

THE CREDIBILITY OF MOVEMENT-WRITING

The author first defended the credibility of movement-writing in Chapter 2, Section 3, of a B. Litt.¹ thesis entitled *Social Anthropology and [the] Dance*, (Oxford, U.K., 1972). Seven theoretical criteria from Nelson Goodman's *Languages of Art* (1969) were used to illustrate to examiners who knew nothing about movement-writing in any form that Laban's system was not merely a mnemonic device. The guts of the chapter are revived in this essay because of still-existing confusion about the relations between movement-writing and research and between 'notation' and 'writing' with regard to human movement.

On the whole, writing (and literacy) are taken for granted in connection with spoken languages. Literacy *is not* taken for granted with regard to body languages,² i.e. sign languages, dances, martial arts, rituals or any movement-based system. For a start, different terminology is used. People say 'recorded' or 'notated' when they talk about sign languages and dances. They tend to avoid the word 'written'. One hears, "I am recording a dance", not "I am writing a dance". Far from being a mere quibble over words, such usage frequently reveals deep misconceptions about Laban's script:

- (a) It is widely believed to be just another complicated mnemonic device, primarily iconographic in nature, which means that it isn't proper writing.
- (b) Laban's script is widely taught as "dance notation" as if the major requirement for learning the script included prior ability to perform classical or modern theatrical dancing. As a result, non-dancers who have attempted to learn the system have had negative off-putting experiences.
- (c) Because Labanotation has been (and still is) associated so strongly with dancing, the system is misunderstood because of the same pestilential intellectual prejudices that afflict sign languages:

Beginning in the 1860s...a new generation waged a campaign to replace the use of sign language in the schools with the exclusive use of lip-reading and speech. The reasons for the turn against sign language were many and complex, but among them was the influence of the new theories of evolution. Evolutionary theory fostered a perception of sign languages as inferior to spoken languages, fit only for "savages" and not for civilized human beings (Baynton 1995: 139).

Regarding item (a): acquaintance with the history of attempts to develop systems of recording dances and sign language would dissolve the problem. There are one or two systems for recording movement that are little more than memory aids and there are those, notably Sutton Movement Shorthand,

that are primarily iconographic (see Farnell 1989, 1994a, 1995 and 1996), but Laban's script doesn't fall into either category.

With reference to item (b): no one would deny that dance notators earned lasting gratitude because they kept Labanotation alive after its initial publication in Vienna in 1928, however, *the system is not tied exclusively to dancing*.

As for item (c): it is about time for linguistics and anthropology to abandon old prejudices about movement-writing along with predisposed attitudes about the alleged "primitive", "nonverbal", "animal-like" inferiority of sign languages and dances (see Williams 1995: 173-188).

Primary Requirements for Movement-Writing

[A] movement script must be capable of writing all anatomically possible bodily action in ways that will preserve the identity of the movement, make possible accurate reproduction of it and maintain its semantic content. This entails a concern with recording action rather than gross physical movement. The difference is captured in the well-known philosophical example of the difference between 'the arm goes up' (a description of a gross physical movement) and 'I raise my arm' (a description of an action). As Best puts it, 'one cannot specify an action, as opposed to a purely physical movement, without taking into account what the agent intended, that is, there are reasons for, and purposes to, actions' (Best 1974: 193). Equally important is seeing actions in context; 'most of what we may want to know about a person's intentional action cannot be understood by a narrow concentration upon his physical movement but by...standing back from it and seeing it in context' (Best 1978: 78) ...

In this regard, it is important to note that Labanotation is always written from the actor's perspective rather than the observer's, and so has a built-in assumption of agency. Figure 1 (see below) records the action 'I (the person acting) raise my arm' rather than the gross physical movement engendered by the phrase 'the arm goes up'.

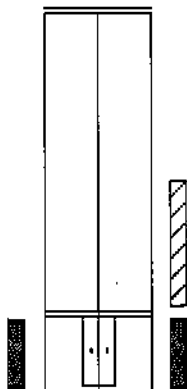


Fig. 1. Transcription of the action 'I raise my (right) arm' using the Laban script (Farnell 1994a: 939)

To an ethnographer, however, this description remains inadequate, until some context is provided in which to understand this raising of the arm as an action with a reason or purpose. The description can then be amended accordingly. For example, three occasions of raising the arm might look identical but could be any one of the following three actions:

- 1) I am reaching up towards the subway strap in order to grasp it and maintain my balance.
- 2) I am stretching my hand up away from my shoulder because I am stiff from typing at the computer all morning.
- 3) I am raising my hand to ask permission from the teacher to leave the room.

The differences between these three actions that are identical in appearance are clearly distinguished in the Labanotation description of them. Even without any prior knowledge of the Laban script the reader should be able to discern similarities and differences in the collection of graphic signs that constitute the three written actions in Fig. 2.

