

5 Folk Dance Research in Hungary: Relations among Theory, Fieldwork and the Archive

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Widespread interest and recognition of folklore, from the late eighteenth century onwards, provided a stimulating atmosphere for the emergence of scientific investigation into folk dance traditions in Hungary. The particular ethos of Hungarian folk dance research, which is shared to a greater or lesser extent with other countries in east and central Europe, has been determined by three specific features: a vigorous and rich traditional dance culture upon which to focus; a well-constructed institutional framework within which to conduct the research; and access to modest technical equipment to support fieldwork and subsequent analysis of the collected materials.

A strict theoretical and methodological model was formulated in Hungary, particularly during the second half of the twentieth century, which focuses mainly upon historical, functional and formal aspects of dance tradition, and which has had a consequential effect upon the concept and conduct of fieldwork. The goal was and is to collect documents of 'authentic folk dance' into an extensive archive and to distribute the knowledge systematically in the form of academic monographs, compendia, type-catalogues and motif-indexes. National cultural policies have aimed to create a homogeneous corpus of new cultural values based on the most genuine, unwritten, vanishing traditions of the folk. Experts from the fields of performance, the arts, education and public life claim to pay strict attention to the most ancient, most national, most adaptable and 'purest' elements of local traditional cultures. These activities of nationalizing, reviving, purifying and rendering the dances archaic have resulted in a specifically shaped, indeed distorted picture of the traditional cultures of eastern and central Europe which, together with international cultural movements and fashions, has gradually reacted upon the dance traditions

themselves. Dance research has made efforts from the beginning to grasp this process in its complexity as objectively as possible (Réthei Prikkel, 1924).

THE FOUNDATION OF HUNGARIAN RESEARCH

The present structure of Hungarian folk dance research had its beginnings in the 1930s, when difficulties in the accurate recording of living folk dance and dance music were perceived as a scientific problem. The most important achievements of this period were systematic filming (Plate 5), transcription and publication of folk dances, first by analytical verbal description (Gönyey and Lajtha, 1937; Molnár, 1947) and later by Kinetography Laban (Gönyey and Lugossy, 1947). The theoretical and methodological framework of this period can be traced in its key publications. Sándor Gönyey and László Lajtha in the dance chapter of the large compendium *Ethnography of Hungarians*, first published in 1937, based their hypotheses and propositions on recently made film recordings which were interpreted in the light of the theory of European dance ethnology and dance history. They drew mainly on Curt Sachs's evolutionist and historical comparative approach and the methods of the Finnish geographical-historical school. For the presentation of the 20 or so dances they used verbal descriptions in parallel with a series of photographs and drawings made after the film recordings. Researchers concentrated on dance motifs which they could identify from the short film shots. Generally, they did not record the dance music synchronously with the dance but frequently documented it on other occasions. This recording method and the improvised nature of most Hungarian dances hindered the development of morphological concepts.

István Molnár's collection, published in 1947, can be regarded as a significant move towards establishing a dance morphology. As a professional dancer and choreographer, Molnár approached dance practically and divided the various folk dances into motifs to arrange them in a motif-catalogue according to their characteristic type of movement (steps, jumps, beating, clapping, and so on). At the same time, he gave a full description of the whole dance process by means of code numbers for the motifs. He filmed and transcribed (in verbal form) source material between 1941 and 1947 in nearly 50 Hungarian villages, including some in Transylvania.

Another book published in 1947 is a modest collection of dances with a short presentation of the ethnographic context. Written mainly for practical purposes by Gönyey and Lugossy, it is interesting from a methodological point of view; about 20 dances collected in the 1930s and 1940s are transcribed in both Kinetography Laban and verbal description. Although the dances are only extracts, and the transcriptions stylized and schematic, this book paved the way to the current situation, where Kinetography Laban is widespread in Hungary and used exclusively in our publications.

