

UQÀM | Département de danse

A psycho-phenomenological approach to movement analysis

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Introduction

The activity of analyzing movement, whether it be conscious or not, is all-pervasive in dance-related spheres : in teaching, training, performing, and dance-making, in aesthetic analysis, in the study of dance history, in the development of reception theory and the more recent approaches to raising audience awareness regarding choreographic works. On the strength of this simple observation, our research project emerged from the desire to generate exchange of practice and knowledge between two approaches to qualitative movement analysis developed specifically in the field of dance: Laban Movement Analysis (LMA) (Laban, 1950) and Functional Analysis of the Dancing Body (*l'Analyse fonctionnelle du corps dans le mouvement dansé* -AFCMD) (Godard, 1995; Harbonnier-Topin, 2001; Rouquet, 2004); by crossing these two points of view, our main objective is to rethink the articulation between the expressive and functional aspects of human movement.

Clearly, these two approaches emerged in different contexts and focussed on different concerns. Nonetheless, when we take note of what the analysis activity itself entails, a constant appears – movement analysis bears witness to a singular subjective perceptual experience bringing into play kinaesthetic empathy, and this despite lexical differences and different orientations in terms of objectives (why we are observing). Whether the discussion centers, as in AFCMD, on the detailed description of physical processes in movement or, as in LMA, it articulates a poetics of expressive forces, we find that each construction of meaning emerges from an embodied gaze which weaves connections among distinct observations.

As the study began it became clear to us that, although it is never explicitly named, observation activity always underlies what we call movement analysis. To this effect, within the framework of our research we have chosen to speak of ‘observation-analysis’.

Research Methods

In order to explore observation-analysis in terms of activity, we have led individual interviews with twenty analysts who are recognized as ‘experts’ in their respective approaches to movement analysis; half of the participants are certified in the American form of LMA, the other half are qualified in France as AFCMD analysts. Each expert is asked to observe a video recording of two dancers, each of whom interprets the same choreographic sequence, in order to identify their

functional and expressive singularities. The resulting interview is also videotaped, enabling the researchers to observe and keep track of gestures which accompany the analysis discourse.

We have chosen the « Explicitation Interview » technique which was developed on the basis of Husserl's theories of consciousness and attention by the French psychologist and researcher Pierre Vermersch (2000, 2009; 2012). The technique is designed to elicit detailed descriptive verbalisations in the context of an introspective action related to past experience. The purpose of this type of introspective interview within the framework of our study is dual: to be able to access the internal process of the experts while they conduct their movement observation-analysis, for example: When you see this quality, how do you know? What do you do? Which clues do you rely on? And, secondly, to bring to light the implicit knowledge which underlies that process. The following questions seek to bring insight to specific points: how is the participant's attention directed? Which observable phenomena are chosen? How does he/she identify and name what she sees? What is the knowledge which underlies and supports the orientation of attention?

The interviews are analyzed in two phases: the first is a detailed analysis of the interview contents. This step allows us to identify the movement characteristics selected by the expert, to identify the nature of the observed characteristics - whether cinematic, dynamic or metaphorical. As well, a second step of this analytical phase was carried out using the framework of Activity Analysis which was developed at the *Conservatoire National des Arts et Métiers (CNAM)* research center for continuing education (Barbier, 2011). Activity Analysis is a field of research which brings to bear a holistic, interdisciplinary and contextualised approach to understanding the substrata of doing (particularly useful in the fields of on-the-job training, ergonomics, and workplace analysis in general). Activity being defined as the “set of processes by which the subject engages with the environment, including his/her own concomitant self-transformation » (Barbier, 2011, p. 25) (our translation), using this filter for research can unlock insights into what the subject is effectively doing in a particular context while clarifying the rapport with her environment and her own activities. This framework allowed us to pinpoint the specific activities favoured by each expert while conducting her observation.

The second phase of the study targets a synthesis, reconstructing the overall coherence of each subjects' experience of the ongoing observation-analysis. We chronologically retraced the observation process, bringing out the movement factors which were most often attended to by the

expert. The resulting synthesis corresponds to the task requested of the expert – identify the singularity of each observed dancer, taking into account both functional and expressive characteristics.

