

DETERMINATION OF THE BASIC SEMIOTIC UNITS IN THE FIELD OF DANCE

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A dilemma is initially imposed how to reveal dance structural characteristics, whether to approach general analysis of all performance segments and accompanying elements (costume, musical accompaniment, scenography and other elements of performance) or rather by selectively determined components?

Without pretending to offer a new methodology, we rely on the existing and already scientifically verified procedures. Following the theoretical corpus treating art, we will invoke some accepted existing determinants. The conclusions and attitudes assumed by numerous eminent theoreticians will serve as initial grounds. Some semiologists and structuralists treat an art work as a unit composed of more internally connected parts. One of the representatives of the Prague School, Jan Mukarovsky in the text *Structure, function, sign, value* writes: "The work of art is a highly complex sign: each of its components and each of its parts is a carrier of partial meaning" (Mukarovsky, 1986, p. 210). The Russian semiotician of the Tartu-Moscow Semiotic School, Yuri Lotman in its capital work *The Structure of the Artistic Text* (2005) considering primarily literary texts also comes to a conclusion that the work of art is a complex sign in which a multilayer structure with precisely set rules is bundled. Charles Sanders Peirce in his interpretation also equals/unifies the sign with big, complex wholes. It may also be much more than a simple sign. We accept this concept, or model of semiotic analysis in which the entire performing text with all accompanying components is aligned with the sign having a complex coherent organization.

Before we define the sign-performance itself, we will briefly refer to the term *sign*. The sign is a two/three-tiered unit depending on the manner of its interpretation, or semiotic school. The Eurolinguistic movement, founder of which is Ferdinand de Saussure, interprets the sign as a two-tiered model composed of a *signifiant/signifier* and *signifier/signified*. The signifier is a form possessed/obtained by the sign, while signified is a representation/image/concept. The signifier is variable and may vary depending on the various composition in different languages, while signified is related to a single representation/association/idea. Unlike this school, Charles Sanders Peirce and Charles W. Morris provide a different position of the sign, where the two-tiered model is added by a third or fourth element. "This process, in a tradition which goes back to the Greeks, has commonly been regarded as involving three (or four) factors: that which acts as a sign, that which the sign refers to, and the effect on some interpreter in virtue of which the thing in question is a sign to that interpreter. These three components in semiosis are called – respectively *sign vehicle*, *designatum*, and *interpretant*, the interpreter may be included as a fourth factor" (Morris, 1975, p. 19). First component is a sign vehicle, or what responds to the signifier according to Saussure, signified in this case is identified with *designatum* and *interpretant*, which translates/interprets the relation between the signifier and signified. Or differently interpreted *represent* – name for example form possessed by the signed, *object* – content, or object to which the sign refers and *interpretant* individual perception of the sign. The new-introduced component, *interpretant*, is the third pillar through which subjectivization is achieved, some general terms and meanings are specified. This model-triad might be more acceptable in relation to the treatment of the work of art; namely due to this new feature for example new value obtained by the sign itself is providing opportunity for specification.

Irrelevant of the selection of the concrete sign model, at this level of analysis, it is important to position the relation:

