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## György Martin's Method for Analyzing Dance Structures

In the modern age of art theories, from about the middle of the nineteenth century until the second third of the twentieth century, parallel with the emergence of human sciences, the act of creating conceptual content focused primarily on the forms of art, generating several approaches to meaning. Research in the arts followed linguistic theory of the time, intended to look behind the surface to discover deep structures and functionalities. Dance theory, as usual, lagged behind new trends even in the field of music similar in ephemeral abstraction. Toward the end of the period of modernism, Hungarian ethnochoreologists—possibly the first in traditional dance research to do so—put forward a special approach to the structural analysis of dance.<sup>1</sup>

Two highly elaborated analytical papers were published, almost at the same time, at the end of the 1950s and the beginning of the 1960s. Olga Szentpál released her paper “Versuch einer Formanalyse der Ungarischen Volkstänze” (“An Attempt of a Form Analysis of Hungarian Folk Dances”) in 1958;<sup>2</sup> György Martin and Ernő

<sup>1</sup> Why the Hungarians? After World War II, the research of traditional dance was strongly supported politically and economically in all of the countries in the Eastern or communist block of Europe; beyond Hungary, fieldwork, filming, collecting and archiving traditional dance was also well subsidized in Romania, Bulgaria, Slovakia, the German Democratic Republic, and, of course, in the Soviet Union. I suppose the theoretical advantage of the Hungarian research can be, in large part, attributed to the fortunate and wise foresight of Olga Szentpál, the founder and leader of a highly respected modern dance school in the 1930s and 1940s. Szentpál introduced the dance notation system Kinetography Laban, which was both detailed and reliable enough for unambiguous reconstruction of dance, into the curriculum of her school, and applied it in her research as well. The early use of this comparatively new system of dance notation with its well-established system for movement analysis in the Szentpál School plays a key role in the fact that kinetography later became widely accepted in the Hungarian dance research. Education in kinetography received broad institutional frames during the new political era and was accepted as a subject into the curriculum of higher education, such as that of the Színházművészeti Főiskola (Academy of Dramatic Arts) and the Állami Balett Intézet (State Ballet Institute). The new generation of Hungarian traditional dance researchers, such as György Martin, Ernő Pesovár, Ágoston Lányi, Mária Szentpál, Emma Lugossy, acquired professional knowledge of the system that made them capable of investigating dance at the single movement level needed to introduce their brand new theories in the form analysis of dance. The use of a reliable and at the same time generally accepted and applied notation system makes the results of analysis controllable, especially if the original source, the films from which the notation was made, is available as well.

<sup>2</sup> Szentpál 1958.

Pesovár's methodological sketch on the structural analysis of Hungarian traditional dances was published in Hungarian in 1960, then in English in 1961.<sup>3</sup> Both papers focused on the identification of motifs and structures, but their conceptual approach was definitely different. As stated by Martin and Pesovár, Szentpál analyzed dance "relying on choreographical factors independent of the accompanying music;"<sup>4</sup> while, in contrast, Martin and Pesovár's underlying concept was to define the structure of the dance in reference to the close relationship between music and choreography.<sup>5</sup> This commitment may be rooted in Kodály's encouragement of Martin, and the expectation that he continue the investigation of relations between music and dance, already started but dropped by János Seprődi and Béla Bartók.<sup>6</sup>

Martin and Pesovár mention ethnomusicology as one of the theoretical backgrounds for their concepts; what is more, they consider that the "terminology used in musicology and in linguistics readily presents itself for use in dance research."<sup>7</sup> Following Bartók's directions for analyzing and systematizing Hungarian folk songs,<sup>8</sup> they agreed that structure "has the greatest significance in the classification" of historical layers;<sup>9</sup> the historical layers of Hungarian traditional dances were also a central concern of Martin and Pesovár's work in the field of ethnochoreology.<sup>10</sup>

The other influence on Martin and Pesovár's approach stems from a nineteenth-century linguistic concept, the unit of speech. Searching for the structural units of dance, Martin and Pesovár state as a start that the "smallest indivisible unit of the movement is termed in our analysis kinetic (or motor) element or motion"<sup>11</sup> and add that

<sup>3</sup> Martin–Pesovár 1960; Martin–Pesovár 1961 (Martin–Pesovár 2020/8).

