FRANKEL, LORA STRASSER. Antithesis. [An 8 millimeter motion picture film of the dance is available for consultation at the Walter Clinton Jackson Library at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro.] (1969) Directed by: Miss Virginia Moomaw.

"Antithesis" is a large group dance using the element of contrast in design, rhythm, group dynamics and mood. Two groups, one aggressive and the other passive in character, oppose one another throughout most of the dance. The aggressive group's movement is strong, angular and opposing, while that of the passive group is soft, curved and lyrical. The music is "Fantasy and Fugue" from Studies in Improvisation by Lukas Foss.

In the beginning the aggressive group is on stage moving in a very close relationship, each member in his own pattern. The movement is slow with much tension and intermittent sharp movements. Following is a section in which each dancer continues his pattern but with great speed. Eventually the group falls into unison movement. Upon the return to the slow section, tension wanes and the dancers return to their individual patterns, making their exit slowly and methodically as a group.

As the aggressive group exits, one member of the passive group enters to contrast the strong movement with soft, airy movement, thus setting the mood for the rest of her group. In the fast movement, the other four dancers enter doing soft, quick movements at intervals, forming a canon and filling the stage with movement. Toward this section's climax the

dancers pause momentarily, and then move in unison briefly. At this point, the aggressive group returns. The passive group clings together and retreats as the aggressive group restates its movement theme and pushes the passive group up-stage and off. A "Flight" section follows in which the aggressive group chases the passive group, leaving the stage empty and dark, except for the presence of one member of the aggressive group.

The next section begins with the solo figure moving slowly with tension, creating a melancholy mood. The stage remains dark as the passive group returns. The mood brightens as they begin to move around the solo figure, again with light, lyrical movement in canon form. They gather in unison movement to entice the solo figure into joining them, leading to an interlude of flirtation which ends when the solo figure captures one of their members. The group pleads with its fifth member to rejoin them but she chooses to remain with the member of the aggressive group, whereupon the four dancers exit.

After a short duet, in which the dancers express affection for one another, the passive group enters to reclaim its lost member, moving around the two and wooing their member back into the group. The members of the aggressive group also enter to reclaim their own. The mood increases in intensity as more dancers are added to the scene, and as the movement increases in energy and sharpness. The dance climaxes and ends as the aggressive group pushes the passive group into a corner, encircles it and envelops it.

ANTITHESIS

by

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APPROVAL SHEET

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ANTITHESIS

At conception "Antithesis" was to be an objective study. Little attention was to be given to the "communication of the human spirit"[1] which Doris Humphrey felt is the purpose of choreography. Previous work done by the writer was always motivated by the need to express a feeling or an idea with communication being of primary importance, but having been influenced by the works of some of the more avant-garde choreographers of the day, the desire was to do something very abstract. Therefore, the original problem was to explore movement to discover how contrast could be used in its basic elements: design, rhythm and dynamics. In evaluating the choreography, it would appear that this purpose has been achieved and in the process of doing so, the purpose which Humphrey stated was the most basic had been fulfilled also. Considering this, an evaluation of the choreography of "Antithesis" will be the concern of this paper.

The first step in the approach to the choreography was to select music. The thought of working with an electronic

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[1]Doris Humphrey, The Art of Making Dances (New York: Rinehart & Company, Inc., 1959), p. 37.

tape because of its non-subjective quality was discarded as
that idea was not really necessary to the achievement of the
choreographer's purpose nor were available the means by which
to make a tape or to have someone else compose one. Lukas
Foss' Fantasy and Fugue was chosen because it is contemporary
and offers a great variety in its rhythm and dynamics. It
was used to help shape the dance. It has intermittent melodic
interludes of which advantage has been taken to create lyri-
cal sections in the dance. During the less melodic sections
of the music, this choreographer felt free to use any rhyth-
mic form that was pleasing but felt compelled to make the
quality of the movement consistent with that of the music.
It is the writer's feeling that the movement and the music
should each be strong enough to be enjoyed for their own
qualities, yet they should be wedded to one another to pro-
duce a composition which has unity and harmony. The movement
is not dependent upon the music in any way. This was done to
give the movement the strength of quality it needed to be
enjoyed for its own sake. The writer hopes that the movement
and the music are harmonious in their dynamics and give unity
to the dance.