work of art (performance) = sign

In this phase, we will apply a deductive method that will allow to detect the most significant spheres important for the concrete study. Writing about the structure of the artistic text and its analysis, Yuri Lotman provides an essential remark: "There is no syntagmatic in the order, but syntagmatic in hierarchy – signs will be related as Matryoshka dolls, they nest into each other" (Lotman, 2005, p. 48). The performance (moving in this case) – sign is composed of a complex structure integrating a number of levels. Beginning the process of analysis and segmentation of "Matryoshka dolls" (Russian dolls are the set of wooden dolls of decreasing size placed one inside another), it is necessary to detect the nucleus of the sign, or the basic element that is imperative of the performance itself. In this case, we cannot invoke to or use structures that are immanent to spoken or linguistic due to existence of essential differences. Interpretation of spoken or written content, if you have the decoder, or if you know the language of the message, is rather simple compared to interpretation and pallet of possible and sometimes drastically different ideas related to interpretation of the movement. The linguistic sign is arbitrary, while kinesthetic and audio sign is not. They possess wide and not concretized meaningful capacity that is associative. In some forms of East Asian theatre there is codification and close relation between some moving units with concrete meaning. In such cases, they are read as related and continuous text. For example, *The mudras* in *Kutiyattam Theatre* in India and *Xiu* in *Chinese dances with sleeves* obtain a character of arbitrary signs content of which is precisely and decidedly determined. Anya Peterson Royce came to an identical point of view, highlighting: "The search for levels comparable to phonemic, morphemic, lexemic, and syntactic is take as a given. It may be a fact, that we are distorting the phenomenon of dance by forcing it into taxonomic system designed for a qualitative different kind of phenomenon. This type of comparison may ultimately tell us that we have to deal with dance on its own terms" (Royce, 2002, p. 201). Hence, our task is to determine the structure of dance performance ourselves, to escape from "scientific imperialism of linguistics, which nowadays is not only subjected to theatrology (or, particularly, in literary science!) but almost in humanistic sciences" (Lužina, 1996, p. 25). The dilemma related to the method of determining integral parts/levels of dance performance material initiates consideration of the existing practical experiences. The answer to the question is obtained in one of the extremely modern

dance options – postmodern dance, which experimenting with the form and content provided nonstandard artistic product. The *flosculum* promoted by the creators of postmodern dance, or its conceptual pioneer Yvonne Rainer discloses relevant marginalized creative issues. She declaratively rejects everything that so far created theatrical work, saying: "NO to spectacle no to virtuosity no to transformations and magic and make-believe no to the glamour and transcendence of the star image no the heroic no to anti-heroic no the trash imagery no to involvement of performer or spectator no to style no to camp no to seduction of spectator by the wiles of the performer no to eccentricity no to moving or be moved" (in Au, 2000, p. 165). They exclude scenography, costume design, lighting effects, music, defined choreography and scenario, established lexical base, and even scene as a defined space (performances were performed on streets, roofs, in museums, parks and so on) and determined time (performances start without announcement and the duration is not specified). Their experimental performances help us to define the reduction levels, or possible rejections. They propose a form that manages to overcome almost all defined norms and rules of theatrical performance and become a *high-ranking* case in which the boundary of performance and life is very thin but still exists. "That construct totally nihilistic attitude to all means theatre art and staging" (Zdravkova-Djeparoska, 2001, p. 238). Creators of the postmodern performance tend to entire rejection of all stage elements. In each of these choreographic experiments - Rainer's pieces by way of excluding trained dancers and using "raw" material in performances, Trisha Brown with her new spatial settings on façade walls and roofs, Twyla Tharp with indefinite duration and space of her works, it is managed to oust all ancillary/additional media in a stage performance, except for one – the performer himself. Without performers, dancers, the performances cannot exist. This allows in this case to impose another relation of the equation through which the term sign-performance is narrowed being positioned in narrowest frames, expressed as follows:

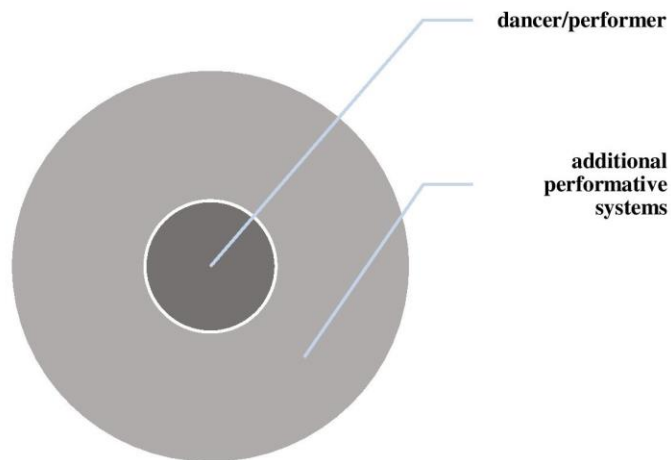
performer/dancer = sign.

