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THEORY AND METHODS IN DANCE RESEARCH: A EUROPEAN APPROACH TO THE HOLISTIC STUDY OF DANCE

by Anca Giurchescu and Lisbet Torp

This article attempts to summarize leading ideas in dance research within the European scholarly tradition and to draw attention to similarities and differences between the anthropological and choreological approaches. Thereby, we hope to shed light on dance research in general and to outline possible directions for future studies.

The notion of a *contrastive* opposition between the American anthropological perspective on dance and the European choreological one has unfortunately been based upon rather broad generalisations rooted in lack of mutually shared knowledge, partly caused by language barriers and in gaining access to relevant information. Generalisations have tended to gloss over the diversity of trends and directions which characterize the efforts on both sides of the Atlantic in establishing basic theories and developing the necessary methods and tools for dance research as a science of its own. There are, however, basic differences between the development of European and American dance research (see also Kaeppler, this volume). Thus, among European dance scholars, the general trend has been to study dance and dance events within their own culture, whereas American dance scholars have tended to concentrate their studies on cultures different from their own. American dance scholars have often come from the field of anthropology and, therefore, they have naturally applied already elaborated theories and methods to the study of dance processes. Their focus has been on "dancing people", therefore, they have seldom analyzed choreographic structure. Conversely, European dance scholars, who have come mainly from the field of musicology, have felt a different and explicit need to work towards the development of theories and methods deriving from the dance material itself as conceived in its pure choreographic features.

The development of dance research is based on various approaches, each of which can be explained by historical-political, socio-cultural, and epistemological factors. In the case of Europe, the status and scholarly position of dance research in a given country must be seen in relation to: 1) the historical and political context in which it was developed and is currently employed; 2) the place of dance and its viability in the given culture (e.g. living tradition and/or revival); 3) the epistemological roots of ethnochoreology and its interdependence with related sciences in a given period; 4) the institutional framework in which dance research is carried out and the educational background of the scholars involved.

The development of European dance research is closely related to the discipline of folklore which has its historical roots in the cultural politics of 18th and 19th century Europe. "As is well known, the discipline of folklore emerged as a by-product of political aspirations in Europe,

particularly in small threatened ethnic minority groups within large and powerful empires." (Dégh 1984:5). Education and enlightenment functioned as a vehicle for creating a "national conscience" and activating people in the "national cause". The concept of a common heritage was incorporated in the attempts to establish national boundaries and to support the feeling of national identity. For example, regional dances and dance types were selected, stylized and developed into symbols of the "national character" of a given country in order to serve ideological unification and to enforce diverse political purposes. In many countries, the national movement led to a conscious revival and even reconstruction of dances of the past. Beginning with the 19th century, presentations of "pure traditional folk dances and folk music", in staged settings according to the ideology and aesthetics of the urban elite, turned into public entertainment.

The development of folkloristics was based on the opinion that the "spiritual roots" of a nation were to be found in the deeply hidden, unadulterated music-making and dancing of the village people.¹ This romantic ideology led to a search for and study of "vanishing" dances, songs, and music. The task of collecting was undertaken by intellectuals, writers, composers, and painters—their aim being to depict, describe, and hence preserve the life and artistic means of expression of the so-called folk. In their search for "authentic folklore", collectors rigorously excluded "new styles", non-national or non-ethnic traits, together with all that which was marked by the "destructive" influence of townlife. This attitude, at times, resulted in a puristic approach to the dance material and its dissemination. Generally speaking, these are the collections that form(ed) the cornerstone of European folklore and folk music archives, many of which were established during the first decades of the 20th century. Unfortunately, only little interest was shown in the processes and in the contexts in which these various means of expression were unfolded.

Foundations

During the first half of the 20th century, a general theory of folklore and its specific research methods developed in each country in accordance with the socio-cultural and institutional setting. These theories and methods were subsequently adapted to the field of dance studies, where such were conducted.² After World War II, the main task was to study the "dance reality" in its social and artistic dimensions and to build theories, methods, and tools for dance research oriented towards collection, analysis, comparison, and classification. The diversity of approaches throughout Europe can be reduced to some general traits which characterize the goals, the theoretical principles, and the methods as stated by various European dance scholars.³ According to these ideas, dance is considered a complex phenomenon and therefore the ideal study of dance incorporates both its artistic and its social dimensions. Thus, contextual research has been fundamental. However, it seems that aspects such as social interaction, socioeconomic influences, gender roles, and style have had little bearing on the majority of the published works. Scholars have often focused

exclusively on dance as a product, collecting information strictly limited to the recorded material, thus, in fact, detaching dance from its context.

