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DANCE RESEARCH: TRANSFERENCE AND TRANSFORMATION

LARRY A. GABAO

College Professor

Presidential Assistant for Cultural Affairs

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Exhibiting evidences or skills to a research, specific to an area called *dance*, does not seem to have set a place among dance practitioners. In the Philippine school setting, *dance* is an activity offered in Physical Education, a curricular subject, whereby students participate in learning rhythm or in interpreting the *folkdance*. More often than not, the activity focuses only on the movement and less discussed are its nature and background. This paper intends to explore how and why *transference* plays a factor in defining the dance research.

The other purpose of this presentation is to discuss how a research material is utilized for staging or performance for viewing purposes. Its framework stresses the importance of dance research on the basis of looking at the source from its original form to video document, to paper and pencil written description and transcription, to oral and voice recordings and finally, to transformation as artistic produce. It will also formulate a theory on the argument regarding the usage of authentic *dance* which many have vague understanding of. As shown in Figure 1, the framework presents dance research trajectories in terms of transformation process of the research material from the transcribed instruction, to the use of video, to the stage. Thus, create an end point of having a book as reference, instructional video as another source, and performance for viewing purposes.

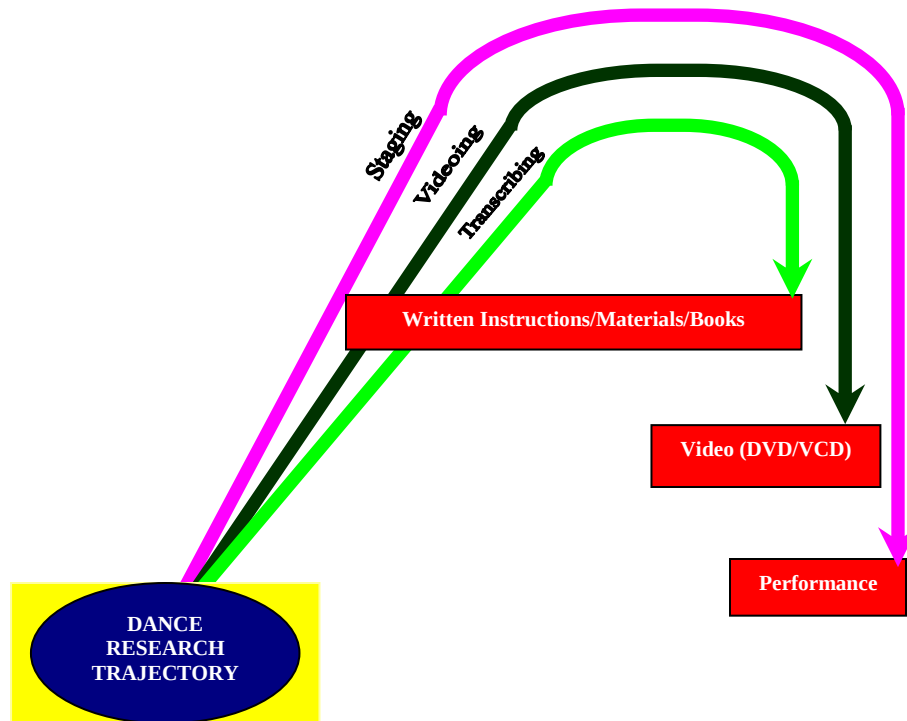


Figure 1. Theoretical Framework on Dance Research Trajectory

During the 1997 SEAMEO-SPAFA Symposium on the History of Performing Arts in Southeast Asia on June 17-24 in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, this researcher presented a paper entitled "Staging and or Performing Indigenous Dance: Conflict of Interest." It highlighted the status of dance as a performing art in the Philippines and in the other member nations of SEAMEO. This researcher concluded that no one holds the claim regarding authentic evidence. Dr. Anis Mohd Nor, the current president of the World Dance Alliance Asia-Pacific, revealed in his paper

similar argument regarding authenticity by picking a closer word *autochthonous*, a word derived from a Greek word meaning “sprung from the earth,” implying that it has no universal, standard or fixed definition, but can be used to refer to indigenous ownership in a narrow sense. In dance, this could easily be referred to any culturally constructed movement systems performed by a particular community, recognizable movement entities construed as belonging to or emerging from the roots of their cultural heritage, original, unique, and unusual. Furthermore, Dr. Anis supports the contention that “autochthonous dances are too difficult and elusive to define, when the beholders themselves are the product of synchronic-syncretic entities fused into processes of assimilation juxtaposed by cross-cultural traffic and marital exchanges.”

Hence, this paper attempts to center on using a raw dance research conducted by this presenter on the hillside of Lake Sebu in South Cotabato in 2005 with his graduate students from Sultan Kudarat Polytechnic College in South Cotabato. The activity was a hands-on test on the students’ ability to apply the theories of Dance Research as a component in their Physical Education course called Applied Dance and the research of this presenter on the Manobo culture of Agusan del Sur and its dances.