I would like to analyze the classification made by a semiologist, Tadeusz Kowzan (1998), who defines 13 integral elements – semantic systems of a theatre performance:

1. Speech,
2. Intonation,
3. Mimics,
4. Gesticulation,
5. Movement,
6. Makeup,
7. Headdress,
8. Costumes,
9. Equipment,
10. Stage setting,
11. Lighting,
12. Music,
13. Autonomous sound effects.

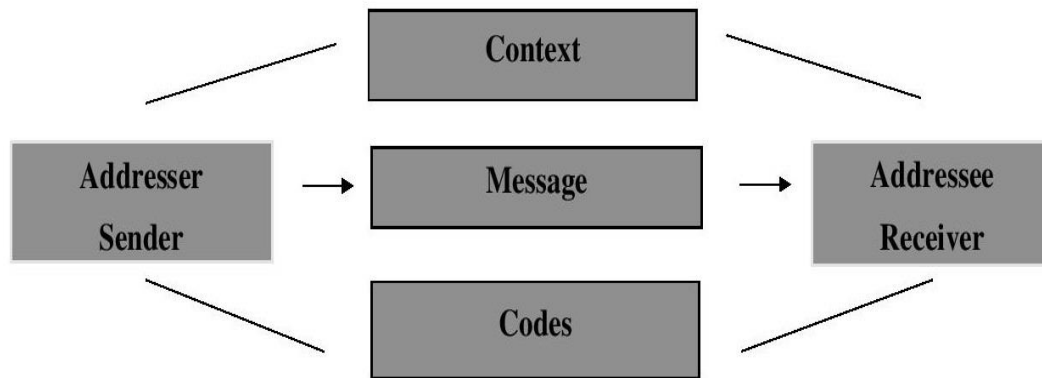
Although Kowzan is primarily focused on drama performance, we can also apply those perceptions in dance art. First five stage systems refer directly to acting expression, next three are supporters connected again to the actor, while the last five can function autonomously. We again come to the conclusion that the carrier although in this case segmented expressive carrier is creative live matter. Hence, segregation of the nucleus is confirmed of a sign-stage performance – dancer/performer, noted as nucleus/center of the performance. The following concentric circle "bigger Matryoshka doll" positioned immediately to the center are the additional assets – costume, makeup, musical accompaniment, equipment and so on. They, through the example of postmodern dance, but also through numerous examples of the existing research resources, confirm that they can (and do not have to) be omitted or partially excluded. In most part of his creation (except for re-choreography of classic works), the choreographer, George Balanchine omitted scenery and minimized lighting design, while the costume was simplified and unified to maximum with all groups of performers. To avoid omission of other groups subject to our research, as an example only, we would like to indicate social dances

(irrelevant of the period or stylish concept in question), the costume element is identified with daily clothes and has a utilitarian function. This indicates that performance is not causally determined by applying additional, accompanying effects (concretely particular costume). The above may be presented by the following graphic scheme:



Artistic performance imposes a range of preconditions to be satisfied in order to realize the stage dance work. The preparatory and performance process, displacement and conditions of fulfillment, by themselves, presuppose satisfaction of special, technical, organizational and other preconditions thus giving the body a new meaning in advance. Theater in the contemporary postindustrial society falls under the sphere of cultural offer connected to entertainment or filling spare time beyond all existential levels of action (like it was in archaic societies). Social dances in contemporary society are part of the corpus related to the free choice in organization of individual activities, and they drastically differ from the artistic dance, while the body status changes its function. The social dance implies an active position, while in a theatre, the spectator (in most cases) is a passive follower of what is being performed. For the same reason, the body in theater performances, the performer/dancer's body integrates different semantic codes and analogously messages that will be detailed below.