After World War II, Hungarian folk dance research became an institutionalized long-term scientific programme supported by the state. A new generation of researchers, building on the past in conjunction with fresh field experience, began to develop new research structures. Able to absorb the most modern and relevant theoretical-methodological concepts offered by contemporary folkloristics, linguistics, ethnomusicology, movement theory and music and dance history, they gradually succeeded in making folk dance research academically comparable in its standards to other branches of folklore study, transforming it into a dynamically developing discipline. In the first period after the war, young researchers concentrated on extensive fieldwork and improvement of field techniques. In the second period, the 1960s, emphasis was transferred to analysis and classification. In the third period, the 1970s, Martin and Pesovár's generation began systematic publication of source material, following the example of folk music and folk narrative research. Currently, the new generation's activity involves implementation of the inherited programme, further development of the conceptual bases for research, computer-aided morphological analysis and a special research programme on individual dancers (Pesovár, 1963; Martin, 1982, 1986; Felföldi and Pesovár, 1997; Pálffy, 1997).

THEORIES, METHODS, APPROACHES

The social sciences have similar methods and techniques for acquiring information: observation, interview, questionnaire and different technical aids such as film, video, audio recorder and the like (Pelto and Pelto, 1978). Differences appear when researchers, due to the diversity of social life, necessarily select and limit the object of their research.

Dancing is a complex phenomenon which has to be studied in its social-cultural-ecological contexts and in its historical perspective. It

demands study in tandem with other synchronic elements such as music, text and other interactive media such as costume and props. In east and central Europe, folk dance researchers focus on the dancing of one social stratum, that is, the peasantry. The main reference point is the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries when dance traditions were relatively vigorous. In our view, the abrupt social and political changes of the later twentieth century caused significant physical and intellectual ruptures which disturbed the manifestation and interpretation of folk dance. These limitations in formulating the object of study derive from the classical concept of folkloristics in which folk dance research is embedded (Martin, 1979b).

The fundamental aim of dance researchers is to depict the most precise picture possible of the 'dancing reality', subject, of course, to the theoretical and methodological paradigm of the period. Hungarian researchers focus on certain basic ethnographic and aesthetic aspects to achieve this aim. We emphasize the social, historical and geographical, which indicates our commitment to the methods of the historical-geographical and comparative-historical schools of research. With regard to the dances themselves, we lay stress on the formal-morphological-structural, the functional-semantic and the musical aspects, which demonstrates our adherence to the morphological schools of European folklore research.

Ethnographic Approaches

Historical perspectives have a long tradition in ethnography and consequently in folk dance research. This tradition stretches from the 'historicism' of Marián Réthei Prikkel (1924), the evolutionist way of thinking and comparative-historical methods of Curt Sachs (1937) followed by Sándor Gönyey and László Lajtha, through the socio-historical approach prescribed by the postwar ethnography, up to the new criticism of historical aspects. Martin and Pesovár's generation conceptualized their historical perspectives in the 1960s in order to create an effective tool to define the historical layers of Hungarian folk dance culture. The core of this concept was the examination of recent folklore in the light of historical sources and vice versa. Within this framework, historical facts provide a wide perspective for the study of change in dance folklore, and contemporaneous folklore practice provides a pattern for the interpretation of fragmentary historical data. In effect, this approach did not generate a new wave of extensive collection of archival materials, but a new type of correlation

between historical and folklore facts. This conception is best represented in the type-monographs which contain the conclusions and data relating to a given dance type (Martin, 1979a; Lányi, Martin and Pesovár, 1983; Karsai and Martin, 1989).

Social perspectives, inspired by folkloristics, were introduced into Hungarian dance research in the 1940s to compensate for the single concentration upon the dance form (Kaposi, 1947; Molnár, 1947; Morvay, 1949). Folklore research offered a comparatively wide range of usable concepts concerning the significance of social context, the interrelation of folklore and community, folklore and individuality, the study of folklore events, the process of socialization in folk culture and the distribution of cultural elements. It is a pity that, at the time, dance researchers were unable to translate these concepts completely into practice and were not able to develop them further. Consequently, the study of social function and the significance of dance gradually became superficial; yet it predominated over other aspects of research. The new generation of researchers in the 1960s re-evaluated the role of social context and placed an emphasis on the formal and musical aspects. They created a more balanced model appropriate to their aims and objectives. Instead of the incomprehensibly wide concept of social function, they narrowed their focus to concentrate on the function of dances in the context of a given ritual or dance event (Martin and Pesovár, 1961, 1963). At the same time, they introduced the principle of individuality by which a dance tradition was to be examined intensively through the concrete practice of individual dancers. Such innovations contributed significantly to improving the social-functional approach.