Figure 2-A. The T'boli Community of Lake Sebu, South Cotabato (2005)



Figure 2-B. The T'boli Community of Lake Sebu, South Cotabato (2005)



Figure 3. The Documentation Process



Figure 4. The Manobo Culture (1990)

TRANSFERENCE A

Gathering of data for an assigned topic for research entails planning, organizing and networking to immediately find out the feasibility in conducting the activity. Admittedly, the research proper of documentation in the field is difficult and expensive. Before, the research legitimate contact persons and relevant office or organization needed to be part of the plan. In the case of direct dance research, the concerned office in the local government or the community leader like the barangay captain has to be notified or requested. This can be done more formally by asking permission or by a visit via written communication ahead of time. This may ensure security and safe passage or entry into the community.

A highly socio-personal approach in the initial visit allows an atmosphere of acquaintance and familiarity of the place, people, way of life and others. The researcher must be equipped with requisite research tools (i.e. questionnaire, biographic interview instrument, socio-economic status interview guide and others) to maximize all efforts, time and money even during the first or initial visit. Normally, the initial visit is purely socialization, but slowly, one can already introduce the main intention which can also pave the way in securing information and basic data needed. The socialization may include photo session for initial documentation and definitely something to be given away. Tokens sometimes help promote better relations in future visits.

The first transference using paper-pencil tool for documentation that lead to any written material output becomes the most tedious work in the pre-research. The researcher must have mastered the basic skills for describing, annotating or translating the visuals into words to achieve the desired documentation. A required training for movement analysis and appropriate choice of words or adapted terminology to describe

the action or movement demands careful application. This is to safeguard and protect the original material being transferred.

In today's technological assistance, handily one can capture movement details through universally used notation systems such as Labanotation or Kinetography Laban and the Benesh notation that have available computer programs. Both systems use signs and symbols to translate body movements to a more accurate notation. Arguments are still at hand among dance practitioners on the usability of these systems regarding the transposition of movements into signs and symbols which non-trained or non-schooled for the systems find difficult and cumbersome. This researcher has been through it as the Filipino scholar of SEAMEO-SPAFA together with 11 more others from Southeast Asian member countries. The grant to study the notation system under the tutelage of internationally known experts was to help each nation to adapt notation system in documenting more difficult movements untranslatable by words (luckily this presenter passed the Elementary, Intermediate and Advanced courses). A sample score is presented in the publication of the Unipress of Nanyang

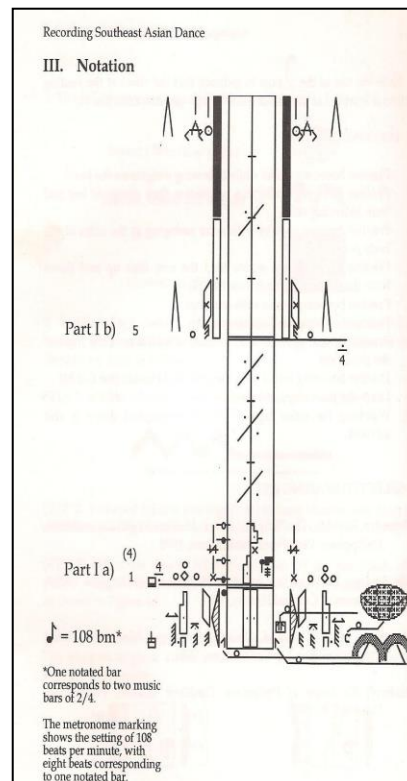


Figure 6. An example of a Labanotation Score written and transcribed by Dr. Larry A. Gabao. The Dance Notated is *Ragragasakan 2000*.

University of Singapore, yet most of the scholars including this researcher who completed the training find difficulty in disseminating because of lack of program support and funding. Similarly, most of the scholars find it hard to apply the notations because Asian dances have intricate movements all happening at the same time and space. An example is a *Pangalay* dance of the Tausug where the motion of the dancer's fingers, hands, arms, head, trunk and legs at the same time and the mood of liveliness make accurate transcription into words, phrases, symbols and signs, a tedious and incredible task.

The late National Artist in Dance Francisca R. Aquino aptly developed a device in describing the dance movement into a structured-based format by naming it fundamental terms for instructional purposes. She not only adapted terminologies from universally known terms in ballet but also corrupted some words like *polka-valse* to *polkabal* or *jota-valse* to *jotabal* for lack of nomenclature for the emerging need of documentation. This effort made her the mother institution of folkdance instruction, having published six (6) volumes of books which she patiently transcribed during her fruitful years from 1920s to 1960s.