Susan Leigh Foster in her book *Reading Dancing* (1996) provides her own interpretation of artistic dance. She uses Roman Jakobson's basic communication scheme:



She readjusts in a scheme corresponding to dance or theater context. Message in this scheme is dance and the codes are choreographic codes and conventions. In this communication system, the choreography (considering dance performance) as sender (addresser) and the spectator as recipient (receiver, addressee) are the two final elements in the scheme. While text or the message in Foster's scheme is segmented in two factors – dancer and dance (1986). "Every art has its own instrument and means of expression. An instrument of dance is the human body; and means – the movement" (Graham in Cohen, 1988, p. 162). This binomial is a key for detecting the body function in artistic performance. The body, as we concluded at the very beginning is a carrier of the message, and if positioned in a different context it obtains a different meaning. Social dances are collective making status, age, family and other type of distinctions. For example - in Macedonian folk dances costumes were a manner of recognizing members who are in or out of marriage. Artistic dance is a sphere in which the body is the main instrument and the main goal in the creation of the act of art. The context (both narrower and wider) is significant; it, however, as demonstrated by the postmodern dance can be deleted or more precisely relativized. In narrower context, we position stage semantic systems determined by Kowzan. Of the thirteen mentioned, artistic reduction results in

exclusion of ten and existence of 3rd - mimics, 4th - gesticulation and 5th - movement (with possible cancellation of 3rd and 4th in some extreme forms). In a performance, everything can be extracted except the dancing body. In the wider context, which includes social, political and ethical norms and criteria, they are not a condition for the body in the artistic performance. Some political and religious systems are exclusion, in which the body, in particular the female body is repressed through codes of dress, behavioral norms and so on. Noting that in those societies it is not developed, for example artistic dance does not exist in some countries (in such form as confirmed in developed societies).

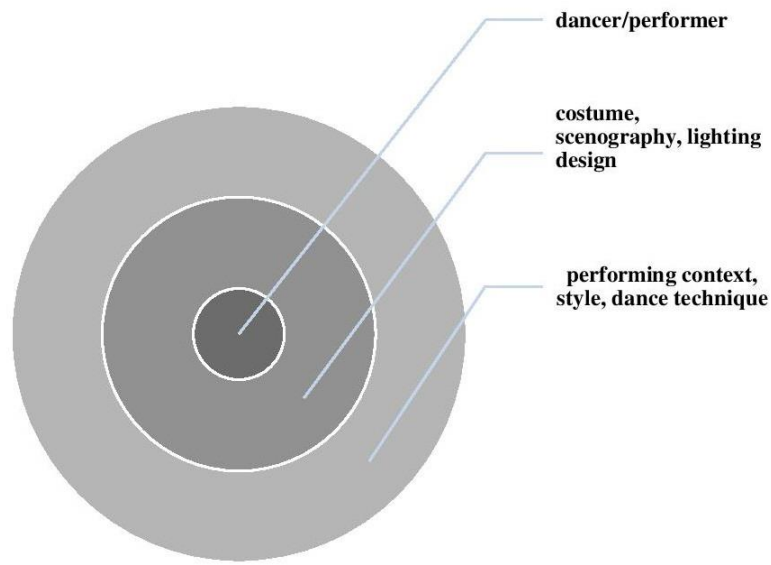
In artistic performance, the body is a material that needs to be modeled, shaped, and cultivated through educational procedures. The dance is a result of cultivation of the movement apparatus and its dance determination. The dancer's preparatory process for stage performances can even extend to one decade, articulating seriousness of imposing movement matrices that are not standard/natural. A supporter of classical dance, André Levinson highlights: "The dancer's technique is not a mechanical action; it is a physical effort that permanently enhances beauty... It is the soul of the dance; it is the dance itself" (Levinson, 1988, p. 139). Martha Graham emphasizes: "Practicing for example technique is important; in the dancer's thought it is only, however, means to achieve his/her goal... Strength, freedom and spontaneity is achieved with the help of practices" (Graham, 1988, p. 163). Extracts unambiguously confirm the need for trained, shaped bodies skilled to perform a concrete dance task. This inaugurates the basic presumption, and that is colonization of the body as expressive material.