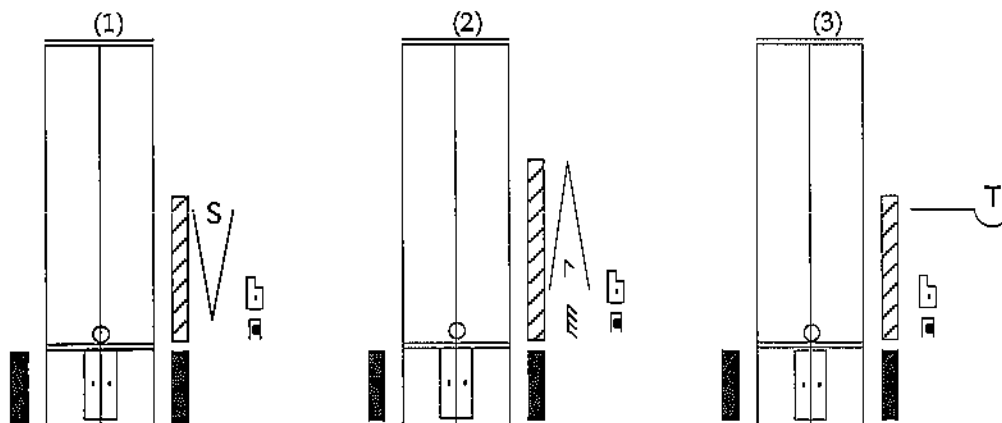





Fig. 2. Transcriptions of three actions that look the same (after Farnell 1994a: 939).

Notice that the differences lie in the signs ∇ , \wedge and \curvearrowright , each of which denotes a certain kind of relationship: ∇ denotes action towards something, \wedge denotes action away from something, and \curvearrowright denotes an action that addresses something or someone. In all three actions the actor moves the right arm from \blacksquare (hanging "place low" by the side of the body), lifting it towards \hatched ("place high" above the shoulder). In addition, however, in Figure 2 (1) the actor moves her arm toward S (the subway strap); in action (2) she moves her right hand \uparrow away from the right shoulder \uparrow ; and in action (3) she addresses T (the teacher). What the script records is neither talk *about* the body (the objectivist perspective) nor talk *of* the body (the subjectivist/ phenomenological experience of moving) but rather "talk" *from* the body—the enactment of the body in the agentic production of meaning (Farnell 1994a: 938-941).

In Fig. 2, Farnell illustrates one of seven theoretical requirements for the existence of a writing system: contextual compliance. Does the system permit the use of its symbols *in different contexts*, but in such a way that they are recognizable as the specified action and no other? They do. 'Context' here indicates two things: [1] the staff on which the symbols are placed ('structural' context) and [2] the movement utterance in which the symbols are found ('semantic' context). Since Farnell's essay is easily available, it is unnecessary to reproduce the staff itself (see 1994a:940). Suffice it to say that all of the symbols, e.g. , , , and their variations bear the same definitions, regardless of their placement in relation to the three vertical lines of the basic staff, which indicates body part.

Where Farnell's three action utterances pertained to the right arm reaching upwards in various semantic contexts, Fig. 3 provides examples of the usage of Laban's script within the context of three 'bows'—that of A, a T'ai Chi master; B, a Catholic priest; and C, the Red Knight (from the ballet *Checkmate*).