<sup>4</sup> Martin–Pesovár 1961: 2, footnote 3 (rephrased in Martin–Pesovár 2020/8: 354, footnote 3). We have to add that Olga Szentpál did have a strong background in musicology, she matriculated as a pianist at the Hungarian Music Academy. She indicates in her paper that when she elaborated her method, she took into consideration the folk song analysis of Béla Bartók and Zoltán Kodály (Szentpál 1958: 259). Throughout her analysis, she constantly compares the dance and musical structures, especially in her two samples, where the synchrony of dance with music was established. However, Szentpál elaborated a highly detailed analytical approach to modern dances as early as the 1930s, where one of the focuses was the development of a form theorem that dealt with the structure of dance (Fügedi–Fuchs 2016: 9). Dance study in that era looked for new approaches in creating new dance, and one of the main concepts was to "liberate dance from all extraneous influences, particularly those of music and drama" (Maletic 1987: 6).

<sup>5</sup> This statement is given only in their paper published in Hungarian (Martin–Pesovár 1960: 213) and is missing from the English version.

<sup>6</sup> Martin 1978: 210 (Martin 2020/10: 467).

<sup>7</sup> Martin–Pesovár 1961: 4 (Martin–Pesovár 2020/8: 355).

<sup>8</sup> Bartók 1924.

<sup>9</sup> Martin–Pesovár 1961: 3 (Martin–Pesovár 2020/8: 355).

<sup>10</sup> See more on historical layers of Hungarian traditional dances in Pesovár 2019.

<sup>11</sup> Martin–Pesovár 1961: 4 (rephrased in Martin–Pesovár 2020/8: 356).

the kinetic element is a phenomenon essentially analogous to the smallest indivisible linguistic unit, the speech sound. The speech sound (phoneme) cannot be divided into smaller independent units, yet the phases of articulation can be analyzed.<sup>12</sup>

They differentiated, however, the concept of kinetic element and motif element: "Any distinct one-member fragment of a motif in the dance, i.e., a kinetic element, is termed a motif element."<sup>13</sup>

Martin recognized early the importance of basic units in dance analysis. In a manuscript, he declared that understanding the structure of dance requires the identification of motifs, therefore, the structure of the motif is just as important as that of the whole dance.<sup>14</sup> He intended to investigate motif structures from a quantitative and qualitative point of view. Quantitative aspects refer to the number of kinetic elements in a motif. The qualitative aspects are formed by two factors: 1. the structural complexity of the motif and 2. the structural openness or closure of the motif as a composition.

Martin raised the idea of motif roots (also a concept similar to the root of words, a morpheme in linguistics) as early as 1959; the concept was elaborated in his work on motif morphology, in which he identified the motif root as a structural element of dance that represents the essence, the motif core.<sup>15</sup> Martin's later dance analyses and motif classifications in his monographs such as the *Lőrincréve táncélete és táncai* (*Dance Life and Dances in Lőrincréve*) and the *István Mátyás* volumes were based on the concept of motif root.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Martin–Pesovár 1961: 4 (Martin–Pesovár 2020/8: 356).

<sup>13</sup> Martin–Pesovár 1961: 5 (Martin–Pesovár 2020/8: 357). László Felföldi mentions, in his article "Structural Approach in Hungarian Folk Dance Research," Martin and Pesovár's determining influence on the theoretical work of the International Folk Music Council's Study Group for Dance Terminology (later ICTM Study Group on Ethnochoreology). Felföldi writes: "Due to the previous analytical work of all the participants, they [Martin and Pesovár] had to make serious compromises in order to create a coherent and unified text for the final document, the 'Syllabus.' This is why the applicability and reliability of the 'Syllabus' became limited as a 'universal' analytical system" (Felföldi 2007: 159). Martin's concept of motif element is missing from the Syllabus. In a revised version of it, written by Anca Giurchescu and Eva Kröschlová, the motif element is mentioned as a distinguishing analytical concept (Giurchescu–Kröschlová 2007: 29). However, according to the attached sample analysis, the notion of the motif element, as understood by Giurchescu and Kröschlová, is significantly different from Martin's concept.

<sup>14</sup> Martin 1959: 4.

<sup>15</sup> Martin 1964: 72. It seems that chronologically Ray Birdwhistell was the first to draw a parallel with the linguistic concepts phoneme and morpheme and human communicative gestures (Birdwhistell 1952). Ten years after Martin and Pesovár's structural analytical paper, Adrienne Kaeppler also introduced a dance analytical approach, in which she compared the units of dance movements to phonemes calling them kinemes and basic dance structures to morphemes as morphokines (Kaeppler 1972: 177–202).

<sup>16</sup> Karsai–Martin 1989; Martin 2004.