As a result of the division of Europe into two political and socioeconomic spheres, folklore research in Eastern Europe took a direction of its own. Here research was officially used to provide a scientific foundation for the cultural politics of the Communist Party. This link resulted in a constant tension between fundamental and applied research.⁴ Among the side-effects of the Communist Party's guidance of scientific activities was the limitation or even total interdiction, in some countries, of the anthropological perspective on socio-cultural processes. Parallel to this, in several countries in Western and Northern Europe, grass-roots movements for the revival of *traditional* dances and music emerged. Many such movements were based on seeking one's roots in an attempt to disassociate oneself from an affluent society through recreating values of the past. Also the Dance-house movement, which emerged in Hungary during the 1970s, was based on similar ideas.⁵

Research Topics, Methods, and Tools

In both Eastern and Western Europe, the following topics were made the main object of the study of dance: 1) systematization and classification of a given dance culture according to its history, type, and function; 2) comparative research: regional dialects and inter-ethnic relations; 3) the processes of change in dance. Most such studies have been carried out in the form of monographs dealing with individual dancers, dances of a social group, a regional dance dialect, a particular dance type, a historical stylistic stratum, etc.

Field work was, and still is, the main method of research. In Eastern Europe it was generally organized by research institutions and/or archives and carried out by teams of scholars covering complementary aspects of folklore. Principles for field work were established and carefully regarded.⁶ Thus, the recording of a dance process had to be covered in its full length, including all the synchronic and interacting means of expression: dance, music, poetry, gestures, costume, props, etc. The object of field research was chosen according to such criteria as "authenticity", meaning competent informants and full documentation, "artistic quality", meaning the best informants, the best technical equipment, and the best recording conditions, and "exhaustion" of a repertoire through its entire documentation.

As a result of this approach to field research in Eastern Europe, a number of research tools were developed. "Direct observation" of dance events in their natural setting was, and still is, the main focus of choreology. Comprehensive technical recordings of dances, music, and texts, or of entire events are realized through combining the following means: film/video,⁷ photo, sound recordings, and interviews with graphic notation⁸ and other written documents such as "direct observation cards",⁹ questionnaires, "informant cards", and information concerning repertoire, frequency, etc. Conversely, in Western Europe, and more recently in Hungary, "participant-observation" and self-experience became one of the

governing principles in field research as the anthropological approach to dance research gained foothold in the 1970s.

Dance Structure Analysis

Field work was usually succeeded by analysis of the recorded material. According to György Martin (1982: 23), dance analysis comprises the following stages: analysis of content and function, analysis of the music, independently and in relation to the dance, and analysis of the dance form. Dance form analysis is not a final goal, it is, however, an essential stage for systematization and comparative research. A major task of the analytical process is the disclosure of an *implicit existent* grammar in each dance idiom. Therefore, the efforts of revealing regularities in the structural make-up of dance and the attempts to create a terminology to cover the theoretical concepts have been a necessary and very important preoccupation of the European dance scholars, especially in Eastern Europe.

These pioneering contributions founded, together with ideas drawn from the fields of musicology and linguistics, a theory and method for dance form analysis as carried out by the ICTM Study Group on Ethno-choreology (former IFMC Study Group for Folk Dance Terminology).¹⁰ The main goals of the collaborative work of the Study Group were: to establish a terminology of universal validity (IFMC Study Group for Folk Dance Terminology 1974 and Dąbrowska 1983); to create an analytical method which incorporates both the constituent parameters and the form of the dance (Giurchescu 1984); to construct a system with a high degree of abstraction, which could later enable the use of computers; to present dance structure in graphic symbols, thereby making comparative studies possible. The next project of the Study Group was to develop a system of classification which could apply to structural, functional, and historical criteria (Dąbrowska 1983).

The theory and method of dance structure analysis developed by the Study Group is an important contribution to the scientific study of dance because it enables researchers to speak about dance in its own terms. However, the claim of universality is the weak point of this method.¹¹ Besides some very general trans-cultural principles and rules (for example of composition and transformation) the developed method is relatively limited and dependent on the characteristic traits of the dance culture in which it was rooted. Thus, the structural units are not necessarily pertinent to all dance cultures. It is only through analyses and comparisons of many different dance cultures that it is possible to develop, through progressive generalizations, the best strategies to construct a science of dance.¹²