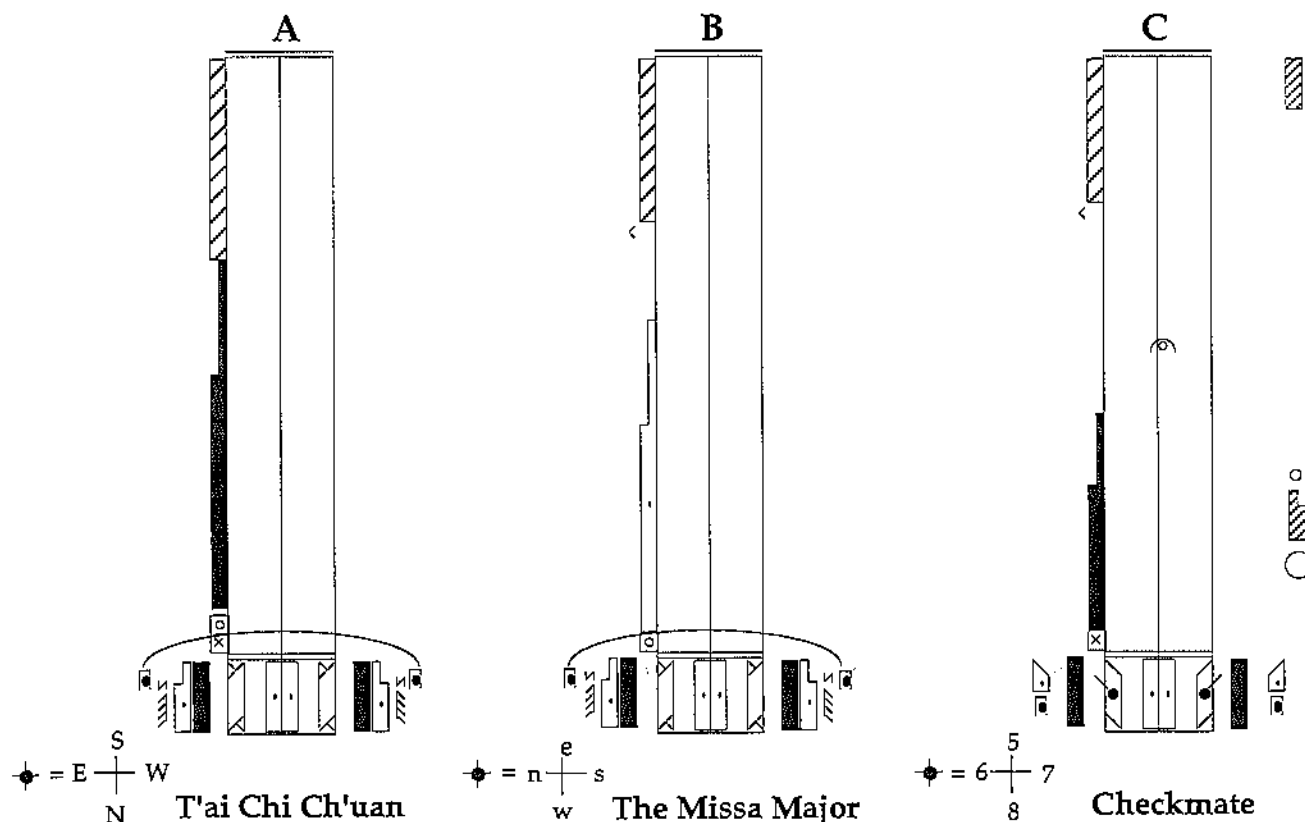


Fig. 3: Three 'bows' from different action sign systems (after Williams 1995)

The remaining six theoretical criteria for a legitimate writing system, apart from contextual compliance, are:



- 1. contextual compliance (see above)**
 1. *the staff (structural); 2. the movement utterance (semantic)*
- 2. syntactic and semantic disjointness**
 1. *character indifference; 2. size; 3. formation criteria*
- 3. finite differentiation**


—(*spatial articulation in written stretches*)
- 4. constituent and contingent properties**



(*moves that constitute the identity of a system*)
- 5. compliance with reality**

(*specific scoring and the production of performable texts*)
- 6. requisite antecedent classification of a 'work', a system, etc.**

(*accuracy and veracity of classificatory framework*)
- 7. identity of behaviour**
 1. *the 'sameness' of actions; 2. rules of investigation and activity.*

The first of three requirements for #2 (syntactic and semantic disjointness) is "character indifference". That is, when we use  we must always know that it is  and not something else. With regard to more familiar spoken language symbols, the principle would be expressed thus: when we use 'A' we must always know that it is 'A' and not 'D', 'C', 'N', 'E' or some other letter.

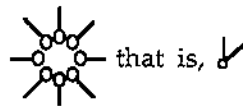
The second requirement is that regardless of size, length, color, etc., we must be able to know that the character is  (or 'A'). Any criteria may be used for a character, but they must be uniform and consistent. The criteria Laban used in the formation of the main symbol-set of his script was a simple rectangle.

By cutting out bits of the rectangle, he developed symbols for 'forward', 'back', 'side [right]', 'side [left]', and the diagonals. The signs had to indicate *direction* (of body parts or of the body in space). They also had to indicate *level*, therefore, dotted signs mean 'middle'. Striped signs designate 'high', the dotted signs, , indicate 'middle' and the shaded symbols, i.e. , mean 'low'.

The third requirement for syntactic and semantic disjointness is found in the rules for making compound elements. The symbols in Laban script, like the symbols in the Roman alphabet, by themselves, have little semantic import. Combined, as they are in Figs. 1, 2 and 3, they create compound elements that, *depending upon the system to which they belong*, form units of an action-sign system.

Criterion #3, 'finite differentiation' means articulation in space connected with the spatial articulation of a human body in a three-dimensional, canonical, coordinate space. How do the symbols indicate directional articulation within the written stretches of movement?

[O]ne naturally looks for a violation in the directional indications, since if every different angle of a line [of the basic symbol-set] stands for a different direction, neither the syntactic nor the semantic requirement of differentiation is fulfilled. But in Labanotation, direction of facing is indicated by a 'direction pin' in any of eight positions disposed at equal intervals around the full horizontal circle; and a direction halfway between any two proximate directions, among these eight is indicated by combining the signs for the two; e.g.



(after Goodman 1969: 214-215).

For Goodman, the significant issue turned around whether or not a movement script (which he called "a notational language") could provide real definitions in a hard philosophical sense that would identify a dance in its several performances, independently of any particular history of production (1969: 212-213), saying that Laban

[C]onceived his system as a notation not merely for dance but for human movement in general, and went on to develop and supplement the system as a means for analyzing and classifying all human physical activities. The need for some such system is especially apparent, for example, in industrial engineering and in psychological experimentation. Whether the experimenter or the subject repeats his behaviour on a second occasion depends upon the criteria of identity of behaviour that are applied; and the problem of formulating such criteria is the problem of developing a notational system (1969: 217-218).