Martin and Pesovár applied structural terms in their system of analysis, including motif, sequence (to the pattern of a musical line), *caesura*, and cadence; these are similar to those used by Bartók. Bartók did not feel it necessary to define his terms and concepts because these were already in use and well established theoretically in musicology by the first third of the nineteenth century. These concepts, however, when applied in dance, especially that of the motif which both Szentpál's and Martin and Pesovár's approaches regarded as the central issue in the analysis of dance structures, needed understanding appropriate to the characteristics of movement.

The strong attachment to structures of the accompanying music can be recognized in Martin and Pesovár's analytical approach as they established the larger units of dance. Their concept of segmentation was the identification of different cadences, such as the complete cadence, semicadence, pseudocadence (similar to a plagal cadence), and *ceasure*, all existing already in musicology, to which they added the notions of suggested and uncertain cadences. These distinctions were based on both the differentiation of movement content in the flow of dance and its relation to the music.

The purpose of establishing smaller and larger units of dance was "to gain a comprehensive picture of the structure of dances and to compare the structural properties of dance types," for this analysis, as they added, "a schematic abstraction of the concrete forms is indispensable."<sup>17</sup> For a condensed representation of dance structures, they applied formulae. Their formulae included graphic and textual elements, some similar to the ones Bartók used, such as boxes for cadences, but capital letters indicated tunes (not musical lines, as in Bartók's analysis), small letters stood for these melodic lines, and several other graphic symbols appeared, such as dotted lines and arcs with arrows. The formula was expected to present two flows of events inherent in a dance, that of the music and that of the dance, where the structure of dance was related to that of music. If the reader was familiar with the dances and became accustomed to the special indications, both the construction of the dance as compared to the musical structure and the inner motivic richness of dance could be deduced immediately. Unfortunately, the use of these highly complex and complicated structural formulae found few proponents, and even Martin later abandoned this practice and changed his focus in structural investigations to the motifs of traditional dance.<sup>18</sup> A decade after Martin's death, leading folklorist Vilmos Voigt evaluated Martin and Pesovár's structural approach as "the most important theoretical exper-

<sup>17</sup> Martin–Pesovár 2020/8: 363; the original text in Martin–Pesovár 1961: 11 is rephrased.

<sup>18</sup> However, Ernő Pesovár followed the practice of establishing the structural formula of dances until his late works. See, for example, Pesovár 1961; Pesovár 1980; Pesovár 2003.

iment of Hungarian folklore research in its time,” and added that the contemporary research did not appreciate the merits of their efforts.<sup>19</sup>

Martin and Pesovár regarded motif classification and the production of catalogs as “indispensable for comparative and historic dance ethnology,” therefore, their paper on the determination of motif types attempted to outline the principles for creating a “motif dictionary.”<sup>20</sup> The recognition of dance types remained one of their main goals, which—they discovered—could not be established by the structure of the dance itself. They reason as follows:

The dance motives constitute the most important factor in recognizing the various dance types, in determining their morphologic characteristics and in their comparative study. The structural peculiarities of a dance process and the structural principles governing it vary within one dance type whereas the affinity of motives correlates dances that may be different in structure.<sup>21</sup>

For them, a key question was the basic principle by which the systematization of motifs can be achieved. Because “in Hungarian folk dances the body weight is carried by the legs,” they decided that “the recognition of the motive-forming function of the support structure and its application may serve as a starting point for determining and classifying the motive types.”<sup>22</sup> To elaborate an indexing system, they identified three types of change of support: from one leg to the same (indicated by number 1), from one leg to the other (indicated by number 2), and double support, independent of which leg the support is changed from (indicated by number 3).

They intentionally chose to disregard the movement context of a motif in dance: “In compiling the support index, the motive is looked upon as an independent unit, isolated from the dance process.”<sup>23</sup> This approach led to certain ambiguities for classes VIII, X, and XIII, in which some motifs were identified by two indices, that is, the seemingly same pattern was classified differently. The significant conceptual difference between starting a motif with the change of support from one leg to the other or with a repetition of the same support as a result of “the mode of repetition,” whether the motif was repeated identically or symmetrically in the dance, had to be taken into consideration.<sup>24</sup> This indicates an inconsistency in theory: the context of a motif in dance could not be consequently disregarded.

The motif repertoire in which they exemplified the theory was selected from the *ugrós* dance type. Apart from the above-mentioned obstacles, the support structure

<sup>19</sup> Voigt 1993: 31. Voigt also mentioned Martin's volume titled *Motívumkutatás, motívumrendszerezés: A sárközi-dunamenti táncok motívumkincse* (Martin 1964).

