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Voices of Notators: Approaches to Writing a Score - Special Issue

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Abstract

In this special issue of *Voices of Notators: Approaches to Writing a Score*, eight authors share their unique process of creating and implementing their approach to notating movement, and they describe how that process transforms them as researchers, analysts, dancers, choreographers, communicators, and teachers. These researchers discuss the need to capture, to form, to generate, and to communicate ideas using a written form of dance notation so that some past, present, or future experience can be better understood, directed, informed, and shared. They are organized roughly into themes motivated by relationships between them and their methodological similarities and differences. The papers are arranged to reveal four themes present among these authors. The themes are: (1) revisiting notation history to rethink the future understanding of notation, (2) focusing and developing notation so it can function to capture traditions of the movement form being embodied to support accurate learning, (3) working with technology to capture, document, analyze, and research movement; and (4) practitioner's perspectives papers that examine approaches to notating scores to focus the tool of notation to maximize the teaching and learning experiences of the participants and, hence, those who use the resultant scores.

Writing a score of human movement is a type of research, a deep and careful analysis of the inner workings of a human's (dancer, choreographer, pedestrian, etc.) personal expression of the use of body, time, space, and energy. By using written symbols that represent movement concepts, a score creator can translate movement into a symbol-based score that represents what is happening in the movement. By analyzing the themes, ideas, and qualities of the movement, and by organizing those into a form of sharable movement literacy, an author can compose a score that reveals the theoretical underpinnings of the structure, salient features, details, and essence of movement being investigated. Each notator brings her or his own analytical skills to the process of capturing a dance-work or a movement activity and those who use notation can have very different reasons for doing so. Some create notation to understand and communicate about the movement while other create scores to represent movement ideas that can be interpreted in movement. Different purposes and approaches drive people to notate human movement, which result in a variety of outcomes, theories, discussions, activities, and types of documents.

In this special issue of *Voices of Notators: Approaches to Writing a Score*, eight authors share their unique process of creating and implementing their approach to notating movement, and they describe how that process transforms them as researchers, analysts, dancers, choreographers, communicators, and teachers. These eight researchers each discuss the need to capture, to form, to generate, and to communicate ideas using a written form of dance notation so that some past, present, or future experience can be better understood, directed, informed, and shared. Although each of the following eight papers stands solidly on its own merits, I have organized them roughly into themes motivated by my awareness of relationships between them and how readers might experience their methodological similarities and differences. The papers are arranged to reveal four themes present among these authors. The themes are: (1) revisiting notation history to rethink the future understanding of notation, in a paper about vector notation used for choreutics by Jeffrey Scott Longstaff; (2) focusing and developing notation so it can function to capture traditions of the movement form being embodied to support accurate learning, in a paper about T'ai Chi Ch'uan and Qigong by Keith McEwing and a paper by Doris Green about the development of a well-needed traditional African Dance/Music notation system that captures both the dance and music; (3) working with technology to capture, document, analyze, and research movement, in a paper by János Fügedi about best practices for conducting ethnochoreology by notating dances from Hungarian folk dance films and a paper by Zi Hyun Kim and Hedda Lausberg discussing a statistical study using the NEUROGES® system to examine emotional expressions among German and Korean participants when observing two dances, a French ballet (*Giselle*) and a Korean traditional dance (*Sung-Mu*); and (4) three

practitioner's perspective papers that examine approaches to notating scores to focus the tool of notation to maximize the teaching and learning experiences of the participants and, hence, those who use the resultant scores. The focus for these three papers is a constructionist approach to engaging with the notation development and its subsequent use. Valarie Williams' paper explores a reflexive process-at-work while notating choreography being created in the moment by choreographer Bebe Miller. Beth Megill's paper tells how she used Labanotation and Motif Notation to write a score to be used to restage a dance in collaboration with dancers who had never read notation before, revealing a new approach to notating, collaborating, educating, and restaging. Shlomit Ofer shares a teaching-learning method she uses with Eshkol-Wachman Movement Notation using a non-formal, communicative practice of creating self-generated movement symbols that does not require long-term expertise, but results with engagement with notation literacy.

Revisiting Notation History to Rethink the Future

This special issue opens with an article by Jeffrey Scott Longstaff about Laban's vector theory and how it represents motion, as opposed to destinational references of movement. In "Rudolf Laban's Dream: Re-envisioning and Re-scoring Ballet, Choreutics, and Simple Functional Movements with Vector Signs for Deflecting Diagonal Inclinations," Longstaff discusses vector signs, one of Rudolf Laban's methods from his 1926 book *Choreographie*, harking back to a notation system that was a forerunner to Labanotation/Kinetography. Vector signs represent movement as orientations of slopes of lines through space rather than intentions of moving from one point in space to another. Longstaff compares Labanotation direction symbols with Laban's earlier vector signs by looking at differences when simple sequences are scored in both formats. He examines Laban's idea of deflecting inclinations where movements are categorized as mixtures of fundamental contrasting tendencies of dimensional stability and diagonal mobility. Following the discussion of Laban's method, Longstaff aptly applies these signs to re-envision ballet movements, and this is augmented by using the center-of-mass of any limb or coordinative structure as the guide for movement pathways, an approach with ecological validity and promoting greater connectivity. The vector signs are further explored in free-style motifs of simple functional movements. Considerations are then given to how vector signs can be used to envision Laban's choreutics as deflecting diagonal motions, an alternative to the point-to-point method that is often used. Longstaff harkens back to Laban, who persistently expressed a desire for movement to be notated as motion rather than positions. An appendix is provided as a tutorial on reading vector signs,