Results and Discussion

The Explicitation Interview brings to light the process of observation and analysis of movement, seen as an investigation. The interviewer-researcher questions the expert-observer in the same manner as the somewhat naïve and down-to-earth Dr Watson questions Sherlock Holmes. In the process, the expert in movement analysis sheds light on her way of seeing, the construction of her gaze and the clues she focuses to do so.

The interviews tended to bring out experts' observations which seized on signs barely glimpsed at the edge of awareness, leading the movement analyst to establish hypotheses. What type of reasoning is at play here? Does the nature of the creative process which brings about these inferences involve induction, deduction, abduction? These distinctions in our reasoning processes were originally developed by Charles S. Peirce (Peirce & Ketner, 1992) in his critical approach to our power of knowing. It is abduction which Peirce identifies as emblematic of creative thinking, whether artistic or scientific in nature. At the confluence of imaginative and rational thinking, abduction refers to intuitive thought processes. Also called IBE, or *Inference to the Best Explanation* (The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy [online], 2013), abduction is exemplified by the Sherlock Holmes style of investigation, often mistakenly associated with deductive reasoning. For example, when this analyst says: "I have the impression that the run-up of her spine produces the mobility of her arms", she has an abductive way to observe and analyze movement. Indeed, Peirce describes an activity which he calls "drinking in impressions"; abductive reasoning relies on the subject's ability to perceive unprecedented links between multiple sources of knowledge, brought to the fore through observation and experience. According to Sebeok (1981), who draws the relationship between Peirce and Holmes, abduction functions as a sort of lateral thinking requiring attention to detail as well as a state of receptivity (for example open attention, empathy...). Peirce speaks of abduction as a reasoning-state which sparks a particular emotion.

When we analyse the data from the interviews we observe the following ongoing process: each participant tends to test and then validate (or not), as a set of hypotheses, her own keys to reading what she sees which she compares with her experience, with her knowledge and, at times,

by physically echoing the same gesture. In the light of our preliminary results, in the context of observation-analysis of the dancer there appears to be a particularly high frequency, in terms of activity, for the process of inference by abduction and the ensuing construction of meaning. To this effect, progressively throughout her observation activity, the analyst constructs an internal coherence between the various movement elements which she has identified.

The framework for Activity Analysis, which relies on its' own terminology, allowed for a new and more distanced perspective regarding the specialized movement analysis discourse. One of the strong points arising from activity analysis is “the progressive construction of a shared culture of lateral thinking” (Barbier, 2011, p. 62) (our translation). As well, we suggest that the notion of a shared intelligibility vocabulary would render movement analysis activities more explicit and accessible in a wide variety of fields (theatre, music, anthropology...) allowing for connections between different areas of skill, thereby setting up a meta-level field of knowledge.

Our protocol allowed us to identify several types of activity which comprise observation-analysis: prioritizing, describing, embodied echoing, sensing, allowing one's attention to be attracted (exogenous bottom-up capture of attention), identifying movement parameters, assessing, appraising, questioning, inferring (primarily by abduction), validating assumptions and hypotheses, statement making about knowledge, and constructing meaning. The study develops a definition for each activity, to some extent using Barbier's activity analysis vocabulary (*Vocabulaire de l'analyse d'activité* (2011)) as a basis. Our first results point out a divergence between the two systems of analysis on the basis of the types of activities which tend to be prioritized by the users of each system.

According to our observations the LMA experts gave more importance to the « identifying » and « making statements to frame knowledge » activities,...

“...that sense of going from **directional** into **shape flow**”

... whereas the AFCMD experts tend to “infer” and “construct meaning”.

“**I feel that** the run-up of her spine **produces** the mobility of her arms”

We put forward the hypothesis that the ‘identifying’ and the ‘stating knowledge’ activities favoured by the LMA experts refer back, in fact, to earlier experiences that build meaning which have consequently been stabilized into a coded and shared professional vocabulary. These terms function then as short-cuts, thereby bypassing the detailed explanation of observed phenomena.

The use of the AFCMD approach, on the other hand, which has not focussed on building a specific terminology, requires making sense out of a series of hypotheses during the observation process. Each observation activity generates a new investigation, progressively weaving internal coherence out of its' disparate elements.