Goodman answered one of the questions he asked, e.g. "How far...does the system meet the theoretical requirements for a notational language?" (1969: 214) only tentatively because he had inadequate knowledge of the system. Readers who make the effort to compare his analysis and illustrative materials with the materials used in this essay will find additions that are the result of knowledge of the system that he lacked. Of course, that doesn't alter the relevance or the rigorous characteristics of the *criteria* he used. On the contrary, the use of more sophisticated examples enhances the veracity of his criteria and his perception.

Constituency and Contingency

Having examined criteria #1 - Contextual Compliance; #2 - Syntactic and Semantic Disjointness and #3 - Finite Differentiation, we move to #4 - the

constituent and contingent properties of a movement text and the action-sign system to which it belongs, we will now consider *moves that constitute the identity* of a system--actions that are constituent, as against those which are contingent.

Here, Goodman was primarily concerned with the "correctness or incorrectness" of performances of a dance or a piece of music, saying,

[A]n incorrect performance, though therefore not strictly an instance of a given quartet at all, may nevertheless--either because the changes improve what the composer wrote or because of sensitive interpretation--be better than a correct performance. Again, several correct performances of about equal merit may exhibit very different specific aesthetic qualities--power, delicacy, tautness, stodginess, incoherence, etc. Thus even where the constitutive properties of a work are clearly distinguished by means of a notation, *they cannot be identified with aesthetic properties* (1969: 119-120).

Style, interpretation, aesthetic qualities are without doubt significant, important features of danced works of art as well as musical performances, but they are contingent, not constituent, features of performance. That is, style, interpretation and aesthetics *do not determine the identity of a performance*.

When we ask "What are the *constitutive* properties of a sign system?", we are asking what actions, gestures, spatial organization(s) and such *constitute* the system in the sense of identifying it as that particular system and no other. Alternatively, we might ask how we recognize ballet dancing from any other kind of dancing? How does an ethnographer *know* that the signing he or she observes in a café in the United States is American Sign Language, [ASL], not Plains Sign Talk [PST]. How does a musician know that he or she is hearing a Beethoven sonata, not a Schubert waltz?

I've been told such questions are "silly". Popular wisdom tells us that we recognize ballet-dancing from other kinds of dancing because we have seen ballet-dancing and other kinds of dancing and we are not, after all, fools: we can distinguish between them.

"See, the dancer is wearing *pointe* shoes and a *tutu*, or, the dancer is wearing tights and turning his feet out--who can't recognize *that* as ballet?"

Popular wisdom, useful though it may be in some situations, is not the kind of index of 'knowing' that trained investigators use. In the example above, the *pointe* shoes, the *tutu* and the tights are contingent, not constituent properties of the idiom of ballet-dancing. The turned-out legs and feet *are* constituents of the idiom, but of the four features mentioned, 'turn-out' is the only constituent feature. Moreover, the "turn-out" is only one of a combination of constituent features of the idiom that enable trained

investigators to know what they are seeing.

In similar ways (use of space, rules for 'dominant' hands, etc.) ASL and PST possess different grammars and syntactical rules that are constituent to each. Beethoven sonatas and Schubert waltzes have different constituent time and key structures. Knowledge of such things is anything but "silly".

A trained investigator asks, "What makes this action-sign system *recognizable as itself* and no other?" The answers are always complicated and multi-dimensional, but the problem of constituency and contingency was effectively addressed fifteen years ago by Durr, when she examined the role observation plays in the movement-writing process (1981: 132-138).

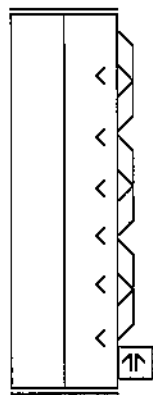


Fig. 4: Physical movement of shoulder-shaking



Fig. 5: Shoulder movement from Karachuonyo score

(after Durr 1981: 134)

It was evident from the beginning that pure observation on my part was not enough.... Often, it was necessary to ask questions that would provide insights into how best to write a movement or a phrase of movements.

It became increasingly obvious that Labanotation was the *means* to record the messages (the 's-structures') of movement, but [it] did not contain the code (the 'p-structures'). In other words, one can record gross physical movements (see Fig. 4) but this does not mean that one has captured the intended movements of native dancers (see Fig. 5).

The two movements are not the same, although they involve the same body parts. Fig. 4 is devoid of semantic content. Fig. 5 possesses meaning only as it is intended in the context of the *Karachuonyo* dance.³ ... to rely on a purely observational approach to cross-cultural notation is to record 'behavior' in terms of raw movement as seen through the investigator's own set of mental and kinesic spectacles.... Best would be in agreement with social anthropologists when he says,

Roughly, the meaning of a particular movement is given by the whole dance, the meaning of the dance is given by the dance tradition of which it is a part or extension, and the meaning of that tradition is given by the culture, society, form of life to which it belongs (1974: 187).