At this point, the argument of concocting authentic dance from any transferred material has lost its original sense. It is even more incredible to think that during Aquino's time, there was an absence of technological support to capture the dance history, movement, etc. However, dance practitioners, Physical Education teachers and others trained under the Aquino device find comfort in using the device today. The device is still a practice but with an enhanced documentation supported by available technological aid.

To exemplify further this type of transference is an extraction taken from Aquino's 1952 description of *Subli* from the province of Batangas.

Since they are trained to translate and they possess the language skills, interpretive ability and knowledge, P.E. majors or folkdance teachers can transfer the instruction to movements. However, to make the argument concrete about the insufficiency and inability of the written transcriptions, there poses an ambiguity about the origin of the language written whether the hand would include the arms or vice versa or specific to the ability of the hand to move into the side with no mention of the space, whether into the right side of the body or the right side of the body space.

Neither the description indicates the position of the body and the body's postural effect which is to move naturally when one body part is moving or just to remain still. In this type of description, only teachers or students that have special training and technical facility can interpret this dance genre.

Introduction	
Girls	
(a)	Hold hat at top with R hand. Move R hand to right side (cts. 1,2), to left side (cts. 1,2), to front as if paying respect to audience (cts.1,2) put hat on head (cts.1,2).....4M
(b)	Pause. Hands down at sides.....4M
Boys	
Stand still, hands on waist for 8 measures or	
(a)	Click castanets once with both hands at right side (ct.1) pause (ct.2) repeat the same with hands at left side (cts.1,2) repeat the same with hands in front of chest (cts1,2) bow and click castanets once on (ct,1) with hands on second position (cts.1,2).....4M
(b)	Pause. Hands on waist.....4M

Figure 7. An example of the transcription written by Francisca R. Aquino, 1952

TRANSFERENCE B

Videoing or capturing an action via camera either by still photo or by motion picture is transference of the dance from its original setting. The challenge of documentation has fewer burdens when compared to the written description because the researcher can handily get as many information as the camera can capture, if not offer an easy recall to many information. The technology has gifted the researcher assured veracity and the best position when put to a defense of possible questions regarding the data gathered.

Despite its limitations that most scholars argue of, today's technology brings elicit transfer in capturing the movements happening in space. The side facing the lens is all frontal that hides back actions that can not be captured at the same time. At a certain degree, video and/or camera offers an advantage over transcription by allowing more accurate details like colors of costume, properties and any sound or music.

Arguments among scholars, dance educators and experts consider the video as a tool for gathering data, but cannot serve as ultimate source of the dance. The inability to capture the effort or body expression emanating from the muscle groups is seen as limitation.

There are dance qualities in the traditional form that video recording alone cannot fully document. Thus narratives or oral descriptions are needed to provide explanations.

This type of transference supports the contention that the dance in the video may be wrong to be called authentic dance, rather more appropriately termed as autochthonous dance. The correction defines that the dance, though transferred to the video,

still carries the source as dance of the indigenous group or from its original source.

In a paper presented during the 1997 International Conference on the Preservation of Intangible Culture through Audio-Visual Documentation in Hanoi, Vietnam, this researcher concluded that the video cannot fully stand as the lone material for the dance, but must be accompanied with narration or appropriate oral and written annotation.

The dance transferred on video poses no difference with the written dance description as it is not complete by itself. Again it is remote to claim authentic dance when it is transferred to another medium.

TRANSFERENCE C

Indigenous groups do not object to staging the traditional dance for they are also performing with an audience or group of people for entertainment. This type of transfer is called staging or arranging the dance to suit the need of the viewers or audience. Technically, staging is putting an arrangement in an organized form with time boundaries and space limitations as in an auditorium, a theater stage, a platform or similar venues for viewing purposes.

The dance material, when transferred for stage, immediately loses its authentic form due to the demand of the following staging characteristics:

1. Elements of Dance Space (an area for performance)

- 1.1 Direction - indicates the forward, backward, sideward, diagonals.

1.2 Level - refers to placement of the body either low, middle or high with designated point of reference.

1.3 Range - identifies the reach of movement parts in a space.

1.4 Pathways - creates visual presentation of lines and figures.

1.5 Focus - defines the focal point of face placement.

The five (5) elements determine the principle of an effective visual formula for artistic creation and recreation of the dance director, arranger or choreographer that eliminates the point of view of the original doer or dancer.

2. Theatrical or Stage Elements

2.1 Lights and design - illumine the dance and also offer optical illusions when applied with design.

2.2 Sound - produces auditory sensibility or music of the dance.

2.3 Stage - a dance area oftentimes elevated or above the seated audience such as proscenium stage, arena type, apron or frontal extension.