During the process of choreography, the main purpose
which guided the choice of movement was that of discovering a

variety of ways to use the element of contrast. The most expedient way to show contrast in this dance was to use two groups which would oppose one another in many ways. Therefore, one group was created which is strong, dominant and somewhat antagonistic and another was created which is soft, shy and passive. In the opening section of the dance the dominant group establishes its character. In the second section the passive group establishes its character and, when being confronted by the dominant group, takes flight. The third section opens with a short solo by one of the members of the dominant group and progresses to group, duet and group interludes with the passive group and the solo figure. The dance closes with a final statement by the dominant group as it overbears the passive group. In order to establish and communicate the characters of these two groups, contrasts in the design, rhythm and dynamics of the movement were used.

The element of design has many facets. In looking back over this work, it can be seen that some of these facets of design were used and manipulated very deliberately while others were included rather unconsciously in the process of creating a mood or relationships through the movement of the dancers. At this time, the use of contrast in design in terms

of static line, time, and the use of stage space, color and lighting will be considered.

The most obvious facet of design is that of static line. This would include symmetry as opposed to asymmetry and opposition versus succession in the lines of the body or in the collective design created by many bodies. In oppositional design the lines of the body are at angles to one another; one part of the body opposing another or, in the case of more than one body, the lines of one body opposing those of another. In successional design the lines are curved and the eye tends to flow from one part of the design to the other without an abrupt break in line. Humphrey says that symmetry suggests stability, security, comfort and repose while asymmetry suggests stimulation, excitement and adventure and that opposition suggests force, energy and vitality while succession suggests mildness and gentleness.[2] Opposition and asymmetry in the movements of individual bodies and the linear relationships between them was used for the dominant group. This creates a forceful, exciting atmosphere on stage and makes the dancers appear strong and aggressive. Some symmetrical lines appear here and there in individual bodies

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[2]Ibid., pp. 50-58.

throughout the slow part of the opening section which coupled
with their oppositional quality add strength and stability to
their character.

In contrast, the design of the passive group is
largely asymmetrical and successional. These qualities give
them the soft, gentle character that was intended and yet,
makes the movement interesting to watch. Humphrey supports
this writer's feeling regarding linear design when she says,

> Considerably more stimulating is the asymmetrical
> succession, which is the area of grace and beauty;
> here there is just enough asymmetry to provide a
> pleasant alertness, with neither oppositional
> shocks on the one hand, nor the deadly balance of
> symmetry, on the other.[3]

An example in which advantage of asymmetry is taken
to show the relationship between the two groups is the point
at which the dominant group confronts the passive group for
the first time.

> To express conflict, these movements must be
> asymmetrical, with only an occasional balanced
> design if a rest is needed. Of all the four
> parts of movement, the design, especially that
> in space, will most quickly tell of the intention,
> the mood and the meaning.[4]

Here the choreographer used contrast in level and linear
design to convey the idea of conflict. The dominant

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[3]_Ibid._, p. 58.   [4]_Ibid._, p. 57.

group remains on a high level using oppositional movement advancing diagonally from downstage left to upstage right, while the passive group crouches low using successional movement. This creates an unbalanced stage with the dominant group pushing the passive group upstage right and off into the wings.

Phrasing is a more subtle way in which contrast can be used in choreographing a dance. If the choreographer allows the movement in the dance to take a variety of phrase shapes, the dance will be more stimulating to the observer. If the phrases are all of the same general length with the same intervals of rises and falls, the dance will tend to become boring. Humphrey sums up this point, when she says:

> The good dance, then, should be put together
> with phrases, and the phrase has to have a recog-
> nizable shape, with a beginning and an end, rises
> and falls in its over-all line, and differences in
> length for variety.[5]

Phrasing can be achieved by the manipulation of two of the elements of dance not yet discussed in this paper: rhythm and dynamics. The phrasing of "Antithesis" is achieved through the use of varying tempi in the rhythm of the movement, varying degrees of energy put into the movement, and the use of group dynamics.

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[5]Ibid., p. 68.