After providing an excellent example of a shoulder movement (a kineme) of a Luo dance that is constitutive, Durr concludes:

In the light of my new level of comprehension, it would be difficult to try to justify Labanotation as being more than what it [in fact] is: a script. It can demonstrate the 'how' of a movement, but not the 'why'. This is not meant to be interpreted as any attempt to discredit the system, but merely as an attempt to clarify its usage and importance. Labanotation has the potential to provide credibility to the areas of movement and dance that have long and rightly been criticized for their lack of research and documentation....

Saussure ... notes that "the first linguists confused language and writing" (1959: 24); that "language is a storehouse of sound-images, and writing is the tangible form of those images" (1959: 15), and that "we generally learn about languages only through writing" (1959: 23). These observations strengthen the need for investigators of body languages to identify Labanotation as a *script* ... (Durr 1981: 135-136).

Compliance With Reality

The significance of Durr's discoveries regarding constituency and contingency cannot be underestimated, expressed as they are in terms of the direct experience of attempts to write actions from a culture not her own. In agreement with Farnell (1994a), she found that, writing *movement* and writing *action* are two different things. More important, she found that writing actions that are constituent to a system in which they are embedded means that the writer cannot ignore the semantic context of the actions. In the *Karachuonyo* dance, shoulders aren't "just shaken", they are shaken in a *culturally specific manner*. This insight led to a conclusion: Laban's *script* is only wrongly confused with the body *language(s)* it is so well-equipped to write.

Durr's apperceptions also have to do with Goodman's criteria #5: compliance with reality, which includes "specific scoring". Since Durr tells us that the written moves in Figs. 4 and 5 *are not the same moves*, we can expect that someone reading, then performing, the moves (analogous to "reading aloud" visually) would not perform the same move reading Fig. 4 that he or she would perform as a result of reading Fig. 5. It is thus that "specific scoring" of an action sign system depends on real knowledge of what is constituent to the system, which in turn, depends upon knowing what the semantic context of the movement is.

"But that's just nit-picking", someone says, "the move from the dance is different because of the dancer's *interpretation*. There's no need to say the difference is 'constituent'".

But there is, and here, the argument re-emphasizes the major feature of contingency: *stylistic interpretation*. Not only that, Fig. 4 *doesn't* comply with

the reality of the dance Durr wrote, but Fig. 5 *does*. In other words, “shoulder-shaking” isn’t a move that can be written one way, then included *in that form* in any movement text whatsoever. Farnell observes:

The writing of a movement text can be no more ‘purely descriptive’ than can that of a standard ethnographic text; both are beset with problems of translation and interpretation. As with a standard ethnography, one builds one’s interpretations over time and makes choices about descriptions as one’s knowledge increases. With a movement text, however, one is aiming at a performable script that encodes indigenous understandings (1994a: 964).

Compliance with reality (criterion #6) means writing a *performable* text, the reading of which would be recognizable to those to whom the action-sign system belongs.

Requisite Antecedent Classification

Goodman started his examination of Laban’s “notational language” as he called it, by pointing out that the system

[R]efutes the common belief that continuous complex motion is too recalcitrant a subject matter for notational articulation and discredits the dogma that successful systematic description depends in general upon some inherent amenability ... in what is described ... (1969: 214),

and, he is right. Philosophically, he would doubtless be aware of a problem in the minds of many as to the *existence* of a dance, except during the period when actual performance is taking place, but

Dances do not simply spring up like mushrooms on the occasion of performance in our own society, nor in West Africa or any place else that I have ever heard of, and there is no just cause for us to label the odd bit of spontaneous cavorting or gamboling about as “a dance”. A ritual does not simply appear as if through spontaneous combustion either ... but those of us who reject certain elements of a phenomenological approach to the study of dances do so because it tends to preclude any notion of preconceptions; that is, a phenomenological approach to the dance denies the dance any duration in time (Williams 1991: 79-80).

Indeed, even if they are conceived as mere sequences of gross physical movement, human acts can be written. They can be repeated. If they can be written and repeated, we can safely dismiss allegations based upon their ontological existence. Furthermore, there are recognizable boundaries within which we can identify elements of actions that are the same and those which are not.

Useful though a criterion of requisite antecedent classification is, Goodman’s examination in this case was severely limited because he confined his remarks solely to “dance”. To him, the criterion read, “requisite

antecedent classification of a dance work". Perhaps wisely, he limited himself to western aesthetics, western dancing and western art in his discussion about the system of writing. He was mainly concerned about problems of authenticity; the "correctness" and "incorrectness" of performances, etc., but, what this means with regard to the material in hand is that we must look to *requisite antecedent classification of a movement system*, whether it is a dance, a sign language, a martial art, or a ceremony of some kind.

Even so, the criterion may seem puzzling. Isn't it obvious that X is a dance? Can't we assume the gesticulations made by Y are part of a sign language? Surely we can take for granted that Z ceremony, involving sacrifice, is "just like the Mass". No, we can not. To begin with, does the classification 'dance' used by a native English-speaking ethnographer fit the concepts and categories of other cultures?