Among all of the experts of both systems, we observed a great number of points of convergence in terms of the movement factors which were attended to, particularly regarding the observation of posture, motor coordination, support, dynamic phrasing and flow. The main point of divergence, subject rather to individual variation and unrelated to the system used, comes to light in the various interpretations of "weight". For example, these two analysts obviously do not refer to the same understanding of the weight notion:

"I sense her weight kind of rebounding there"

"I don't feel the presence of weight in terms of expressive factor"

This would seem to indicate that the observational clues needed to appreciate the relationship to gravity of the mover are difficult to identify objectively. There is a particular sensorial and physical engagement required when reading the weight factor which would seem to involve the observers' own constructed relationship to gravity (Godard, 1995, p. 227). Marked by this fundamental construction, we are inevitably influenced by the perceptual pre-set which is intrinsic to the gaze of the subject-observer.

Before concluding we would like to point out some of the limits of this study; we cannot ignore the fact that each of the expert observers comes to the study with a distinct *habitus*. Observation activity is largely modulated by numerous factors related to the individual's personal story. The complex and tightly woven interrelationship between corporeity, specific training in movement analysis and actual professional practice is beyond the scope of this study. As to the habitual context for professional practice and goals for observation, we are aware that the task we have set for the experts invited to this study – that is to identify the functional and expressive singularity of the dancer - may be more or less a novelty for many of the participants whereas, for some, the task is quite close to the usual aims of practice.

To this effect, this research targets discourse without taking into account the professional context. We are approaching observation-analysis activity as performative, that is in its' spontaneous manifestation as elicited through the explicitation interview.

Conclusion

This study, examining in detail the discourse used by two systems of movement analysis, in short functional analysis and Effort analysis, and in seeking to understand their *modus operandi*, attempts to shed light on the relationship between expression and function. Taking into account the activity of observation-movement analysis as a creative process (Moore & Deicher, 2004), the dancing body is seen through the changing living prisms proposed by the observer. We join Perrin (Perrin, 2012), in raising the issue of the relationship between the observer and the observed: who is seeing? and who is seen? A dialectic tension is generated between the desire to see and effective observation: “There is no immanent meaning to discover, rather there is meaning to construct, for which we take responsibility” (our translation). Accordingly, it appears pertinent to engage the inquiry into observation-analysis in terms of a search for internal coherence, thus refusing to foreground the illusory pursuit for absolute objectivity.

As an epilogue, an example of an internal coherence proposed by one of the analyst:

“My impression first, was a sense of **young vulnerability...**
...I feel the sense of the timing, going back and forth, between **suddenness**, and **sustainment...** Also has a little hesitation in the sustainment... It also has a sense of **yielding into the gravity ...** That’s where I also get the sense of vulnerability.”

Explicitation interviews (conducted by Nicole Harbonnier, assisted by Helen Simard for the English speaking participants)

LMA (USA): Trisha Bauman (21 mai 2014), Kathie Debenham and Pat Debenham (26 mars 2014), Cate Deicher (25 mars 2014), Martha Eddy (22 mai 2014), Esther Geiger (23 mai 2014), Peggy Hackney (12 mai 2014), Janet Kaylo (20 mai 2014), Sharon Mansur (23 mai 2014), Carol-Lynn Moore (25 mars 2014), Pamela Schick (12 mai 2014)

LMA (France): Angela Loureiro (1er avril 2014)

LMA (Canada): Nadine Saxton (4 juin 2014)

LMA et AFCMD (France): Élisabeth Schwartz (15 juillet 2013)

AFCMD (France): Mohamed Ahamada (24 aout 2014), Catherine Augé (21 janvier 2015), Claudia Damasio (20 janvier 2015), Soahanta De Oliveira (15 juillet 2013), Catherine Friderich (20 janvier 2015), Nuch Grenet (19 juillet 2013), Lydie Guelpa (18 juillet 2013), Bernard Kesch (23 janvier 2015), Emmanuelle Lyon (16 décembre 2013), Térésa Salerno (20 février 2015), Nathalie Schulmann (16 juillet 2013), Martine Truong Tan Trung (4 juillet 2014), Valentine Vuilleumier (7 janvier 2014), Patricia Zaretti (19 décembre 2013)

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