Geographical perspectives have long been pursued in Hungarian research. They were integral to the 'language atlas' and 'ethnographic atlas' programmes throughout Europe and of the Finnish geographical-historical school. They were introduced into folk dance research in 1947 when researchers established a programme to publish a Hungarian dance atlas. The essence of the geographical approach is to collect standard information from a given geographical region, ethnic territory and frequently a language territory of a nation in order to define the geographic distribution of a folk dance culture. This facilitates researchers in determining the regional variance of the elements of a dance tradition synchronically, to investigate the diffusion of elements diachronically and to make predictions about future dissemination. Work on the folk dance atlas was in progress until the end of the 1950s. It resulted in a systematic exploration of numerous ethnic

groups and ethnographic regions and villages in Hungary. Another outcome was the publication of the material in the form of regional monographs, village monographs and monographs pertaining to a specific ethnic group (Morvay and Pesovár, 1954; Martin, 1955, 1964; Martin and Pesovár, 1958; Belényesy, 1958). Unfortunately, this work was not integrated with the Hungarian ethnographic atlas with the result that folk dance as a research topic was neglected (in contrast to Slovakia and some other places in Europe) in this comprehensive survey of folk culture. In the 1960s, Martin and Pesovár's generation went on to conduct extensive field research in Transylvania and in all the neighbouring countries, but the nature of the geographical approach gradually changed. The previous programme was transferred into an overview of the Carpathian Basin, revealing the features of a special dance zone in Europe. This proved to be a necessary step for the preparation of solid comparative research (Martin, 1965a, 1968, 1979a, 1985).

Dance Textual Approaches

A focus upon formal, morphological and structural approaches is a particular feature of Hungarian and generally of east European folk dance research. It stems from the fact that in our improvised, individual dance traditions, the dance motif (or figure, as it is known colloquially) is the only unit which can be identified at first sight by the observer. Compositional rules and principles of improvisation remain hidden even to an expert. In the nineteenth century this led to the belief that Hungarian folk dances are analytically indecipherable; consequently, it was thought that they could not be mastered and taught by foreigners, that is, by non-native dancers. Generations of researchers have worked to overcome this view, through systematic filming of dances and application of appropriate analytical methods. The main ideas of Hungarian folk dance analysis derive from extensive field experiences, from the different morphological schools of folkloristics (including folk music and folk tales) and linguistic theory (the Prague School). A significant stimulus has been gradually developing research in Hungary into movement theory (Szentpál, 1958; Dienes, 1996).

The principal concerns of folk dance analysis are to identify the various structural units as objectively as possible, to define their relationship to one another, to examine their structural function, and to uncover the rules of their composition into higher structural units.

These factors enable the researcher to delineate the manner and amount of freedom and regulation, that is, the norms of dance creation in the practice of an individual dancer, a local community, a region or a whole dance culture (Martin and Pesovár, 1961, 1963). As the most stable yet basic structural element, the motif has a very important role in folk dance research. The establishment of a repertory of all motifs, arranged in motif indexes according to dance regions, types, individual dancers, and so on, provides an objective basis for large-scale comparison. It should be noted that distinctions between *langue* and *parole*, competence and performance, product and process are not explicit in Hungarian folk dance research, but it does not mean that these concepts are not present in our research (Martin and Pesovár, 1961, 1963; Karsai and Martin, 1989).

