

## What Constitutes a Dance?: Investigating the Constitutive Properties of Antony Tudor's Dark Elegies

By: Ann Dils

[Dils, A.](#) (1993) What Constitutes a Dance?: Investigating the Constitutive Properties of Antony Tudor's Dark Elegies, *Dance Research Journal* 24 (2), 17-31.

Made available courtesy of University of Illinois Press: <http://www.press.uillinois.edu/journals/drj.html>

**\*\*\*Note: Figures may be missing from this format of the document**

These papers were originally given as a panel entitled What Constitutes a Dance at the 1989 Congress on Research in Dance Conference in Williamsburg, Virginia. Panelists selected Antony Tudor's 1937 *Dark Elegies* as a case study and basis for examining general questions regarding elements to be considered in identifying a dance work. Several issues and occurrences inspired panel members, such as recent interest in revivals of dance works from the beginning of this century and scholarly debate about issues related to directing dance from Labanotation scores. While Nelson Goodman's 1968 book *Languages of Art* served as a theoretical springboard for discussion, Judy Van Zile's 1985-86 article "What is the Dance? Implications for Dance Notation" proved a thought-provoking precedent for this investigation.

The term "constitutive" comes from Goodman's work and is one of several ideas discussed in *Languages of Art* that are important to dance notation. For Goodman, the purpose of notation is to identify a work and specify its essential properties. These essential properties are constitutive; elements of a work that can be varied without disturbing the work's identity are "contingent" (p. 117). The existence of a score, according to Goodman, makes dance an allographic art form—one in which a score identifies the work. Allographic art forms are distinguished from autographic forms, such as painting, in which identity or authenticity is established by the work's production history (pp. 99-123).

In "What is the Dance? Implications for Dance Notation," Van Zile examines Goodman's ideas about the purpose of notation, along with ideas from a wide range of other scholars, to pose an open-ended set of questions about the identity of a dance and the purpose of dance notation. Van Zile questions, for example, how we determine the essential properties of a dance work and how, in a score, we can distinguish between essential and non-essential properties (p. 42).

The papers presented here work to uncover, from a number of perspectives, the constitutive properties of *Dark Elegies*. John Giffin's choreological (1) analysis is taken from his experience in directing *Dark Elegies* from the Labanotation score. Giffin details Tudor's construction of an expressive dance language, use of floor patterns, and non-traditional use of soloists and chorus. Most important is his conclusion that *Dark Elegies* is a choreographer's, not a dancer's, theatre. He believes the emotional power of Tudor's dance is embodied in the construction of the work and that reconstructions should rely on strict adherence to detail and not the interpretation of performers.

Vera Maletic's analysis is predominantly technological and in part choreological. Maletic compares an American Ballet Theatre documentary film of a rehearsal and the Swedish television media "translation" of the dance in two ways. She examines how the documentary and television translation formats affect the perception of essential elements of the dance. She also points out some differences in the performance of the work by the two companies, and outlines the predominant qualities and spatial structure of selected motifs.

My gender analysis of *Dark Elegies* concludes the series of papers. Gender difference is woven deeply into the piece through its narrative structure, movement vocabulary, costumes, and spatial relationships. Tudor

establishes a world where women are locked in grief and men act to dispel grief and heal the *Dark Elegies* community.

The papers presented here are based primarily on the following sources: the Labanotation score prepared by Airi Hynninen during the 1979/80 American Ballet Theatre revival of *Dark Elegies* under Tudor's supervision; the 1976 American Ballet Theatre film documenting a rehearsal; the 1974 adaptation for Swedish Television with members of the Royal Swedish Ballet; and the 1989 Ohio State University reconstruction under the direction of John Giffin.

A number of case studies involving Tudor's choreography influenced our work. Rachel Richardson presented a paper entitled "*Dark Elegies* (1938) Antony Tudor" at the fourth Study of Dance Conference in England in 1986. She analyzed characteristic features of particular sections of the work and discussed the relationship between Tudor's dance and the music score, Gustav Mahler's *Kindertotenlieder*. Michael Huxley's 1988 "A history of a dance: an analysis of *Dark Elegies* from written criticism" provides an overview of critics' interpretations and changes in production of the work as produced in England between 1937 and 1981. Judith Chazin-Bennahum presented a paper entitled "Shedding Light on *Dark Elegies*" at the Society of Dance History Scholars Conference in 1988. She discussed the precedents influencing Tudor's ideas and movement style. David Vaughan's panel at the 1988 Dance Critics' Association meeting explored Tudor's establishment of "psychological space" (see Maletic's discussion below) with examples shown from *Pillar of Fire* and *Romeo and Juliet* (reported in Burns, p. 9). Finally, Muriel Topaz, in her 1988 article "Specifics of Style in the works of Balanchine and Tudor," pursues the issue of style through a close examination of selected phrases from representative works.

#### NOTE

1. The term "choreology" was coined by Laban in the 1930s and was subsequently introduced to American researchers by Gertrude Kurath in the 1950s and 1960s. Kurath defined it both as the science of movement patterns and as the study of dance. See Laban, pp. viii and 48, and Royce, p. 49.

#### WORKS CONSULTED

- Burns, Judy. "The Thread That Ran through the Maze: The 1988 DCA Conference on Space." *DCA News*, Fall, 1988, pp. 9-10.
- Chazin-Bennahum, Judith. "Shedding Light on *Dark Elegies*," *Proceedings of the Society of Dance History Scholars 11th Annual Conference, Feb. 17-19, 1988*, pp. 131-144.
- Goodman, Nelson. *Languages of Art: An Approach to a Theory of Symbols*. New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1968.
- Huxley, Michael. "A history of a dance: an analysis of *Dark Elegies* from written criticism," in Janet Adshead, ed. *Dance Analysis: Theory and Practice*. London: Dance Books, 1988. pp.141-160.
- Laban, Rudolf. *Choreutics*. London: Macdonald & Evans, 1966.
- Royce, Anya P. "Choreology Today: A Review of the Field," *CORD Research Annual VI*, 1972, pp. 47-84.
- Richardson, Rachel S. "*Dark Elegies* (1938) Antony Tudor," in *Choreography: Principles and Practice*. Report of the Fourth Study of Dance Conference, University of Surrey, Guildford, England, 1986, pp. 206-217.
- Topaz, Muriel. "Specifics of Style in the Works of Balanchine and Tudor," *Choreography and Dance*, Vol. 1, 1988, 1-36.
- Van Zile, Judy. "What is the Dance? Implications for Dance Notation," *Dance Research Journal*, Vol. 17, No. 2 and Vol. 18, No. 1, 1985-86, 41-47.