There are three obvious examples of different phrase
shapes found in "Antithesis." The first phrase begins with a
slow, steady group movement that is sustained in quality
except for an occasional accent created by a fast movement
within the group. Each dancer moves in his own phrasing,
each having a breath quality. In other words, though his
group seems to be pulsating together, the movement of each
member has its own phrase length with its own rhythmic rises
and falls. The group then explodes into a very fast sequence
which climaxes in a short series of movements done in unison.
Each member then returns to his own movement phrases and
slowly makes an exit. This long first phrase, therefore, has
its high point at the end of the middle section; starting out
slowly, it builds into a climax and then tapers off to nothing.
The other two examples of phrase shapes appear in the second
half of the dance. Both climax at the end of the phrase but
differ from one another in length and in the way that the
movement builds to a climax. The first phrase is the longer
of the two. It begins with a short, rather melancholy sec-
tion, danced by a solo figure. The movement intensifies as
more dancers are added to the stage. This section is charac-
terized by a series of rises and falls in the speed and
tension of the movement. At the end of the phrase we see a

final build-up of tempo and dynamics which concludes in a
strong restatement of the thematic movement and melodic mate-
rial of the section. The final phrase also begins with a
short, soft section and builds to a strong, dynamic climax.
However, in contrast to the former phrase, this one builds
gradually in intensity as more dancers are added and as more
tension is added to the movement. It has no moments of
relaxation or pause. In other words, this phrase has one
great rising and no falls. It is fortunate that it is a
shorter phrase than the previous one because, if it were
longer, the audience would become exhausted while watching it.
Yet, this constant building gives this last phrase the
strength it needs to become the climax of the whole dance.

In regards to the use of stage space by the choreogra-
pher, Humphrey has made some interesting observations which
should be considered. She says that the stage possesses areas
and lines of direction which are dominant and will aid the
choreographer by adding strength to the movement and to the
characters of the dancers moving in those areas or on those
lines of direction. Likewise, the stage has some weak attri-
butes which may detract from the strength of the dance, if
used inappropriately.[6] Considering the choreography of

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[6]Ibid., pp. 72-79.

"Antithesis" the writer finds that quite unconsciously, various stage areas were used for the purpose of adding strength to the dominant group in contrast to the softness of the passive group.

The movement of the dominant group begins at stage center " . . . without a doubt the most powerful single spot on the stage."[7] This adds to the strength of the group. Other important events in the dance which take place in this powerful location are the climax of the "Flight" section, the solo section, the concluding portion of the duet and the climax of the dance.

The diagonal, " . . . the most powerful path on the stage . . ."[8] is used many times throughout the dance. Some examples are: during the climax of the first phrase, when the dominant group moves in unison; the first confrontation between the dominant and passive groups; the movement which builds to a climax of the passive group, when the aggressive member captures one of its members; and the movement which builds to the final climax of the dance. In contrast to these examples, the passive group moves generally in a scattered formation. This helps to give a feeling of soft-ness and freeness to its character. When this group does