Functional and semantic perspectives are derived from study of the social contexts of dances. In the model of Martin and Pesovár's generation, social function and meaning played a subsidiary role, since, as the most rapidly changing aspects of dance, their capacity for formal classification is limited. They are, however, significant in the study of historical changes of dances: Martin and Pesovár selected four factors for attention. First, dance names and folk terminology are extremely useful in ascertaining collective knowledge about dance and may reflect the emotional, moral and mental relation of the community to its practice. Furthermore, such vocabulary may signal the origin and interethnic connection of dances as well as provide a sensitive indicator of changes taking place in such relations. A second social factor is the structure of a dancing community in terms of its participants' number, sex, age, profession, religion, and the like. Investigation of the roles and connections of the community to the individual dancer, for example, of dancer to dancer and of dancer to musician, will reveal a network which can throw light upon how a dancing community operates. Third, the analysis of dance events and dance customs may indicate the temporal, spatial and dynamic features of a community's dance life. The exercise of preferences, prohibition or neglect of particular dances or dance events may reveal explicit or implicit significances. Finally, the approach of Martin and Pesovár's generation to social context included study of the socialization processes within a dance community. These included learning, adoption, transmission, utilization and loss, all processes which may clarify the connection of a dancer or dancing community to a dance tradition or specific dance (Kaposi, 1947; Morvay, 1953; Martin and Pesovár, 1961, 1963).

Martin's focus on the role of music in folk dance analysis and classification owes much in its conceptual formulation to developments in folk music and music history research from the 1960s and comprises independent study of the accompanying music and the relationship between the dance and the music. Behind this approach lies the fundamental principle that the musical factors (metro-rhythmic structure, tempo, affinity to certain schemes of rhythmic accompaniment, the occasional or constant feature of the dance–music connection and the qualitative–quantitative features of connected melodies) are the most stable components of the dance and are very significant in shaping the dance form. Consequently, they cannot be neglected in dance analysis and classification (Martin, 1965b, 1965c, 1979b, 1980; Felföldi, 1995).

Summary

On the basis of the dominant structure of the local dance repertoires and the amount of improvisation versus fixed form, Martin and Pesovár defined three dialects in Europe. In south-east Europe, they noted that the prevalent forms are the collective, semi-regulated round and chain dances. In east Europe and the eastern part of central Europe, individuality and extensive use of improvisation characterize the dominant folk dance genres of men's solo dances and free couple dances. In western Europe, collective, regulated couple dances such as quadrilles and contra dances are widespread. Martin and Pesovár's thesis is that these geographical differences represent fundamental historical changes in European dance culture over the last centuries. Southeastern European peasantry preserved the characteristic features of the round and chain dance fashion which stretched across Europe during the mediaeval period. Most folk dances of east European peoples date back to the Renaissance when free turning couple dances were widely popular. The quadrilles and contra dances, common to west European peasantry up to the twentieth century, have their origin in the eighteenth century. According to historical sources, these dance fashions were initiated by the social elite and spread by all the social strata (nobility, bourgeoisie and peasantry) through their respective channels of communication. This thesis is predicated on the dominant genres and practice of local dance repertoires and excludes from consideration old ritual dances such as the morris dance or *căluș*. Furthermore, the local reality is actually more diverse in Europe. Nonetheless, the general portrait made by Martin and Pesovár does reflect a general actuality (Martin, 1968, 1974).

THE PRACTICE OF DANCE RESEARCH

Dance is an intimate, rarely verbalized sphere of ceremonial (not everyday) behaviour. The credibility of the documentation in such circumstances is endangered by the use of technical equipment, the intervention of the researcher into the event. This is particularly the case with our individual, improvised dance traditions. Furthermore, the observation of dancing is a culturally determined situation in which participants (researchers and informants) are embedded in different cultures, even if they are from the same nation. Of necessity, they interpret the given dance culture in different ways and this emic-etic differentiation is the result of an inevitable subjectivity on both sides. Finally, in such circumstances, researchers must employ multifaceted procedures and equipment to guard against a one-sided methodology. As a result, theory-building is not a straight route from primary observation to hypothesis and general theories.

Fieldwork

The majority of scientific problems are decided in the field. Most primary data on human action in the social sciences are derived from direct observation and recordings of verbal reactions to and examination of the products and results of behaviour. The objectivity of the documents arising from these sources is dependent on the accuracy of decision-making with regard to the basic questions of documentation: who, what, when, where and how.