<sup>20</sup> Martin–Pesovár 1963: 295–296 (Martin–Pesovár 2020/9: 405).

<sup>21</sup> Martin–Pesovár 1963: 295 (Martin–Pesovár 2020/9: 404).

<sup>22</sup> Martin–Pesovár 1963: 299 (Martin–Pesovár 2020/9: 408).

<sup>23</sup> Martin–Pesovár 1963: 300 (Martin–Pesovár 2020/9: 410).

<sup>24</sup> Martin–Pesovár 1963: 304 (Martin–Pesovár 2020/9: 414).

of motifs (complemented with the number and rhythm of support and the quality of composition) as the leading concept of systematization worked well, supposedly because in *ugrós* dances each movement unit is usually a support movement, whether accompanied or not by a gesture of the other leg. At the end of the paper, the authors charted a course for future development: to “proceed to a more comprehensive systematization and include the motive types into larger units, such as would be the family of motives,”<sup>25</sup> which could be based on “common elementary motive cores” to build a catalog of motifs.<sup>26</sup> And indeed, later on, when Martin attempted to classify motifs of the Central Transylvanian fast male dance, the *legényes*, he regarded the motif core, at that time referred to as the motif root, as the base for the new principle of classification.<sup>27</sup>

The reader may realize that the authors took the notion of both the motif and the motif type for granted, as no direct definition is presented in their papers. The motif is identified only as “the smallest and relatively constant organic units of the dance,”<sup>28</sup> and a reference is given to the notion of motif applied in the field of folk poetry.<sup>29</sup> However, the cited paper refers back to Olga Szentpál’s definition mentioned previously. We may conclude that at the time of publishing their papers with these new approaches in dance morphology, Martin and Pesovár were in accord with Szentpál’s motif definition. Later on, Martin published his highly detailed, already cited, version of the contemporary understanding of Hungarian traditional dance motifs.<sup>30</sup>

Martin pays detailed attention to the “improvised and individual character and unregulated structure of Hungarian folk dances” in his paper titled “Improvisation and Regulation in Hungarian Folk Dances.”<sup>31</sup> He approaches the practice of improvisation by investigating the structural characteristics of dances that he regards as important for the whole European dance culture because the East European phenomenon “elucidates one of the significant periods of the development of European dances.”<sup>32</sup> He calls attention to the fact that the accidental eventuality manifested in the improvisation of Eastern European dances is only illusory because “improvisation is always preceded by long practice and every instantaneous improvisation is assimilated to the series of more or less different earlier variations” of earlier performances.<sup>33</sup> He presents three main forms of dances, the solo, the couple, and group

<sup>25</sup> Martin–Pesovár 1963: 307 (Martin–Pesovár 2020/9: 418).

<sup>26</sup> Martin–Pesovár 1963: 307–308 (Martin–Pesovár 2020/9: 418).

<sup>27</sup> Karsai–Martin 1989: 76.

<sup>28</sup> Martin–Pesovár 1963: 296 (Martin–Pesovár 2020/9: 405).

<sup>29</sup> Ortutay 1959: 209.

<sup>30</sup> Martin 1964.

<sup>31</sup> Martin 1980: 391 (Martin 2020/11: 475).

<sup>32</sup> Martin 1980: 393 (Martin 2020/11: 478).

<sup>33</sup> Martin 2020/11: 478; the original text in Martin 1980: 394 is rephrased.

dances, and introduces the possibility of freedom for improvisation. Then, he investigates the structure of different Hungarian *legényes* dances, in which both phenomena, regulation and improvisation, could be demonstrated in one dance type. He reveals the fixed underlying structure defined by the musical structure of a period and points out the stability or diversity of motifs within their opening, middle, and closing functions in a musical period.

Similarly to the first two papers in this section, Martin avoids a direct definition of the key concept of the study, in this case, what improvisation means in his approach. It can only be deduced that improvisation refers to the changing sequence of motifs, and due to his devotion to comparing dance and musical structures, little attention has been paid to another aspect of folk dance, the concept of motif creation.

