

**JOURNAL FOR THE ANTHROPOLOGICAL STUDY  
OF HUMAN MOVEMENT**

AT NEW YORK UNIVERSITY

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## REVIEW ARTICLE

DANCE NOTATION: THE PROCESS OF RECORDING  
 MOVEMENT ON PAPER. Ann Hutchinson-Guest.  
 New York: Dance Horizons, xiv + 226 pp.  
 (Cloth) \$ 29.95

The purpose of this book is, as the author clearly states, to provide an introduction to a wide variety of topics relating to movement notation systems. This it certainly does. Twenty-three chapters provide brief answers to every conceivable question interested listeners could have asked the author during her extensive career as a pioneer teacher of Labanotation and professional notator. It is debatable, however, what purpose is served by a volume which places the superficial treatment of several important issues alongside a pot pourri of practical information.

Hutchinson-Guest's work fails in this instance largely because it is an attempt to introduce practically everything about movement notation systems to everybody and anybody. The end result may be that no one will be satisfied with this book. To the serious student or those with academic interests in fields other than dance and human movement studies, the brief presentation and avoidance of critical discussion will be disappointing and probably frustrating. To those within the field, much will seem redundant.

Despite this major problem, in selected parts, this book is both interesting and informative and provides some illuminating glimpses for the non-specialist into the world of the professional notator. Chapters which draw upon the author's long practical experience with the notating process are written with clarity and include insightful detail.

Particularly important for readers new to movement analysis will be the descriptions in chapters four, five and six, which deal with ways of viewing movement; degrees of specification and various modes of description. Unfortunately, the fact that the author's analytic categories come from the Labanotation system is not explicitly stated. This is misleading to anyone meeting this kind of movement analysis for the first time because other notation systems work upon different kinds of principles. In addition, this variety of categories for observation and enquiry and the ensuing flexibility of description are a particular feature of the Labanotation system which could have been brought out more clearly. Although not addressing anthropological concerns explicitly, these passages will be of interest to anthropologists because they illustrate why Labanotation, with its attention to writing according to the mover's or choreographer's concepts of action is, of all extant notation systems, the one most suited to anthropological description.

The well illustrated historical chapters provide the reader with an overview of the historical development of European movement notation systems. These change from the simple letter-codes which acted as mnemonic devices for social dancers in the 15th and 16th centuries, to the comprehensive systems of the 20th century. One wishes that greater critical attention had been paid to comparisons between these systems, however. Surely, even introductory readers deserve to be given sufficient theoretical discussion and detail to be able to construct a 'map of the territory' for themselves.

Critical presentation of the material is disappointingly absent throughout the book. This probably works against the author's purpose as an educator in addition to compromising the development of this field of study, albeit unwittingly. It is the style of discourse itself which is problematic. The author declines to engage in critical discussion and offers instead what appear to be unproblematic presentations of 'information'. As a result, the book fails to stimulate ideas and raise questions. Nor does it suggest to potential students the important fact that in-depth historical, analytical and comparative study remains to be done.

Several chapters are spent on practical issues, such as how the notating process is carried out, how a score is produced, how choreographic works are reconstructed from notation, the acceptance of movement notation in the dance profession, copyright issues, and movement notation as a career. The chapter on evaluating a system manages to convey in non-technical language some of the complexities of this topic, but again, one wonders to whom it is addressed. The attempt to explain in simple terms here becomes simplistic and the tone rather patronising. In addition, one is left with the uncomfortable feeling that this classification of criteria will be unthinkingly reproduced by generations of teachers and students, rather than subjected to critical evaluation. Although no author can be held entirely responsible for whatever uses are made of published work, it seems to be the case that style and depth of presentation can, on the one hand, promote critical discussion and further the field of enquiry, or it can effectively stultify critical thought by appearing to present the problems as already solved. Unfortunately, Hutchinson-Guest's book tends towards the latter.

By far the worst feature of the book are the author's occasional confused attempts to utilise technical discourse from other areas of enquiry. Particularly problematic in this vein are the frequent references to language, with terms such as "dance language", "language of movement" and "language of dance" scattered throughout the text without clarification as to how such terms are to be understood. The blatant misuse of the term 'semiotics' (p.3) is both embarrassing and confusing, and as to what is meant by "kinetic logic", we are given no explanation. It is also disappointing to find naive definitional statements of the "dance is science" and "movement is life" variety, the fallacies of which were exposed some time ago by philosopher David Best (see "Expression in Movement and the Arts", 1974). This is unfortunate and detracts from much that is of value and interest to non-specialists.

Appendices provide useful chronological and alphabetic listings of the 86 notation systems which have appeared in Europe and America since the mid 15th century. The bibliography also provides a very useful resource for investigators, although it was frustrating to this reviewer to find that the bibliographic reference for the "Anstey comparative project" (chapter 21) had been omitted.

There can be no doubt of the enormous contribution this author has made to the systematic development and use of the Labanotation system. This is her forte and will remain so, hence it is those passages in this book which reflect her tremendous energy and practical experience which can be recommended. The discerning reader may wish to skim over those which reach beyond the bounds of the author's particular expertise.

Brenda Farnell