In order to illustrate the Hungarian approach I summarize the monographic research undertaken in the Upper-Tisza region (Szabolcs-Szatmár county) in 1954–8 (Pesovár, 1955; Martin and Pesovár, 1958). The programme, initiated by Martin and Pesovár's generation, was based on the comprehensive plan and initial activities of the previous generation. It was conducted by the Work Group for Folk Dance Research (around 20 experts) within the framework of the Ethnographic Department of the Institute of Folk Education in Budapest. The general conception was to undertake monographic research in a region which possessed a vigorous dance life and rich repertory of dances and which would facilitate researchers to test the recently raised modern, theoretical-methodological problems. The plan comprised the whole procedure of research from fieldwork through analysis and classification to publication. The phases of the field research were as follows:

1. Preparation of the work through collection of the widest possible range of existing documents, including historical ones from the state archives and written materials from the local press.
2. Pilot research in around 100 locations from the total 234 settlements of the region, with small-duty film apparatus, by individual collectors.
3. Selection of the places for detailed research based on the outcome of the first two steps. The two main criteria for selection were intensity of the dance tradition and the proportional territorial distribution. In order to pursue the second criterion, in some cases, researchers chose villages with a less thriving tradition.
4. Detailed data-collection through interview techniques, direct observation of dances, dance music and the dance life in and out of social context, and selection of key informants for later filming. The work was assisted by research guides and questionnaires (see the Folk Dance Archives of the Institute of Musicology of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences).
5. Full technical recording of the dance repertory in its traditional order in about 50 places by a team of researchers, which included a film operator (regularly a dance folklorist), sound operator (regularly an ethnomusicologist), photographer (usually a dance folklorist) and a notetaker (usually an ethnographer organizing and recording the whole event).

In most cases the filming took place at artificial dancing events initiated by the collectors and organized by local helpers. Dance folklorists had to apply this strategy because traditional dance events are rarely suitable for making a document of full value, fit for formal analysis. On full-length recordings the whole body of the dancer is constantly visible without being hidden by anybody else. At the same time, the whole dance has to be recorded from the beginning until the dancer stops, together with a precise indication of the synchronization of musical accompaniment and movements. Although these artificial events bear some resemblance to the actual ones, they are not suitable for classical functional-semantic analysis. The deficiency of this sort of data has to be compensated for by numerous direct observations of actual events. The procedure was aided by film cameras with electric cells, which made it possible to record 30 metres of film without stopping, in contrast to the previous clockwork cameras, which could record only 5–6 metres. Judging from experience in the

region, this length is enough for the dancer to perform almost the full motif repertory and to use favourite compositional devices. If we record the dance of the same dancer more times on the same occasion and at some later events, we can gain a good idea of his talent (form-repertory, rules of improvization, creativity). This is important particularly in the case of outstanding individuals (Martin, 1979b).

With regard to research topics, collectors made an effort to record the dances of different generations and social groups. In this region the dances of the gentry and members of the lower nobility, as well as those of shepherds and peasants, are distinctive in the dance tradition. The researchers recorded both outstanding and average dancers, together with the youth, who danced the traditional dances in a rich and dynamic form. They paid attention not only to the traditional dance repertory, but also to the social dances and the impact of the professional and the amateur village dance masters. They recorded the dance compositions of the famous Pearly Bouquet, which had been made for ensembles in the region, in order to study the interrelationship of the local tradition and its stage adaptations. Special attention was paid to the dance traditions of gypsies, who are fairly populous in this region and who shared a similar standard of living with the lower strata of Hungarian peasantry. As a consequence, the interrelationship between their dance traditions appeared to be a promising research topic.

6. Supplementary research was carried out in the villages which formed a focus for detailed collection in order to verify the data and to add new information. This work continues to be undertaken with less intensity by the present research generation but with new techniques, such as life history collection, video documentation in the teaching situation and the recording of verbal comments in response to viewing old films.
7. The programme during the five-year research period resulted in 11,000 metres of film, 4,000 photographs, 12,000 pages of written data and 200 melodies on tape-recorder or in written form from 680 informants of nearly 100 villages. Although a significant amount of the collected data has not yet been published, this monographic programme had great importance in the theoretical-methodological development of Hungarian folk dance research (Martin and Pesovár, 1958).