Even though one of Martin's focuses from the 1960s was on the structure and motifs of Hungarian traditional dance, there is no direct trace of the effect of the ruling theoretical influence of the age, the structuralist approach, on his theories. The mention of oppositions regarding the variations of dance cycles in his paper titled "A táncciklus: A néptánc legnagyobb formai egysége" ("The Dance Cycle: The Largest Form Unit of Folk Dance")<sup>34</sup> may hint at the theory of binary opposition as introduced into ethnography by Claude Lévi-Strauss.<sup>35</sup> Martin presents three main oppositions.<sup>36</sup> One is the opposition of dance genres when male and couple dances are performed one after the other in the cycle. The other is the opposition of the metrical and tempo differences of dance, the slow-quick pair. And the third, that dances performed in a cycle stem from different dance historical strata. Apart from the latter, which does not really represent an opposition since strata are differentiated by researchers, the first two seem phenomena that are rather contrasting than opposing ones.

A hindrance to the application of the linguistic approach to dance is that it overtly simplifies the high complexity of human movement potential based on single units divided sequentially by timing, the units of rhythm. As explained in meticulous detail, Martin and Pesovár considered the simultaneous movements of supports and gesture, definitely different in spatial representations, as a single kinetic element.<sup>37</sup> Several subsequent papers followed this view, such as the Syllabus,<sup>38</sup> Kaeppler,<sup>39</sup> Dabrowska and Petermann,<sup>40</sup> Giurchescu and Kröschlová.<sup>41</sup> Martin maintained this compound unit-view up to his later works, such as in his monographs on the motifs

<sup>34</sup> Martin 1978 (Martin 2020/10).

<sup>35</sup> Lévi-Strauss 1955.

<sup>36</sup> Martin 1978: 201 (Martin 2020/10: 454–455).

<sup>37</sup> Martin–Pesovár 1961: 4 (Martin–Pesovár 2020/8: 356).

<sup>38</sup> "Foundations" 1974.

<sup>39</sup> Kaeppler 1972.

<sup>40</sup> Dabrowska–Petermann 1983.

<sup>41</sup> Giurchescu–Kröschlová 2007.

of the Sárköz-Danube Region,<sup>42</sup> and on *legényes* dancer-individualities.<sup>43</sup> Other researchers have discussed that movement phenomena, such as support and gesture, can run parallel to one another, and it is worth investigating them separately. In respect to the vertical motion of the body, Egil Bakka focused on up and down changes separately from the pattern and movement types of motifs.<sup>44</sup> It has been discussed only recently that a single movement of even one body part may include several expressively significant spatial changes within the same rhythmical unit and that they may form distinct parallel sequences of movement events.<sup>45</sup> Certain tensions and contradictions in motif classification by Martin can be attributed to disregarding these special characteristics of dance.<sup>46</sup>

Martin and Pesovár played a pioneering role in the structural analysis of traditional dances, and the subject attracted the central attention of research in Europe in the 1960s and 1970s. The initial endeavor, however, was exhausted by the 1980s; the promising studies were not developed further; they found no or very few followers, and those were mainly in Hungary. The reasons may be diverse: one may be that such research needs a high-level of movement analytical knowledge, but the training to acquire this at a professional level has not been included in the curriculum of any university. It can be assumed, as well, that at the time when structural linguistics was a leading research paradigm in human sciences and the rapid emergence and popularity of dance anthropology, the structural investigation of dances did not achieve the expected convincing results. The recognition of the construction of national social dances from simple and highly regulated structures is evident, as it is easy to reconstruct them; detailed analysis is not required.

The investigation of dances with improvised structures needs, on the one hand, dance recorded in a well-established notation system and well-trained notators, a knowledge that can be obtained only with long years of practice; on the other hand, the notation of such dances takes a considerable amount of time. Furthermore, the classification of elements and interpretation of the structure of improvised dances with low-level composedness are still uncertain because well-established methods, tested and applied to a wide variety of dances, have not yet been developed; Martin and his colleagues laid down only the foundations. Still, it can be stated with certainty that Martin created a discipline that can be followed even today. Although Martin was not a “structuralist” in the sense of the 1960s, his approach resembles

<sup>42</sup> Martin 1964.

<sup>43</sup> Karsai–Martin 1989; Martin 2004.

<sup>44</sup> Bakka 1970. The direction of vertical motion in relation to the main beat of the music was also taken into consideration by Martin as a possible aspect of separating regional characteristics.

<sup>45</sup> Fügedi 2020: 291–293.

<sup>46</sup> Fügedi 2020: 295–296.



structuralism as a research paradigm; he was also in search of the abstract structures of dance, even if this work had to be started at a more primary level in comparison to that needed in linguistics and music. It is without doubt, however, that Martin established the Hungarian school of ethnochoreology based on analytical-comparative methods and dance literacy.

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