including several possible translations of each sign into Labanotation direction symbols.

Focusing Notation to Capture Traditions to Support Accurate Learning

Two papers explore the theme of focusing and developing notation so it can function to capture traditions of the movement form being embodied to support accurate learning. Keith McEwing argues for the advantages of having Taijiquan sequences or forms recorded with Kinetography Laban/Labanotation over other various memory aids for learning the martial art. In "White Crane Spreads its Wings and Snow Rabbit Digs the Earth: Kinetograms of Contrasting Styles within Chinese Martial and Meditative Arts of Taijiquan (T'ai Chi Ch'uan, 太极拳) and Qigong (Chi Gong, 气功)," McEwing gives historical information, cultural analysis, and an interdisciplinary perspective about the movement forms. He explains the basic principles of Taijiquan and how these can be best captured in notation, addressing some major challenges and providing excerpts of the Yang Style 24 Hand Form. He also covers the five family styles of Taijiquan (Chen, Yang, Wu (Hao), Wu and Sun) and how Kinetography Laban/Labanotation can be used to compare these styles. It mentions identifying variation in different practitioners of the same style or form and recording Qigong into movement notation. He makes the case for scholarly writing of Taijiquan for comparative research to make new and significant contributions to the wealth of historic writings of Taijiquan and it's enormous potential for usefulness to teachers, students, and practitioners alike.

Doris Green has dedicated her life to creating written documentation for the music that parallels Labanotation of traditional African dances, thus burgeoning a dual system for writing movement and music called Greenotation, after Green. In her article, "The Creation of Traditional African Dance/Music Integrated Scores," Green presents the unique relationship and structures between African dances and music. She explains that the music is associated with the spoken language of the people, which makes it virtually impossible for outsiders to comprehend the music of different African countries as dance and music do not exist without each other. Because for centuries, the dance/music of African people has been passed between generations using and oral/aural process, there was not an emphasis on capturing these cultural forms on paper. Hence, dances and music can be lost due to human error or miscommunication. Green rectifies this dilemma by providing written documentation simultaneously for these dances and music to preserve, and given perpetuity, provide scholarly documentation and access to cultural dance/music forms. These forms could not be accomplished prior to Greenotation because African dance/music lacked a written format. Her

work is unparalleled even in Africa, as given evidence of the many organizations that have adopted her scores in their libraries and archives.

Both McEwing and Green focus on deep analysis of art forms so those who share in performing these traditions can gain deep and refined understanding of art forms due to the focused research and thoughtful notations they have provided.

Working with Technology to Capture and Research Movement

János Fügedi is an ethnochoreologist, who notates traditional Hungarian dances as a way to analyze and understand the vast array of steps and improvised performances. His paper, "Notating Dances from Films: A Method in Hungarian Ethnochoreology," focuses on notation as the primary tool for conducting analysis of traditional Hungarian dances from his extensive experience of analyzing using films. Fügedi details the advantages of notating dances from films, but also the possible obstacles that the notator may face when the only means of movement information is the moving picture. Fügedi describes best practices for doing notation analysis from films with a proposed workflow for how to best prepare manuscripts for completion and clarity. He also offers thoughts about which analytical points of view to consider when dances are notated from film. This article is an essential toolkit for anyone who analyzes movement from films. While the focus in this article is folk dance from historical footage, the information provided could transfer to analysis of any movement in any type of film or video. Much of the information and advice could be transferred to analysis of digital films as well.

While Fügedi focuses on how to cope with old, historical films, in contrast, Zi Hyun Kim and Hedda Lausberg work with a computer system that assists for analyzing body language of those who observe dance, so they can document emotional reactions to dances on film. This approach to movement literacy uses statistical analysis to capture how people from different cultures relate to what they observe. In "Processing Emotional Expression in the Dance of a Foreign Culture: Gestural Responses of Germans and Koreans to Ballet and Korean Dance," Kim and Lausberg researched hand movement behavior of Germans and Koreans during verbal description of their thoughts and feelings immediately after observation of scenes of the ballet *Giselle* and of Korean dance *Sung-Mu*. The hand movements were analyzed with the NEUROGES® system. ANOVA analysis revealed that Kim and Lausberg's hypotheses were partially confirmed. Germans showed a cross-cultural effect for sad Sung-Mu and an in-group effect for happy Giselle, while Koreans showed a clear in-group effect for Sung-Mu. Kim and Lausberg focus on the potential relationship between the cross-cultural versus in-group advantage effects and their relation to the dance

stimuli experienced by participants. Research into aesthetic and emotional reactions to dances are not easy to summarize and the NEUROGES® system is a tool to help us to learn about ourselves. This system may be able to capture some semblance of how we understand ourselves culturally in the moment.