[T]here can be powerful and dissonant side-effects from the insistence of including art as an interface to dance. The manipulative attitudes of super-ordinate peoples can force adaptation by subordinate peoples that is not the same as an internally developed evolution. We may, for example, eventually force the Hopi kachinas onto the proscenium stage and Hopi "dance" may become an art. If this happens, the world will lose at least as much as it gains (Keali'inohomoku 1980: 42).

Tourists can take things for granted, make assumptions, and classify what they see in other cultures according to familiar, culture-bound models of actions, but researchers cannot afford such luxury.

[T]here is little anthropological reason for classing together the Japanese cultural form called *mikagura* performed in Shinto shrines, the cultural form called *buyo* performed within (or separated from) a Kabuki drama, and the cultural form commonly known as *bon*, performed to honor the dead. The only logical reason I can see for categorizing them together is that from an outsider's point of view, all three cultural forms use the body in ways that to Westerners would be considered "dance". But from a [Japanese] cultural point of view either of movement or activity there is little reason to class them together. Indeed, as far as I have been able to discover, there is no Japanese word that will class these three cultural forms together that will not also include much of what from a western point of view would not be considered "dance" (Kaeppler 1978: 46).

Reversing the predicament, would the classification, *mikagura* or *buyo* used by a Japanese ethnographer fit the concepts and categories of Euro-centered societies about *their* dances? But, even stronger statements of the problem inherent in requisite antecedent classification have been made:

To speak of West African dance is in fact a misnomer. As has been well documented (Blacking 1983: 89; Grau 1983: 32; Kaeppler 1985: 92-4; Middleton 1985: 168; Spencer 1985: 140; Williams 1991: 5, 59), the ethnocentrically European term 'dance' is not

applicable to systems of structured human body movement of non-European peoples, who have their own terms of reference for conceiving of such activities. For example, in southern Nigeria most ethnic groups have a generic term which includes dance among other activities which are construed as intrinsically sociable and usually rhythmic. The Bini word *iku* refers to 'play', 'dance', 'games' and the Igbo *egwu* to 'play', 'games', 'dance', 'music', song. In Bini the word for 'to dance' is *gbe*, which also denotes 'to beat', while in the related Isoko language *igbe* means 'dance'. The specific meaning of each of these expressions is context-dependent. Individual dances do, however, have their own names ... (Gore 1983: 59).

Far from being a straightforward, unambiguous criterion solely pertaining to a system of movement-writing, "requisite antecedent classification" involves knowing whether or not the people being investigated have the same classificatory framework the movement-writer has. Then too, an investigator may find him or herself struggling with relationships of gesture and actions influenced by unfamiliar classifications of bodily parts:

Let us consider the shaking of hands in England and among the Ibo of south-eastern Nigeria. In both languages there are apparently intertranslatable terms for the gesture (Ibo *ji aka*). Although *aka* is usually translated 'hand' the boundaries of the parts concerned are, however, quite different. The English "hand" is bounded at the wrist. The Ibo *aka* is bounded just below the shoulder ... (Ardener 1982: 4).

Farnell comments:

Like the Ibo taxonomy of the body, the Assiniboine (Nakota language) taxonomy does not coincide with English. Whereas 'arm' in English usually includes the hand, in Nakota, the 'arm' (*istó*) extends from the shoulder to the wrist only, the 'hand' (*napé*) is a different body part. As we have seen, for Ibo and Assiniboine people, a 'handshake' can involve neither the hand (as bounded by the English term) nor a shaking action....

Handshakes and the like belong to an area of human social life which is commonly taken to be the most observable, the kind of behaviour that can be relatively objectively described. Even in this apparently simple zone, however, action and thought are inextricably linked and mediated by language. In both Nakota and English, as with Ibo and English, there are apparently inter-translatable terms for the gesture of 'shaking hands' but they cannot be said to refer to the same action sign across cultures. For a Native American woman offering relaxed fingers, a hearty grip is a gesture with a different meaning; a gesture that is not only a greeting but an indication of both ethnic identity and ethnic awareness. To paraphrase Ardener (1989: 172), the instance may appear to be socially trivial but the relationships between Native Americans and non-Indians have no more characteristic a framework than this ... (1994a: 954).

Along the same line of thinking: I find it difficult to believe ethnographic descriptions of Polynesian dances that ignore bodily taxonomies and the semantics of human anatomy (see Williams 1980). Steiner's work on

Polynesian *taboo* provides a good example of the kind of research that is frequently lacking:

To understand this better [i.e. the restricting power of personal *taboos*], we must realize that in Polynesian belief the parts of the body formed a fixed hierarchy which had some analogy with the rank system of society. Although it need not be stressed in a sociological context, it cannot be accident that the human skeleton was here made to play a peculiar part in this ascetic principle of *mana-taboo*.

Now the backbone was the most important part of the body, and the limbs that could be regarded as continuations of the backbone derived importance from it. Above the body was, ... the head, and it was the seat of *mana*: When we say this, we must realize that by '*mana*' are meant both the soul-aspect, the life force, and a man's ritual status.

