

**BABEȘ BOLYAI UNIVERSITY**  
**DOCTORAL SCHOOL OF THEATRE AND FILM**

**Doctoral Thesis Summary**

**Seen Dance. Danced Dance. Created Dance.**

**Choreological Perspectives**

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As I tried to point out through the title of my thesis, *Seen Dance. Danced Dance. Created Dance. Choreological Perspectives*, my research wishes to analyze and bring up to date the triple perspective on the experience of the body. The three points of view – creating, performing and appreciating movement – are not being tracked separately, but through the eyes of the artist which reunites all of these roles. Beyond its analytical mission, my research also represents an attempt to discover my own identity, of locating myself in the Romanian performance arts field and beyond its boundaries. It is a necessity felt by more and more artist today, who, even though are specialized in a certain domain, they tend to question and surpass the limits of the art form they have been practicing. Therefore, practice is the essential way of researching such a fragile domain like dance. Its fragility consists not only in the intangible and evanescent nature of the human movement, but also in the attempt of translating in into words.

For myself, professionally, a license degree in acting and a master degree in choreography have meant the transition from a profession to another, although in both of them the body is the main instrument. The transition to choreography did not mean denying the acting principles after which I used to guide my artistic activities, on the contrary, these two continue to constitute a work foundation, especially in the context of collaborating with actors and students from the acting department. My ways of communicating with them started to become more consistent after my experience of participating in the 2015 edition of the “Dance Summer School”, organized by the “Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance” from London. Thanks to the Choreological Studies workshop that I had the chance to attend and which I frequently reminded about in my entire doctoral thesis, I acknowledged the importance of the ability to analyze movement through the five elements which constitute “The Structural Model of Human Movement”: body, actions, dynamics, space and relationships. They represent the main topic of the fourth chapter of my research, because through the first three I tried to prepare a propitious ground for a better understanding of these concepts. Therefore, I can say that the information I received from the workshop in London represents “the tip of the iceberg”, because a much more profound investigation of the choreological universe is needed until “The Structural Model of Human Movement” is reached. Nevertheless, these first concepts have incited a big personal interest to fathom this fascinating discipline and led me to the two works which lay at the base of my thesis: *Looking at Dances. A Choreological Perspective on Choreography*, written by Valerie Preson-

Dunlop și *Dance and the Performative. A Choreological Perspective*, from the same author in collaboration with Ana Sanchez-Colberg. Both works have been a challenge to me, as a researcher preoccupied by finding a suitable vocabulary for dance, for both the academic field and Romanian theatrical practice. An obvious challenge was translating terms and expressions from the two titles: “looking at dances” and “the performative”. It was quite difficult to find Romanian correspondents for the notions and concepts forwarded by Valerie Preston-Dunlop. They are essential for accurately understanding the core of choreological studies. Thus, I tried to express in words as clearly and as objectively as possible that what actually lies outside language: dance. Therefore, the first chapter, “Appropriate Words”, has the mission to create a suitable language for dance, so that, for what comes next, this language can achieve fluidity, comfortable for every reader.

The choreological perspective on movement represents a paradox for it is giving a highly detailed analytical vision upon a such evanescent phenomenon like dance. Choreological studies offers, for those who desire to distance themselves from their own art and to analyze it in a more objective manner, tools using which a creator may evaluate the semiotic and communicational aspects of his own work. Hence, through this research that I have been making, I proposed myself to address not only choreographers and dancers who desire to enrich their work strategies, but also to all practitioners of performance art, regardless their interest for dance itself. In my practice, I am more and more aware of the type of reasoning and the language used when I try to describe movement. By taking the decision to start this research in the shape of a doctorate in “Performing Arts”, my working processes have become even more impacted by the tools which choreological studies have to offer. If through this research I will succeed to arouse the reader's curiosity about the examples of dance works I have been giving and to enhance his perspective on movement, I consider my mission accomplished. For this, my intention of introducing the term “choreology” in the Romanian academic field remains my highest ambition. It would mean that my work as a creator, performer, spectator and researcher was fruitful.