Recent Trends in European Dance Research

In the 1970s, the structuralist orientation, and later the post-structuralist semiotic one, added new dimensions to the study of dance.¹³ This direction of research aimed to answer questions such as, "What is dance?" and "What is the intimate relationship between the form and the meaning of dance?" Thus, dance has been considered a non-verbal means of expression (a symbol), in the process of communication within a well-defined socio-

cultural setting. In this process, dance never functions in isolation, but in the make-up of the message, it interacts synchronically with other means. The dance symbol has been studied in its morphological and syntactic structure by applying basic principles of linguistic analysis. The semantic dimension gave rise to inquiries regarding the function(s) of a given dance performance in context and regarding the sense people (dancers and audience) make of a dance experience.¹⁴ This shift in focus from static structures, considered "in vitro", to dynamic processes, with the attention on performance context, gradually led to a symbiosis of the choreological perspective to the anthropological one.

In the last ten years, the contacts between "American" dance anthropology and "European", analytical-descriptive, choreology, far from generating conflictive opposition, has resulted in a more comprehensive perspective which integrates theoretical and historical approaches with socio-cultural contexts. Anthropological studies of dance and music have been carried out in Great Britain. At the Centre of Dance Studies (Jersey C.I.), Roderyk Lange published several works based on a continuation of the scholarly traditions of his homeland Poland, where anthropology has been an integral part of dance research at the University of Torun since the mid 60s. John Blacking approached dance from musicological and anthropological points of view. The impact of Blacking's work clearly reach beyond the development of the studies of music and dance at the Queen's University in Belfast.¹⁵

The approaches developed in Europe within the last twenty-five years have demonstrated not only practical and scientific necessity, but also limits when imposed as "unique points of view". Thus, many scholars, representing both the anthropological and the choreological "schools" have argued for an integrative perspective on dance research (Youngerman 1977). According to this perspective, dance has been considered as a cultural process and studied in performance situations within the context provided by the socio-cultural system in which it is produced. Dance has further been related to other modes of social activities, thus being incorporated into the texture of a given life pattern. A concept which could provide the necessary theoretical support for integrating all dimensions which define dance as a coherent and dynamic factor is that of the *culture text* (Winner 1984).

We believe that dance research must be directed according to the problems to be solved in each case. This implies that focus and emphasis may shift depending on the aim of the study. It has also become clear that all aspects must be taken into consideration, however, to a varying degree according to the scope and the ultimate aim of the research project. Two case studies are presented here to show how choreological and anthropological perspectives have been incorporated in the research on dance in a given socio-cultural context by the authors of this article.

*Anca Giurchescu: Continuity and change in a traditional culture. The role of dance for creating a new identity among the Vlachs living in Denmark.*¹⁶

The research results from the socio-political realities of the post-war period in Europe: displacement, integration and re-integration of ethnic groups in new and different socio-cultural contexts. This study of the Yugoslav Vlachs settled in Denmark aims, on the one hand, to reveal the Vlachs' ambivalent ideas about themselves, and the way they relate to other ethnic and social groups; on the other, it focuses on the contradictory juxtaposition of traditional and new means which the Vlachs employ both to express and to change their identity.¹⁷ The framework for these inquiries is the dance event called *hora*, periodically enacted in Denmark. The *hora* structures the reality of the social group by setting the symbolic boundaries, thus creating a context for multi-media communication. By use of a traditionally established system of symbols (dance, music, texts, gestures, proxemics, dressing, etc.), the *hora* acquires a complexity of functions and has many different meanings, which can be deciphered on several semiotic levels such as the conceptual, the ceremonial, the socio-political, and the expressive. The main functions of the *hora* are to strengthen group unity and to bridge the past to the present social experience.

Methods used in the study of the *hora* were: participation and direct observation, recording (sound, video, dance notation), and interviews. "Feedback interviews" based on performers' comments on their own video-recordings from various events help to understand the way they themselves experience and interpret these events.¹⁸ The structure and form of the dance and its relation to other expressive means were also subject to inquiry: staged folk dances, called "folklor", symbolize the Yugoslav "national culture", whereas "free" dancing represents their own Vlach culture. The modern trend that Vlach dances can be performed to non-Vlach melodies, through morphological and stylistic adaptation, was revealed through analysis of the dance-music relationship. However, the use of space, the place in the dance chain, the movement style, and dynamics showed that traditional patterns of interaction between gender, age, and ethnic groups still exist. The research project constitutes a synthesis between different methods which make it possible to relate the formal structure of the symbols to their meaning and function—to relate the discourse about dance to that about the people who dance.

Lisbet Torp: Hip Hop Dances—Their Adoption and Function among Boys in Denmark from 1983-84 (1986).