The choreographer – dancer connection builds a specific relation. While choreography is a scene text passed by each performer through his/her own body apparatus, it covers a number of levels – intellectual, emotional and physical discourse of shaping/reproduction of the role. The classic performance imposes strict performance rules where there is not a particularly wide space given the transformation of the choreographic content. Creativity in the field of standard ballet repertoire is mostly realized in the part of conceptualization, building and conducting of the character. Semiotician Kowzan emphasizes the following characteristics: "In the classical ballet, it oscillates between strictly conventional figures

(this is demanded by the tradition) and expressive demands of the story" (Kowzan, 1998, p. 221). A part taken from Marina Konstantinova's analysis is given below, where she comments the performances of Aurora from the *Sleeping Beauty* of the most significant ballerinas from Mariinsky and Bolshoi Theaters in Russia.

Aurora – Kurgapkina significantly simplified the character, and it was bright, cheerful, and at times glaring, virtuously demonstrating plausibility and glamor... Aurora Kolpakova signifies a modern intelligent girl, who accidentally enters a fairytale situation, in which she is not lost but she deals with the occurrences – she raises them to the level of a dream or a metaphor but not reality. The plot of Kolpakova is in the background, and foremost three acts filled with classical dance. (Konstantinova, 1990, pp. 208-210)

Modern dance provides more creative freedom to the performers, who have not only reproduced kinesthetic template but complement it through the form especially popular for this stylish line – improvisation. "First, I practice with the dancers, then I give them movements and actions to be performed in the dance, but I do not expect from them to repeat them exactly as I do. It is my job to find a way for dancers to move them as they would move themselves and to get most out of it" (Cunningham, 1988, p. 233). The performer, dancer is the last link in the process of creation of the work, in fact the dancing body according to all the noted features becomes a work of art. Although in the beginning of the 20th century, Andrei Levinson wrote about the ballet, this quote refers to all scenic kinesthetic forms: "The task of the ballet – is to create forms through mediation of human plastics in front of the eyes of the audience" (Levinson, 1918, p. 74). Hence, the existing schematic view obtains the following format, for example content:



Only scenic arts (like the new forms of performance, body art and so on) create live artistic works whose existence is time limited. Dancers transform their meaning by stepping on the stage ending with the completion of the choreographic text. Any new step on the stage, for example on the performing space in conditions of repetition of the choreographic text does not mean repetition, but creation of a new work of art that, like the previous ones only exists in the time of interpretation. In various theatrical forms, we follow different stages in which the actor/dancer prepares "to become a work of art". The interpretation of each of these dancing bodies is not simple and they each carry a different message depending on their context. It is very important to point out that the segmentation of the sign that Lotman also defined is a search of the ways of functioning and physiology of the elements of a play. Through this system of concentric circles, the dominant interest is directed to the dance body. The additional circles allow us to obtain information that accrues to the basic and most important category - the body. The dancing context largely determines the meaning of the performing body and the mission that it has. In this sense, a classical ballet body in a national theatre cannot be equated with the reactive contemporary dance body, that has been set and created as a response to certain socio-political trends (performances that are a part of mass protests, activist performances, etc.). In this direction, the key to interpretation is given by this stair system

in which all the elements are analysed, but the dominant sign is the dance body. The dance system is connected to the body apparatus; thus this so-called "pre-expressive level" (Eugenio & Savarese, 1995: 195) is achieved by compulsory training before each stage performance in which they not only prepare their body for what is ahead, but also mentally mobilize to perform the task. The set objective – artistic creation of various stylish profiles (ballet, modern and contemporary dance) is achieved through the pre-expressive phase. The process of transformation goes through several levels of action. On the one hand, it is extensive education, or colonization of the body. On the other hand, it is the process of transformation that each body experiences just before stepping on the stage. The last link in the presented scheme, the performing context, scene presence and imposition of the standards of the medium itself is conditioned by the preparation, that is, by switching from the everyday utilitarian moving concept to the forms of artificial dance by activating the pre-expressive level. Petar Bogataryev researching folk theater writes, "on the stage, things that fulfill the function of theatrical signs acquire specific properties, qualities and attributes that they do not possess in real life" (in Elam, 1998, p. 186).

It follows that as perceived, a semiotic dancing body is a sign, and the sign in performance possesses quality of a work of art.

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