As far as I am concerned, the transition from actor to choreographer does not represent the only change in my professional identity. It is rather the beginning of a changing artistic existence through taking upon myself various aspects of “serving the stage”: performing, creating, spectating. This triadic perspective through which I see movement across the whole research, which is the main topic of the second chapter, is enriched by that of the teacher of “Corporal expressiveness” in the university field and also by leading workshops and participating to them and, finally, of the artist that loves dance for what it communicates, but also for what it is in itself: form in space and time. Looking at movement as a plain phenomenon and then as a way of transmitting messages is the main concern of this analysis and I have tried to detail it in the third chapter, all of these not being possible without references to seen, danced or created dances. Furthermore, my main focus is on

artistic creations from the past two decades and, considering choreology's interest in the theatrical aspect of dance, I wished to emphasize my preference for dance theatre and physical theatre works. I did not restrain on my own understanding of these two performance art genres, I also embed transcripts of a few interviews which I had the opportunity to take live from some of the most important ambassadors of physical theatre, artist who have had access to the “moments of rupture”, those from which a radically new concept of contemporary dance arose: Hannes Langolf (“DV8 Physical Theatre” Company) and Rob Hayden (“Ultima Vez” Company). I also found it purposeful that, when I analyze a seen, danced or created dance, to insert excerpts from reviews written by critics and journalists specialized in the cultural field. The main reason for this decision is that of adding a side perspective to the theatrical practice of dance, since it lays under a matter of subjectivity. This way, the difference of approach between the point of view of the choreologist and of the art critic upon the same artistic act will be noticeable.

Rudolf Laban, the “artist-researcher”, as he called himself, the central figure of my thesis, the one who set the base of choreological studies in the era of German Expressionism, used to advise his dancers in such a way: “Don't think in words, they separate. Think through the processes of moving, which is unified.” His successor, Valerie Preson-Dunlop, who has dedicated her entire career to perpetuate these studies in the academic field, represents Laban's voice from the present time: “Dancing is feeling-thinking-sensing with imagination.” Imagination is the key to creating that effect of unreality which dance is looking for. It is the core concept that lies behind various movement techniques that arose in past decades. Experimenting with such techniques by participating to various workshops have proved me once again the tight connection between acting and choreography mechanisms. The difference lays in the form of expression, more exactly, in the amplitude through which the body is encouraged to express itself in a dance context. When the body, conducted by imagination, succeeds to overcome its mundane ways of acting, it becomes a portal that leads to a world of fantasy for whom watches it. Rudolf Laban believed in the existence of two worlds: the world of everyday appearances – a space of action – and a world of unseen superior order – the land of silence. For him, dance represented the dynamic flux between these two worlds. Dance is not a message that needs to be told, but an expression of the oscillation between the space of action and that of silence. In the space of silence itself lays that dimension of dance which is situated beyond words. Valerie Preston-Dunlop begins her introduction in *Looking at Dances. A Choreological Perspective on Choreography* by stating that “movement described in words is awful”. Dance is a way in which the body expresses itself that can rarely be explained, because it is a matter of senses, like a complicity between our sensory channels. However, it is important for a performer to try to understand what exactly happens in his mind and body when he moves. He uses an amalgamation of sensations from both inside and outside his physical existence.

Dance may be a manifestation of solitude, of thoughts and feelings which interconnect in our minds. In the same time, it may be a kinesthetic response to what stimulates us from the outside, a dialogue with external factors, perceived through our sensory equipment. Possessing its five senses – visual, aural, tactile, olfactory and gustative – the performer is able to incarnate, through his body, what he perceives “here and now”. Naturally, the first three senses are the most present in the process of embodiment of the sensations which they generate, because they are also the ones that can be shared with those who intercept the movement. Therefore, the creators, the performers and the spectators seek for what can be seen, hear what can be heard and feel what can touch them. It is an availability which manifests itself through attention and curiosity for the surrounding world, characterized by an oscillation between our inner universe and our participation in the present moment. Of such openness must all three entities that participate in an artistic event be capable of, to be able to build “the triple facets of dance”, the main topic of the second chapter and the umbrella underneath which I have set the entire thesis. Furthermore, through the examples of dance works that I have offered, which belong to the theatre dance and physical theatre genres, I wished to emphasize the participative aspect of such creations, which offer more than just plain beauty of the form that the body is capable of. These two performance art forms do not see the body as a simple carrier of meanings, but as an intersubjective identity, which is part of the creative process. This would be the choreological perspective on dance forms which allow the active participation of the audience in the creative act. These types of productions generate a “binocular vision” on dance, which involves creating, performing and interpreting of a performative event, both through the meaning it carries and esthetically, for its expressiveness. This dual perspective, the main topic of the third chapter of my research, desired to emphasize the fact that the narrative layer means much more than just telling a story. It has to be built up of elements which, together, are worth being seen. The concept of “merit”, developed by Roman Jakobson, refers to the sense of value which differs from one person to another, and artistic works that gather several art forms have a much higher potential to stimulate public appreciation. Concerning Tanztheater, as a synthesis of various art forms, Pina Bausch stated: “I intend to speak about life, about ourselves, about what moves us. And these are things about which it is impossible to talk following a certain tradition of dance. Reality cannot always be danced. It will not be neither efficient, nor credible.”