In this work, Hip Hop dances have been examined in their socio-cultural context, studying their function and means of expression. Methods for structural analysis were used in the examination of the form and the content of the dance per se, and in the style of performance. By combining anthropological and choreological approaches it was possible to conclude that the performance of Hip Hop dances among pre-teen and teen-age boys was a gender specific phenomenon, girl performers were rare and usually not as good as boys. The dances served to satisfy a need to show off strength and virility, characteristics which had generally been frowned

upon in Danish society since the 1960s if not part of sports contexts.¹⁹ Performing Hip Hop dances functioned for many immigrant boys as a key to entry into social groups other than their own as it also did for many Danish boys with problems of being accepted in their own peer-group. This function is also commonly known in traditional dance cultures, where esteem and admiration from other members of society can/could be obtained by a good dancer, regardless of his social affiliation.

Form analyses of the Hip Hop dances and comparison with men's solo and group dances were carried out. Since there is no tradition for men's solo or group dances in Denmark, the comparisons included men's dances from other dance cultures. The analytical-comparative study showed that traditional men's dances and Hip Hop dances make use of similar compositional techniques and spatial organizations. The principles for learning and practicing Hip Hop dances are not very different from the principles applied in the process of learning within traditional men's dances, many of which have improvisation as a main characteristic. Also the use of implements, as seen in many dances of the traditional repertoire, appears in the Hip Hop dances which include the handling of *imaginary* everyday implements in different sequences of mimicry.

The above case study of Hip Hop dances was carried out on the basis of a holistic approach. However, other studies of the same material could be carried out with more emphasis on either the anthropological or the choreological perspective.

Conclusion

We would like to stress that in the light of present-day reality, which is characterized by deep and rapid changes, movement research is a necessary instrument to uncover the various layers of the dance process, its constituents, and their meaning and function in society, thereby contributing to the understanding of people and their means of expression within the framework of a socio-cultural community.

In order to reach these goals, theory and methods of dance research should be further revised and improved. The already existing tools should be fully employed and new instruments elaborated and applied in accordance with the progressive development of technology and the worldwide spread of mass-media. We should also take into account the generally higher level of formal education among informants and their increasing capacity to verbalize their own dance experience.

Intensified and continuous contacts between an increasing number of dance scholars from all over the world have developed the study of dance into an established and autonomous field of its own. Such contacts have brought along constructive discussions based on comparative studies, incorporating different, and partly culturally determined, approaches. An important forum for this development is the ICTM Study Group on Ethnochoreology, which offers a fertile ground for the scientific study of dance, enabling exchange and current testing of theories and methods within dance research. This has resulted in a re-evaluation of the concept of dance and a broadening of the scope of research thus, encompassing, at its best, the anthropological and the choreological approaches as complementary and necessary in the holistic study of dance.