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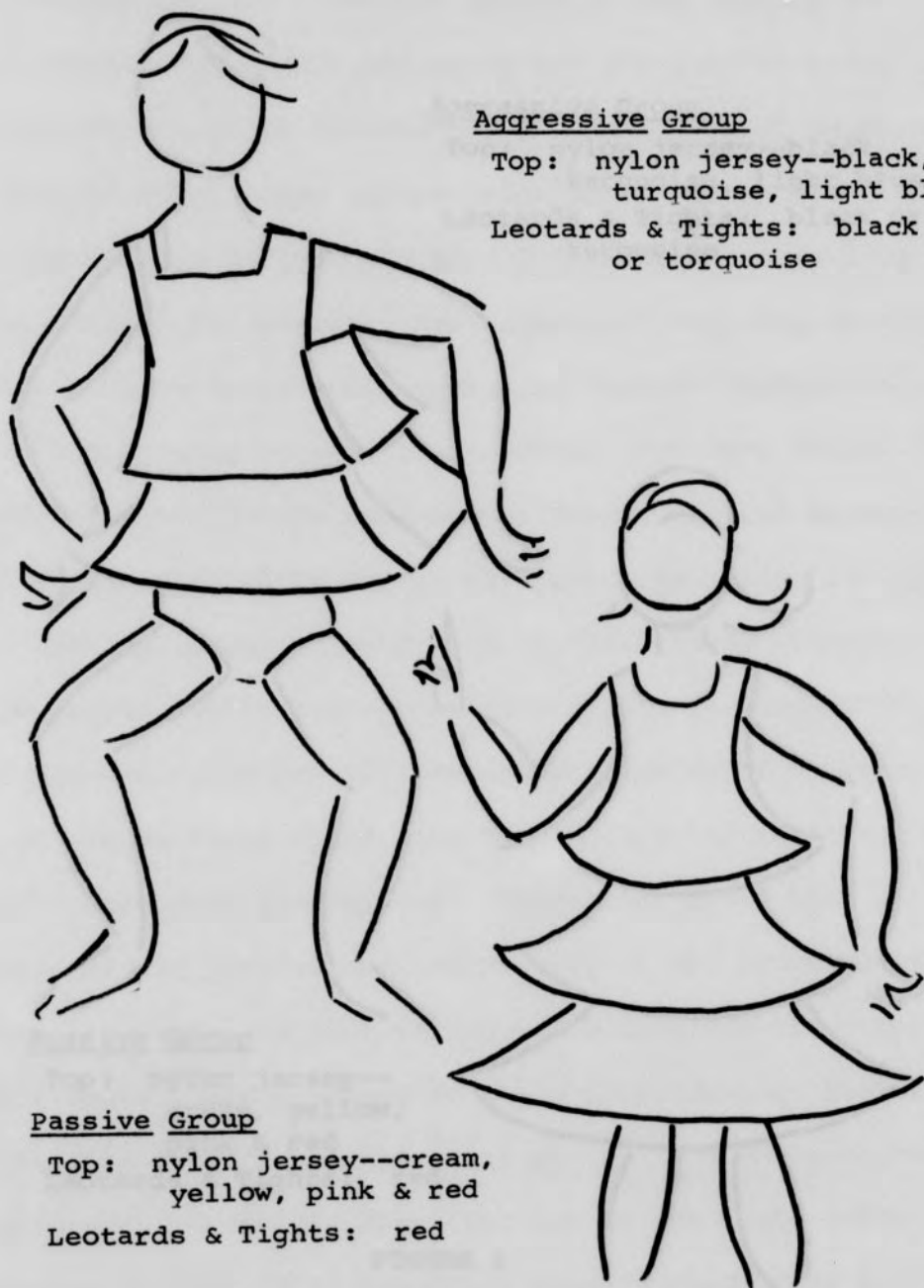
[7]Ibid., p. 76.   [8]Ibid., p. 75.

move as a unit, it usually does so in a circular pattern, a formation which gives it little strength, only a sense of unity. While the passive group is positioned in " . . . the weak spot between the center and the corner . . . "[9] the aggressive group enters at the downstage left corner to confront it. This positioning of the passive group emphasizes its weakness and the peril of its situation. Thus, stage areas and lines of direction have been employed by the choreographer to aid in communication.

It is a well accepted fact that color has a psychological effect upon the observer. Therefore, it behooves the choreographer to use color to enhance his idea or to help him accomplish his purpose. It is possible to use color in several ways in the dance: in costume, in make-up, in stage setting and in lighting. In "Antithesis" color has been employed in the use of costumes (see Figure 1). The passive group wears a combination of warm colors, including red, yellow, pink and cream. These colors help to give the dancers the warm, bright attitude which is intended to be characteristic of them. In contrast, the dominant group is costumed in cool colors, including black and two shades of

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[9] Ibid., p. 77.

FIGURE 1

COSTUMES

Aggressive **Group**

Top: nylon jersey—black,
turquoise, light blue

Leotards & Tights: black
or torquoise

Passive **Group**

Top: nylon jersey—cream,
yellow, pink & red

Leotards & Tights: red

Aggressive Group
Top: nylon jersey--black,
      turquoise, light blue
Leotards & Tights: black or
      turquoise

Passive Group
Top: nylon jersey--
      cream, yellow,
      pink & red
Leotards & Tights: red

FIGURE 1

COSTUMES

blue. This accentuates the aggressive nature of the group.

General stage make-up was used. In future performances color

could be used on the faces and bodies of the dancers to

create an unusual effect and carry out the same contrast in

color which exists in the costumes. During actual performance

the choreographer plans to use color in lighting, also, to

help establish a contrast in mood during the various scenes

in the dance. For example, cool shades of lighting should

be used to help to create a somber or hostile atmosphere

during the opening section of the dance, the solo and at the

end of the dance, while warm colors should be used during the

light sections in which the passive group is moving lyrically.

Stage settings have not been used in "Antithesis" because they

are not necessary to the achievement of the purpose of the

choreographer. The use of stage properties or of a projec-

tion on the backdrop would only tend to clutter the stage and

would detract from the dancers. The writer feels that the

movement of the dancers and the playing of one group against

another are most important to the achievement of the purpose

of this dance. The movement is not uncomplicated. Because

of this, the stage should be clear so that the movement can

be perceived. Arnheim states that one of the basic rules of

perception is that it is dependent upon simplicity of line and

design.[10] Stage setting would only create a contrast which would be a detriment to the choreographer's ability to communicate.