From the creator's perspective, a theatre dance or a physical theatre work may take shape through different processes that start from one or several ideas. Developing them through rehearsals can be a follow-up of a detailed preset plan by the author of the work or a consequence of the collaboration between the members of an artistic team, based on a collective input. In the role of initiator of ideas, I have used both manners of materialization, always molding to the performer's skills, both physically and creatively. By the time I started fathoming the world of choreology, I

used to opt for a “dictatorial” type of process, one in which I would inflict not only the idea and the content, but also the form, a prefabricated movement material that is. This would transform the performers into executors, and their main preoccupation during the rehearsals was that of assimilating my way of perceiving things. Retrospectively, I realize that such a work process inhibits the performers' creativity and transforms itself into a “show and copy” routine. Choreological studies have widened my horizons and enriched my toolbox for being able to express my demands more clearly, so that I can obtain organic material which embodies the ideas I wish to develop through the work. A movement material generated and executed by the performer will always look and feel more personal, it will carry that organic feature which the spectator will perceive, even if he does not know the insides of the processes of creation and performing.

Choreology, “the hidden grammar behind movement”, as Valerie Preston-Dunlop describes it, insist upon its necessary connection to practice. Hence, every creative process, revisited through the “eyeglasses” of choreological studies, implies, in the first place, generating material sprung from a human instinct. Such a process, most of the time, takes place in the rehearsal studio, in that space where the body improvises using its emotional and physical qualities. Developing availability for improvisation, as method of generating movement material, needs constant practice. From the performer's point of view, I did not always have pleasure for improvising. On the contrary, I have looked at it with lack of trust and slightly fearfully because of using chance methods in a performative act. I considered it to be risky not having every movement settled in a very detailed manner, because I did not possess the basic principles after which I could structure a material characterized only by clarity of intention, whichever that would have been. There is a tendency of the unexperienced performer of letting himself overwhelmed by “parasitic thoughts” when he is asked to improvise: “Is what I am doing interesting enough?”, “I wonder what is the opinion of the person watching me.”, “I have made this movement before.”, “I don't know what else to do.” Choreological studies, along with the variety of movement techniques that I have been experimenting and which I described in detail in my research, have brought me a powerful support in the process of letting go of certain perceptual habits and enriching my kinesthetic responses.

Sound, the main topic of the fifth chapter of my doctoral thesis, represents one of the four strands of the dance medium and has the unique quality of making the body move, even to the point of controlling our whole being. Letting go of musical support, an important mission in Rudolf Laban's practice as an artist-researcher, implied changing the way a choreographer and a composer collaborate, giving the body the freedom to follow its organic rhythm. For choreological studies insists upon the fact that movement cannot be seen or analyzed separately from the body responsible of mediating it, in such a performative context, it is even more obvious that, when sensing and feeling become tools for dance, it will be perceived by the spectator in a special way, in