This grading of the limbs concerned people of all ranks and both sexes. It could, for example, be so important to avoid stepping over peoples' heads that the very architecture was involved: the arrangements of the sleeping-room show such an adaptation in the Marquesas. The commoner's back or head is thus not without its importance in certain contexts. But the real significance of this grading seems to have been in the possibilities it provided for cumulative effects in association with the rank system. The head of a chief was the most concentrated *mana*-object of Polynesian society, and was hedged around with the most terrifying *taboos* which operated when things were to enter the head or when the head was being diminished; in other words, when the chief ate or had his hair cut. Hair-cutting involved the same behavior as actual killing, and the hands of a person who had cut a chief's hair were for some time useless for important activities, particularly for eating. Such a person had to be fed. This often happened to chief's wives or to chiefs themselves, and among the Maori these feeding difficulties were more than anything else indicative of exalted position. The hands of some great chiefs were so dangerous that they could not be put close to the head (Steiner 1956: 45-46, cited in Williams 1980: 5-6).

Any action sign system belonging to Polynesians would be affected in many ways by such concepts of the body. Unless we understand these, we will fail to comprehend Polynesian and Micronesian dances.⁴

The Final Criterion: Identity of Behavior

The best available fundamental discussion about judgments of the sameness of actions is, in my opinion, still found in Winch (1958), whose insights into the relation between observer and observed have not to my knowledge been superseded.

The concepts and criteria according to which the sociologist judges that, in two situations, the same thing has happened, or the same action performed, *must be understood in relation to the rules governing sociological investigation*. But here we run against a difficulty; for whereas in the case of the natural scientist we have to deal with only one set of rules, namely those governing the scientist's investigation itself, here what the sociologist is studying, as well as his study of it, is a human activity and is therefore carried on according to rules. And it is these rules, rather than those

which govern the sociologist's investigation, which specify what is to count as 'doing the same kind of thing' in relation to that kind of activity (Winch 1958: 86-87ff).

What the criterion of identity of behavior is all about is the *judgments of identity* made by an investigator which produce the generalizations that emerge from the investigation. What are the rules for making judgments of identity? To answer this question, we will re-examine Figs. 4 and 5 (see p. 7 above).

Durr claims that "the two movements are not the same [a judgment of identity], although they involve the same body parts". She asserts that Fig. 4 is an example of a stretch of "raw movement devoid of semantic content" in contrast to Fig. 5, which is the written version of an action-sign that has meaning derived from (a) the performer's intentions and (b) the systemic context from which the movement is taken.

She substantiates her claim by describing how the gross physical movement of "shoulder-shaking" is transformed into an action-sign *when its context is known and applied*. The action-sign was written differently conceived of in relation to the rules of a culture-specific dance. The written stretches provide necessary evidence for her claim that her judgment of identity of the two moves was accurate. Moreover, the example makes clear the fact that *the rules of movement investigation themselves are different*.

For example, kinesiologists (in the field of movement studies, akin to Winch's "natural scientists"), are only interested in the physical movements of, say, shoulder-shaking because of their rules of investigation. Kinesiology consists of observing the principles of mechanics and anatomy in relation to human movement and expressing generalizations about human movement within these parameters. In their investigations, kinesiologists apply and develop concepts that are relevant to kinesiological study. As Winch points out,

[The] application and modification[s] are 'influenced' both by the phenomena [human movement] to which they are applied and also by the fellow-workers in participation with whom they are applied. But the two kinds of 'influence' are different. Whereas it is on the basis of his observation of the phenomena (in the course of his experiments) that he develops his concepts as he does, he is able to do this only in virtue of his participation in an established form of activity with his fellow-scientists (1958: 86).

Durr's examination of Labanotation is germane to the discussion of criteria establishing the credibility of movement-writing because she documents the transformation she experienced from one set of concepts and

criteria regarding human movement to another. Durr was an accomplished movement-writer before she undertook the cross-cultural project that marked completion of her advanced certification in Labanotation, thus, the change in concept and criteria did not happen because of an increase in writing skills. Rather, her "new level of comprehension" resulted in seeing gross physical movements as sociocultural actions. Durr experienced what is commonly called a "paradigm shift". Instead of seeing movement solely as a physical phenomenon, the focus of her visualization changed: her judgments now rested on the judgments of identity provided by Kenyans who were performers of *Karachuonyo*. She no longer wrote 'movement' *per se*, she began to write *actions*.

All of this, however, serves only to emphasize Winch's point. That is, where a kinesiologist deals with only one set of rules--those governing kinesiological investigation--semasiologists have to deal with the rules of movement investigation *and* the rules of the activity (in Durr's case, Luo funeral dancing) under investigation.

Nothing about human movement study lacks complexity. In fact, even for kinesiologists, the picture is complicated, for [1] the rules governing type of investigation;⁵ [2] the investigator's relation to the phenomena, and [3] the investigator's relation to his or her colleagues should not be ignored. For semasiologists, the list is further extended: [4] the investigator's relation to the people to whom the dance, sign language, ceremony, etc. belongs, and [5] the rules of the action-sign system under investigation.