NOTES

1. "The role of the narrators—the people whom folklore collectors have actually met—is conceived of as basically non-creative, in agreement with the well-known statement by Hoffmann-Krayer, the Swiss folklorist: *Die Volksseele produziert nicht, sie reproduziert*" ([1903, eds.] as quoted by Bengt Holbek 1987:31). In Curt Sachs' work *Die Weltgeschichte des Tanzes* (Berlin, 1933), which paved the way for dance research in Europe, this approach is unfortunately still present.
2. The development of dance research has been based on the ongoing contributions by prominent scientists from the fields of ethnography, sociology, linguistics, arts, and especially musicology. For example, in the Hungarian scholarly tradition folklorists such as Gyulá Ortutay and Lajos Vargyas, musicologists such as Bela Bartók and Zoltan Kodály; in Poland, the musicologist Marian Sobieski; in Romania the sociologist Dimitrie Gusti and the musicologist Constantin Brăiloiu; in Slovakia, the musicologist F. Poloczek; in Austria, the folklorist Raimund Zoder and later the ethnographer Richard Wolfram; in Germany, the musicologists Curt Sachs, Paul Jaques Block, Hans von der Au, Karl Horak, and, more recently, Felix Hoerburger.
3. There are only few general surveys on the development of dance research in Europe. The most comprehensive ones were published in *Dance Studies 4* (Lange 1980: 1-36) and *Dance Studies 6* (Martin 1982: 9-45). The latter represents an example of the main trends of dance research in East Europe.
4. In the context of the Marxist-Leninist philosophy, folklore research had an ambivalent role. The symbolic value of "national dances" was consciously employed together with other means of artistic expression to provide the "historical" foundation for the new socialist states. Folklore was considered an integral part of the socialist culture, thus it was re-evaluated and adapted into forms that could easily be manipulated, such as stage performances (Giurchescu 1987). This trend caused strong opposition from scholars who were obliged to work along these lines.
5. For example, in both Sweden and Hungary much energy and time was invested in finding and learning from the old people in the villages. Hence, many such movements offer(ed) fertile soil for the preservation and revival of dances, types of dances, and music that were otherwise vanishing. (Ronström 1986; Striker 1984; Torp 1990: 61-62).
6. For a presentation of such methods for fieldwork and their underlying principles see Lange, R. 1984.
7. From the mid 1950s, film and later video have become the most appropriate media for recording the dance process. It is of utmost importance that dances are filmed in their entirety and, when possible, in their social context. In order to facilitate later transcriptions and analyses of the filmed dances, a set of, generally accepted, directional conventions are followed.
8. It has been generally accepted that the basic instrument for scientific dance research is graphical notation. However, by lack of communication and/or consensus, two main trends characterized the development of dance notation throughout Europe; 1) the creation of "national" notation systems and 2) the adoption of a common, international one. The great number of nationally confined notation systems rooted in particular movement styles, however useful they are within a given dance culture, had a negative effect on the cross-cultural level and thus, intensified the scientific isolation of some countries. The Congress of Dresden in 1957 provided the first forum for scientific debate concerning independent notation systems as developed in Eastern Europe (Bulgaria, Romania, Czechoslovakia) on one side and Kinetography Laban on the other. (Baier-Fraenger 1977). However, even if consensus was reached in favour of the latter, it is only within the last decade that Kinetography Laban has become a generally accepted means for recording and communicating material on an international level.
9. In Romania, for example, a "Direct Observation Card" is used to provide a thorough written record of the observed event describing all its constituents in their actual succession and duration.
10. Vera Proca-Ciortea (Romania) coordinated, between 1962-81, a working-group made up by the following scholars: Rosemarie Ehm-Schulz (GDR), Anca Giurchescu (Romania), Milica Ilijin (Yugoslavia), Eva Kröschlová and Hannah Laudova (Czechoslovakia), Martin György and Ernő Pesovár (Hungary), and Kurt Petermann

(GDR). Since 1972, the Study Group was joined by the following scholars: Grażyna Dąbrowska (Poland) Anna Ilieva and Raina Katarova (Bulgaria).

11. "The method worked out here attempts to give the scientist the possibility of studying, from a unified point of view dances of various national origins and from different historical or social contexts." (IFMC Study Group for Folk Dance Terminology 1974: 119).
12. A recent work on structural analysis of European chain and round dance patterns (Torp 1990) shows that it is possible, on the basis of comprehensive empirical material, to extract a number of theoretical models resulting from the determination of the structurally significant components and the applied principles for their junction, and to uncover the underlying compositional procedures. The method presented enables characteristic features to be singled out and/or combinations of such to be compared analytically. It also makes possible a classification of this particular dance material on the basis of its structural make-up.
13. Some basic works have been dedicated to both gesture and dance per se. Examples of such articles are found in *Langages* 1968; Greimas 1970 and 1971. Other articles, dedicated specifically to dance, are: Giurchescu 1973; Lange 1981; Staro 1989.
14. Since the deep sense of a given dance at a given moment is realized solely by the dancer, it is a basic methodological requirement to investigate the insiders' point of view, conceptually and psychologically, on their own dance performance.
15. The Queen's University, Belfast, was the first place in Western Europe to offer studies in music and dance anthropology.
16. From 1987-90, A. Giurchescu has written several articles in connection with this, still ongoing, project.
17. The Yugoslav Vlachs in Denmark have an ambivalent identity because they are torn between three different cultures: a national culture related to the Serbian language, a traditional one related to their Romanian mother-tongue, and a modern culture related to the Danish language and Danish society. This ambivalence is enhanced by the "myth of return" and reinforced by perpetual contacts with their home-villages.
18. The former "ignorant peasants" are now fully aware of their social/ethnic status, and show an increasing interest in the ongoing research, which they would like to control.
19. From the 60s and throughout the 70s it had been out of fashion, so to speak, to emphasize masculinity. Showing off machismo and physical strength was not "in" during this period which was the time in Denmark when the image of the so-called "soft man" was cultivated by the greater part of society. One of the side-effects of the various attempts to level the differences between the two sexes was, no doubt, that of some young boys having problems identifying with their own sex during puberty inasmuch as many of these boys were raised in broken families and usually brought up by their mother.

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