a way that surpasses the boundaries of plain technical appreciation of movement. Besides the performer and the movement material presented in front of an audience, sound and space are the other two components from which dance medium is made of. Both of them represented important sources of inspiration for my own works. Whether there was a certain space created for a certain dance, or a certain dance created for a certain space, which is the main topic of the sixth chapter, space is impossible to ignore, because it essentially contributes to the making of “unreality”. It is a perception game created by the choreographer through different strategies of building transitions from a real world to one of fantasy. The same aspect applies for sound as well, no matter if it is music we rely on, or if we choose a “vocal body” - that breathes, produces noise, delivers text. Sound and space are being debated after the “appropriate words” have already been chosen for establishing a proper vocabulary for movement. Therefore, reading these last chapters should achieve the proper fluidity, especially because they are rich in examples of works already seen from all three angles of the triadic perspective. Even more, the titles found under the different aspects of my research will be perceived in a unified manner, through the “eyeglasses” of choreology. This unity is given by the same perspective through which we can be able to see different creations and to draw relevant conclusions about the way they were conceived by the artists.

Choreological studies, from the performer's perspective, help me see my own dance through the intentions I propose myself to have for every move. Frequently, not having an eye from the outside to judge what I am trying to communicate, I often use the video camera to be able to make comparisons between what I feel in the inside and what is really visible from the outside. Therefore, technology seems to be extremely useful in perceiving one's dance and it is a method which I use also as a choreographer, so that the performers can have a clearer image of what they are doing. In conclusion, with the help of video recording I am able to analyze my own movement and, in the end, to enhance the shape by choreological means, which helps me clarify the intentions behind it. Both methods of appreciation – video recording and choreology – represent “mirrors” for movement and come for the rescue when we feel lost in a labyrinth of desire to communicate too many things at once. This is a tendency of the beginner, who wishes to demonstrate his skills by trying to show as much as possible in a very short time. For being able to perceive accurately the elements from the structure of a movement material, the performer needs to make choices and to overcome the limitations of his sensory equipment. For this reason, current dance techniques, like Gaga or Flying Low and Passing Through, emphasize the importance of making priorities in movement. They always encourage guiding one's self after one single aspect that generates shape in space, and the visual channel has to be alert at all times. This way, space, the last of the four strands in the dance medium and the main theme of the last chapter, is also the most powerfully connected strand to movement. For a body to be able to connect itself to the “here and now”, it needs to have an

awareness of its own physical presence in space. Proprioception, the ability of the body to locate itself according to the space in which it appears, may be considered a sixth sense that humans possess and this sixth sense is, probably, the most valuable tool of a dancer. All the movement techniques I have analyzed in my research are seeking, in a way, to sharpen this sense, to make the one that is moving more lucid and alert, even if they operate with imagination and creating unreality. This is also one of the reasons why these techniques refuse to use mirrors in the spaces where they are practiced. The mirror may be useful in classical ballet or in dance genres which are based on precision of form, because a body that is trained by a certain dance style does not only learn a way of dancing, but also a way of feeling. On the other hand, since the main concern of my research is to study dance as a theatrical practice, movement can not be isolated from the one that embodies it. My opinion is that it is beneficial for a performer to experiment a great variety of movement styles in order to enrich his arsenal of skills, to enrich his kinesthetic responses and to be prepared to react with trust and openness to any kind of artistic vision.

Not only creators are the ones who should develop their availability to perceive the elements of which a performative act is composed of. As a spectator, being open to various forms of artistic expression is, actually, a way of being open to the surrounding world. The habitualness to consume artistic manifestations from a restrained creative area may limit one's comprehensive capacity. Participating to diversity enriches the spectator's cultural knowledge and transforms him into a more objective receptor. In the context of theatre dance and of physical theatre, as creations that erase the boundaries between art forms, such an openness is essential. As a creator, this would be my main mission: to erase the reluctance with which these forms of performance are still looked at in the Romanian artistic field. Through my research, I wished to expose as many examples of such works in order to demonstrate their esthetic and semiotic complexity. As an artist-researcher, Rudolf Laban has created a fusion between study and practice and introduced choreology since the time when he was excelling in the theatre dance domain. He intended to break down the barriers between theatrical practices by asking a key-question: "What if?..." "What if dancers speak as well as dance? What if nudity is used non-erotically? What if behavioral gestures are the vocabulary of the piece? What if music is taken away and the dance finds its own dynamics and rhythm, its own sound track? What if dances are abstract? What if they are political with social comment?" The ways in which Laban questioned his own artistic practice is re-emergent and has the potential to help both practitioners and academicians to reconsider and refresh their vision on their own work. Movement analysis conceived by the artist-researcher may serve his creation in surprising ways, a matter which I noticed from my first interaction with choreological studies at the "Trinity Laban" workshop from 2015. This kind of movement experience may release rational processes that enrich not only artistic practice, but also the creative human potential.