Drid Williams

Notes:

¹ For American readers, it seems necessary to say that a 'B. Litt.' degree at Oxford is the equivalent of a Master of Arts in the United States. It is a graduate degree.

² Use of the term 'body language' neither implies any connection with, nor likeness to, the ideas of Julius Fast (1970).

³ *Karachuonyo* is a funeral dance that demonstrates power and is performed in honor of the death of an individual either of old age or status, such as that of a chief. The dance is done primarily by the men, while the women remain in the background. The dance is led by a horn-blower, who determines the order of the steps.

⁴ If, on the other hand, there are Polynesian peoples who do not have this kind of ideas, their absence should be noted. I have noted the influence of concepts of the body elsewhere using

an example taken from Pouwer (1973) and the Mimika concept of *ipu*. Ellen's work in this regard (1977) is especially illuminating.

⁵ By "type of investigation" I mean kinesiology, primate studies, or several extant socio-cultural approaches, e.g. Kinesics, Proxemics, Semasiology, an 'emic/etic' approach, Ethno-choreology, Motif-morphology, etc.

References Cited:

Ardener, Edwin

1982. Social Anthropology, Language and Reality. In *Semantic Anthropology* [ASA 22], (D. Parkin, Ed.), London: Academic Press, pp. 1-14.
 1989. Comprehending Others. In *The Voice of Prophecy and Other Essays/Edwin Ardener* (M. Chapman, Ed.), Oxford: Blackwell, pp. 159-185.

Baynton, Douglas

1995. Savages and Deaf-Mutes. Evolutionary Theory and the Campaign Against Sign-Language. *JASHM*, 8(4): 132-172.

Best, David

1974. *Expression in Movement and the Arts*. London: Lepus.
 1978. *Philosophy and Human Movement*. London: Allen & Unwin.

Blacking, John

1983. Movement and Meaning: Dance in Social Anthropological Perspective. *Dance Research* 1(1): 89-99.

Durr, Dixie

1981. Labanotation: Language or Script? *JASHM* 1(3): 132-138.

Ellen, Roy

1977. Anatomical Classification and the Semiotics of the Body. *The Anthropology of the Body* [ASA 15], (J. Blacking, Ed.), London: Academic Press, pp. 343-374.

Farnell, Brenda

1989. Body Movement Notation. *International Encyclopedia of Communications* (D. Barnouw, Ed.), Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania and Oxford University Press.
 1994a. Ethno-graphics and the Moving body. *MAN*, 29(4): 929-974.
 1995. Movement Writing Systems. In *The World's Writing Systems* (P. Daniels and W. Bright, Eds.), London: Oxford University Press.
 1996. Movement and Gesture. *The Encyclopedia of Cultural Anthropology*. Lakeville, CT: Academic Reference Publishing Co.

Fast, Julius

1970. *Body Language*. New York: Evans.

Goodman, Nelson

1969. *Languages of Art*. London: Oxford University Press.

Gore, Georgiana

1983. Traditional Dance in West Africa. In *Dance History. An Introduction* [2nd Ed.], (J. Adshead-Layson and J. Layson, Eds.), London and New York: Routledge.

Grau, Andrée

1983. Sing a Dance - Dance a Song. *Dance Research* 1(2): 32-44.

Kaepler, Adrienne

1978. The Dance in Anthropological Perspective. *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 7: 31-39.

1985. Structured Movement Systems in Tonga. In *Society and the Dance* (P. Spencer, Ed.), Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, Pp. 92-118.

Keali'inohomoku, Joanne

1980. The Non-Art of the Dance. *JASHM* 1(2): 38-44.

Middleton, John

1985. The Dance Among the Lugbara of Uganda. In *Society and the Dance* (P. Spencer, Ed.), Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, Pp. 165-182.

Pouwer, Jan

1973. Signification and Field Work. *Journal of Symbolic Anthropology* 1, The Hague: Mouton.

Saussure, Ferdinand de

1959. *Course in General Linguistics*. New York: McGraw-Hill.

Spencer, Paul

1985. Dance as Antithesis in the Samburu Discourse. In *Society and the Dance* (P. Spencer, Ed.), Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, Pp. 140-164.

Steiner, Franz

1956. *Taboo*. London: Pelican.

Williams, Drid

1972. Social Anthropology and [the] Dance. *B.Litt. Thesis*, Oxford University.

1980. Taxonomies of the Body, With Special Reference to the Ballet. Part I. *JASHM*, 1(1): 1-19. Part II. *JASHM*, 1(2): 98-122.

1991. *Ten Lectures on Theories of the Dance*. Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press.

1994. Space, Intersubjectivity and the Conceptual Imperative: Three Ethnographic Cases. In *Action Sign Systems in Cultural Context: The Visible and Invisible in Movement and Dance* (B. Farnell, Ed.), Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press.

1995. An Appreciation [of Baynton's work]. *JASHM*, 8 (4): 173-186.

Winch, Peter

1958. *The Idea of a Social Science and Its Relation to Philosophy*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.