able to retell a work as a complete linear story, they are often able to perceive clearly the gradual progression of emotion, the subtle transformation of character relationships, and the final closure of meaning. It is precisely this aesthetic quality—one that can be perceived and entered into—that allows Artistic Performance Dance to demonstrate broader possibilities both in terms of aesthetic reception and stage dissemination.

Moreover, the construction of narrativity places higher demands on the comprehensive abilities of choreographers and creators. A qualified creator cannot be satisfied merely with the organization and arrangement of movement materials; rather, they must also possess the ability to extract and refine themes, to plan overall structure, to transform movement into expressive meaning, and to coordinate the work as a whole. This point is particularly significant in light of the current reality that many works still exhibit, to varying degrees, such problems as a solid technical foundation but weak content expression, or rich formal means but loose structural logic. Against this background, systematic research centered on narrativity undoubtedly possesses strong practical relevance. Such research continually reminds creators that a truly mature Artistic Performance Dance work is by no means a simple accumulation or assemblage of movement materials and stage effects, but rather an integrated whole achieved through the organic coordination and internal generation of multiple artistic elements under a unified expressive objective. In view of this, future choreographic practice should further establish and reinforce the core principle of 'theme first, structure as the guide, and movement in the service of expression.' Only when movement, music, character, and space are genuinely integrated into a single organic system of

expression can narrativity in Artistic Performance Dance in Dance Sport be effectively transformed from a theoretical concept into a concrete and convincing realization at the level of the work itself.

6. Conclusion

As a key aesthetic characteristic of Artistic Performance Dance in Dance Sport, narrativity is an internal outcome generated in the process by which this genre moves toward a comprehensive form of stage art. Through the systematic integration of multiple elements—including thematic implication, patterns of character interaction, systems of movement vocabulary, the organization of musical rhythm, the arrangement of stage space, and the configuration of visual symbols—narrativity provides a work with a relatively clear trajectory of emotional development and a distinctly layered structural order. This study argues that, in Artistic Performance Dance in Dance Sport, narrative structure often takes the form of a dynamic chain consisting of theme establishment, situational unfolding, conflict progression, emotional

intensification, and closure of meaning. This chain not only reflects the general principles of dance narrative, but also highlights the distinctive path through which Dance Sport expands meaning within an established framework of normative movement.

At the level of theoretical inquiry, greater attention to narrativity helps overcome the limitations of current Dance Sport studies, which have tended to rely excessively on technical analysis, and thus encourages the field to move toward a more integrated perspective grounded in art scholarship. In terms of choreographic practice, research on narrativity offers a more systematic line of thought for thematic conception, movement arrangement, stage deployment, and the communication of overall artistic meaning. Looking ahead, if future studies can incorporate more case analyses and comparative investigations of specific works, research on narrativity in Artistic Performance Dance in Dance Sport will inevitably move in a more refined direction and will be more likely to develop a theoretical discourse with clearer ontological specificity.

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