In her work *Dance and the Performative. A Choreological Perspective*, Valerie Preson-Dunlop states that “Choreological study articulates the interconnections between ideas, medium and treatments through both a verbal and a visceral practice. Coming to know how these interconnections work in the studio, what embodying them feels like, what interpretations they offer, and give rise to, are part of choreological practice.” Therefore, I may say that choreological studies help me see, feel and hear in ways I did not acknowledge before I discovered this universe. In the same time, I realize how complex it is, thing that makes me want to dig even deeper and to propose myself, for the near future, to follow a specialized programme in choreological studies to obtain a specialist diploma. The only place in the world that offers such a vocational programme is at The “Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance” of London and it lasts for three years, during which “a team of expert choreologists with diverse interests, experience and expertise offer to those that are interested an environment of intellectual inquiry, movement exploration, creative experimentation and analysis”, as it is explain on the university's official website. I consider that bringing such a specialization would be extremely beneficial for the Romanian academic field, since I already offer choreological tools to the acting students from the first semester of the first year of studies. I intend to perfect my communicational methods in this direction, in order to develop my efficiency in observing such a complex phenomenon as movement. Therefore, my identity as a researcher is, basically, the dominant perspective of my doctoral thesis, it is the identity that succeeds to reunite those from which I create dance, I dance the dance and through which I see dance.

# **TABLE OF CONTENTS**

## **ARGUMENTATION / 5**

## **INTRODUCTION “Movement described in words is awful” / 10**

### **CHAPTER 1. APPROPRIATE WORDS / 14**

- 1.1 The choreological perspective – A Transactional Chronology / 15
- 1.2 Physical theatre – Ideas and medium, content and form / 20
- 1.3 The strands of the dance medium – Performer, movement, sound, space / 26
- 1.4 Does it have a story? Is it worth it? – Narrative and appreciation for itself / 29
- 1.5 Is it with words? – Words and movement in the interest of unreality / 35

### **CHAPTER 2. THE TRIPLE FACETS OF DANCE / 44**

- 2.1 The creator – Democracy and dictatorship, individuality and unification / 45
- 2.2 The performer – Embodiment and corporeality / 51
- 2.3 The spectator – Impression, interpretation and transaction / 64

### **CHAPTER 3. THE BINOCULAR VISION ON DANCE / 72**

- 3.1 Phenomenology and semiotics of dance / 74
- 3.2 The meaning – Codes and conventions / 77
- 3.3 The functions of communication by Jakobson / 83

### **CHAPTER 4. THE STRUCTURAL MODEL OF HUMAN MOVEMENT / 89**

- 4.1 The body – The performer's main instrument / 92
- 4.2 “Actions are what the body does” / 99
- 4.3 Eukinetics – The expressive body from a dynamic point of view / 103
- 4.4 Choreutics – The study of the performer's playground / 116
- 4.5 “space speaks” - The relationship between bodies and its significance / 125

**CHAPTER 5. HOW DOES MOVEMENT SOUND? / 134**

5.1 The use of music – Between rationality and feeling / 137

5.2 Dance for the music or music for the dance? – The collaboration between the choreographer and the musician / 145

5.3 Dancing words – Spoken text as soundtrack / 153

**CHAPTER 6. THE RIGHT DANCE IN THE RIGHT PLACE / 163**

6.1 The empty space and the full space – The collaboration of the choreographer with the scenographer / 165

6.2 Extensions of the body – Costume and nudity, make-up and props / 175

6.3 In a better light – Lightning design, the creator of “emotional temperature” / 185

**CONCLUSIONS. Movement is the the sum of our perceptual habits / 195**

**PHOTOGRAPHIC ANNEX / 203**

**BIBLIOGRAPHY / 238**