Fügedi aims to understand the complexity of the rich, complex, intricate movements of traditional Hungarian dances using the best possible approaches to dealing with all varieties of film footage and its strengths and weaknesses. In contrast, Kim and Lausberg are using computer technology that advances how one documents and measures body language, which can then be statistically analyzed. The methods serve the intended outcomes, and reveal how disparate approaches are similarly valuable to achieve the research aims.

The next theme focuses on the importance of notation literacy in the studio and classroom, with the artists, and with the learners. The shift here is about taking literacy into action with participants so they can have an experience that reveals more deeply the layers of understanding that a choreographer or teacher, a dancer or a student, has happening in that moment. The notation serves to capture, to evolve, and to question the choreographers and teachers' intentions so that the learners can be present with the process of notating and dancing.

Engaging with Notation for Maximizing Teaching and Learning

The following three articles capture the experiences of notators in the field. They differ in that one is a notator, the second is a notator and choreographer, and the third is a notator and educator who engages her students in a constructivist non-formal practice of using choreography in her classroom to bring literacy to the student choreographers with immediacy. Each is concerned with the contributor being a creative collaborator and a collaborative learner, bringing the voice of everyone involved into the constructivist process of being in community. Each author reveals how being in the process of notating a piece of choreography creates a dialog with the dance being made and informs that practice.

In "Writing Dance: Reflexive Processes-at-Work Notating New Choreography," Williams examines the notator-experience alongside Bebe Miller's choreographic process staging a new work, *Prey* (2000), and the notator's documentation of Miller's dance. The side-by-side processes of the notator-at-work and choreographer-at-work are examined providing a contextual framework for analyzing parallel processes. For Williams, who is the notator but not the choreographer, the notation informs the creative practice. The experiences of the notator-at-work, while the choreographer is making the dance, are a continuous learning event based on personal discovery, reflection, and trial and error revealing that notators often become engaged with the choreographer on a

unique level compared to the times when they are notating works already in existence.

Similarly, in "Choreographing, Scoring, and Setting: A Choreographer-Notator's Dance Literacy Experience," Megill reveals an action research study of outcomes of preparing a Labanotation score of a piece from her repertory for herself to better understand structures and details. She created a simple, distilled version of the score using Motif Notation to give to the dancers to learn sections of the dance. She taught the dance to a group of contemporary dancers, who had never read notation before, by having them read and dance the Motif Notation score. She learned that when the notator is the choreographer, the notation practice often directly informs how the readers—the dancers who receive the scores—grow to understand the way the choreographer thinks about and investigates movement. She describes how the experience provided insights for her as a choreographer, in the process of notating the work, presenting the work to the dancers, and rehearsing the work. She shares her observations and student feedback about notating and teaching from a self-created notation scores and culminates with conclusions about possible pedagogical practices for the future.

In "Self-Generated Notations: A Suggested Methodology of Introducing Movement Literacy," Ofer, who focuses on dancers learning movement from experimenting with their own writings, presents a method aimed at enabling the acquisition of movement literacy in a communicative-creative manner that does not require long-term expertise using Eshkol-Wachman Movement Notation (EWMN). She discusses the notion of movement literacy and its defined components—conceptualization, representation, and kinesthetic performance—as having emerged within the EWMN system. She explores the concepts of constructionism using dance literacy and the independent development of visual representations by learners. She establishes a theoretical basis for a pedagogy using non-formal study, in which students use a process of independently developing movement symbols as part of their dance curriculum to reinforce links between the conceptual, representational, and practical aspects of movement studies. One aim is to emphasize that teachers at the beginning of their professional careers can effectively teach dance notation literacy. Each of these three approaches to teaching and learning is rooted in the desire to develop materials for optimal teaching and learning experiences.

In this special issue, my aim was to share the voices of notators with readers to reveal the range of uses of dance notation, to expand upon how notation and movement literacy inform, and to uncover how authors believe movement literacy can represent intention, span cultural divides, and aim to create dialogue about movement and movement literacy. In these eight articles, authors' voices reveal how literacy can clarify ideas from moments in history, how notation captures whole cultures and historical moments, how literacy can be a tool to

tackle many forms of research, and how notation literacy is a reflexive practice that starts dialogues and informs a community. I hope you will find these voices of notators supportive of your own thinking so they encourage discussion and new inquiries, thus expanding our movement literacy community by sharing the wealth of learning this array of practices provides.

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