Having concluded an analysis of the use of contrast in the element of design in the dance, "Antithesis", the writer now turns to the use of contrast in rhythm. The choreographer has not been wholly dependent upon the music for the rhythm of the movement but has taken advantage of some of the distinct rhythmic patterns it has offered. Movement contrasts in types of rhythm and in tempi have enabled the choreographer to establish the characteristics of the groups and to create the desired relationships between them.

Humphrey states that there are four sources of rhythmic organization available to man: breathing and phrase rhythm, rhythm of function, the propelling mechanism and emotional rhythm.[11] The choreographer has made use of the breath rhythm, the motor mechanism and emotional rhythm. In the dance the breath rhythm is contrasted with the motor rhythm, either simultaneously or immediately following one another.

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[10]Rudolf Arnheim, Art and Visual Perception: A Psychology of the Creative Eye (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1954), p. 50.

[11]Humphrey, op. cit., p. 105.

The breath rhythm is characterized by a rising and falling as occurs in short phrases while the motor rhythm establishes a continuous beat. Some examples in which the breath rhythm and motor rhythm have been employed simultaneously in order to create a relationship between two groups are: at the first confrontation, the dominant group moves with definite pulse as the passive group moves with a breath quality; when the passive group moves against the solo figure; and in the concluding phrase when the dominant group again moves with a pulse in contrast to the passive group's breath rhythm. Some examples in which the motor rhythm and breath rhythm follow one another in order to show contrast for the sake of adding interest to the movement are: in the beginning section, previously described in detail when discussing phrasing; and in the movement of the passive group as it flirts with the solo figure.

The writer believes that it may be said safely that an emotional rhythm is superimposed upon the breath and motor rhythms throughout the dance. In order to make the movement kinetic in quality and communicate with the observer, it is important for the choreographer to add variety to the rhythm. In the writer's opinion Humphrey makes a very good point when she says:

> The emotional rhythm . . . is never in a
> monotone, as the human being is not capable of
> sustaining a feeling in an absolutely steady
> intensity and rhythm. Here it differs radically
> from the other two. Motor rhythms can be, if
> called for, absolutely metronomic, and breath
> rhythms can rise and fall steadily and be related
> to the original function. But emotion, by its
> very nature, fluctuates; hence the dramatic rhyth-
> mic pattern must show variation if it is to be
> convincing.[12]

Dynamics is the real essence of communication. It is very important that the dance, "Antithesis", be performed with this in mind. The movements of the dominant group should be smooth with a great deal of tension and the intermittent fast movements should be so sharp that they have a biting quality. During the fast sections care must be taken that the movement does not lose its energy and its quality of sharpness. In contrast, the movements of the passive group should be characterized by a lack of tension. Although there are very fast interludes which call for very precise movement, the energy should be very light. Here, there may be a fine line between carelessness and the correct dynamics. The slower movements of the passive group should be performed as smoothly as possible without tension and during the lyrical parts care must be taken, again, to make certain that the

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[12]*Ibid*., p. 108.

movement is light. If the dancers fail to use the proper dynamics in "Antithesis", the dance will lose much of its communicative power. "Dynamics is the lifeblood of the dance, and is ignored at the peril of your existence as an artist."[13] This statement, made by Humphrey, has been a valuable guide to this writer. Often, the choreographer can use all kinds of devices in the design and rhythm of the dance, but if the dancers do not project the necessary dynamics, the performance usually will be weak.

In conclusion, the writer feels, hopefully, that the original purpose of the study was achieved: the desire to explore the element of contrast in the design, rhythm and dynamics of movement; and feels perhaps the "communication of the human spirit"[14] also has been accomplished. It was very difficult, perhaps impossible, for this choreographer to create a dance which is wholly abstract, as is the much admired work of Alwin Nikolais, or even more difficult to create a dance by the use of chance, as is the work of Merce Cunningham. Although the choreographer was basically moti-vated by the desire to explore contrast in movement, the fact

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[13]Ibid., p. 102.

[14]Ibid., p. 37.

still remains that the desire to create human characteristics in the dancers and in the relationships between them could not be suppressed. These motivations have helped to produce a dance, which the choreographer hopes is not only well constructed, but also, has strong communicative powers.

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