ARCHIVIZATION, CLASSIFICATION, PUBLICATION

Archivization (collection, registration, systematization, storing and conservation) of dance data is an equally important activity of research. In Hungary 90 per cent of the folk dance documents are stored in the archives of the Institute of Musicology of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. It was established in 1950 within the framework of the Institute of Folk Art to collect documents of the revival movements. In 1954 it became scientifically based with systematic collection aimed at the documentation of primary forms of dance folklore. In 1965 the whole collection moved to the Academy on Zoltán Kodály's initiative. Since then it has constituted the basis of the work of the Folk Dance Department of the Institute. The archives include film, written pages of interviews, written field record manuscripts, dance and music notations, motif cards and illustrated catalogues of historical sources containing iconographic, musical and text cards.

The aim of classification is to disclose the relationships which exist implicitly or explicitly among the selected phenomena. The validity of the classes (groups, genres, types, and the like) depends on the fundamental aim. In Europe there are some traditional kinds of classification, using various formal, or functional or mixed criteria, which are also applicable in Hungarian folk dance research.

1. Formal classification is based on the most striking and general formal features such as formation, configuration, floor pattern, number of participants in dance, and so on. It results in classes such as round dances, chain dances, line dances, solos, couple dances, small chorus dances and large chorus dances. This method of classification is most useful in dance research on south-east European peoples.
2. Genre as a class is determined through combining the functional and social criteria with the formal. Men's dances, women's dances, children's dances, mixed dances, amusement dances, skill dances, ritual-ceremonial dances and weapon dances are among the most widespread genres in European dance culture.

The categories of genre and form are useful to characterize longer periods of dance history, or larger geographic regions because the popularity and fashion of the dances are closely related to certain periods of dance history, social formations, dance cultures and dance dialects, as indicated in the earlier summary. The polymorphic character of European dances,

however, hinders unambiguous classification of dances on the basis of formal-functional criteria. Using such mechanical classification, the different forms of the same dances would fall into different categories. To avoid these problems in part, typological principles may be employed.

3. Type consists of a class of dance variants, which belong to a certain formal, functional-semantic and musical framework of dances. In deciding such categories, a complex group of criteria are used in which formal ones are of primary importance. The most important formal criteria are the motif repertory, the structure of a dance and its connection with the musical accompaniment. In the Hungarian dance tradition, Martin and Pesovár identified eight basic types: women's round dances, shepherds' implement dances, jumping dances, Transylvanian lads' dances, slow lads' dances, old couple dances, *csárdás* and *verbunks*.
4. Style as a category of classification is widely used in European folklore research in order to differentiate historical layers. In Martin and Pesovár's practice, folklore dances whose historical parallels can be traced from the eighteenth century back to the Middle Ages belong to the old stylistic layer. Our new style dances date back to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Thus, style constitutes the highest category of classification for our dances, which embraces all the type families, types, subtypes and groups of variants. Other kinds of stylistic categories such as individual style, collective style and motivic style are not accepted in Hungarian folk dance research because of their lack of terminological precision (Pesovár, 1965; Martin, 1970, 1979c, 1983).

CONCLUSION

Fieldwork is an integral part of great significance in the whole procedure of folk dance research; it cannot be conducted in isolation from other elements of the practice of dance research. Its methods and ideas depend on those of the whole discipline. Its aims and objectives are generally in accordance with the aims and objectives of other fields of social interest in traditional dance (art, education, popular culture, and so forth). Following this approach, a new generation of Hungarian folk dance researchers has invested much time in gaining the necessary field experience and theoretical and methodological orientations in order to continue the programme inherited from previous

generations. The central tasks determined by current researchers are the further development of conceptual bases for research with computer-aided morphological analysis and a special research programme on individual dancers. This enables them to progress both in the direction of extensive comparative research and in the intensive study of dance creation as a cognitive, psycho-physical process. In this programme, fieldwork remains an important phase of research enriched by new techniques and methods of intensive case studies.

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