2.4 Costume - represents the intended attire for the dance, but sometimes altered to suit the demand of the theater and performance. Example, among *Kalinga* women, toppers are not required when dancing during their rituals even with an audience, but on the stage a substitute topper is suggested. The invention of zipper is a convenient adaptation to the

baro't saya for women in Maria Clara dress. Colors, texture, designs and others are changed to suit the stage demands.

2.5 Dance Properties - materials held by hands, head and shoulders such as glass, hat, coconut shells, etc. are changed or substituted not only for safety and security purposes but also of similar effect. In the case of *Pandanggo sa Ilaw*, for example, instead of using the original *tinghoy* or oil lamp, candles are used for safety. Oil lamps are not only hazardous for they can cause fire but also inconvenient for they can spill oil on the dance floor.

2.6 The Body/Dancer - The body expresses the meaning of movements or gestures. The dancer that interprets the movements on stage shows a total transfer of movements from their original form. To exhibit the closer look from the original form becomes a physical challenge and requires interpretative ability. Sometimes greater accessibility is required for a trained body to convey the meaning. For example, the demanding gesture of a Yakan or Tausug in a *Pangalay* would mean a well coordinated head, finger, arms, trunk and leg work; the dexterity of an Ifugao movement of a bird, as compared to a T'boli bird's dance; the ability to bend backward to get the hat from the floor for a supple trunk; or a flat head top to balance the glasses and many more type of body qualities to be able to transfer the dance for staging purposes.

Expectedly, the greatest challenge lies in the dance director on mastering the pedagogy of transference in protecting

the correctness of movements, arranging them for stage without sacrificing the traditional or a closer representation.

1 st	Aquino	Written Instruction (1930 – 1960)	Language/Vocabulary substituted for body action/movement
2 nd	Obusan	Camera Documentation (1971 – 2006)	Frontal view with one face of camera
3 rd	Urtula	Performance (1959 – 1988)	The body interpretation (Person)

Historically, the development of transference can be viewed by the researcher to the three (3) examples of the works done by the three (3) National Artists in Dance: Francisca Reyes Aquino in 1973, Dr. Lucrecia R. Urtula in 1988 and Ramon A. Obusan in 2006.

Historical Perspectives (examples of known works)

Transferences

Transference A	Original body written instructions through Transcription or Description
Transference B	Original setting to camera
Transference C	Performance – Staging (from both video/written instructions) or without reference at all. Visual interpretation

THE TRANSFORMATION

Primarily, the transformation of dance in the different research trajectory brings forth the diaspora of dance from its main source or original context. The book presentation exemplifies a transformed contextual point of view, as it adds, subtracts, or reinvents due to lack of vocabulary to substitute or words to describe. The published books of Aquino clearly state that the dance documented was intended to facilitate instruction and neither has she claimed them authentic. Similarly, the new published dance books of the Philippine Folk Dance Society can only proclaim an improved representation in terms of content and related information about the dance.

The documentation of dance through video recording is essential for viewing purposes especially among dance researchers, instructors, and performers. Though it is capable of being edited using various techniques, video dance recording has limitations. One of these limitations lies on the inability of a camera to record or capture at a time the entirety of body movements or performance of actions because a camera is capable only of capturing at a time the frontal image or the action that is visible from a particular angle. Only a new dimension is created when a video dance recording is viewed and interpreted in various perspectives. Video dance recording sets another venue for dance that is totally away from its original place or setting of performance.

On the other hand, the performance is a complete transformation of the dance as it is placed on stage enhanced by theatrics, different dance space and different dancing body. It reveals a world of its own as it caters to the viewers need, rather than showcases the free-wheeling mood, feelings and expression of the dance in its original form.

Transformation

Back to the arguments of Authentic Dance/Autochthonous

- | | |
|-----------------------|--|
| 1. Book Presentation | Available books of Francisca R. Aquino and the Philippine Folk Dance Society. |
| 2. Video Presentation | Available video of dance at the Cultural Center of the Philippines and the National Commission for Culture and the Arts. |
| 3. Stage Presentation | Available staged dances by the PNU Kislap Sining Dance Troupe performers. |

CONCLUSION

Understanding dance research trajectory conclusively manifests transfer and transformation via transcription, video and performance. The trajectory determines the appropriateness of word usage to a dance already transferred and transformed. Considering the transference of the material, the term authentic dance is a misnomer. The emerging term **autochthonous** dance is the appropriate one. Otherwise, it would simply imply that the dance that develops from its origin can be transferred and transformed to another context (dance in diaspora) belonging to original creators.

Equally, various challenges converge in the process of collecting data: skills in interviewing, transcribing movements into words, limited movement vocabulary available for use, ambiguities of queries which are best left unanswered, and limitation of the video that captures only the frontal view.

The dancing body in particular for a performance demonstrates many improvisatory details either due to lack of knowledge and skills or upon the ability of the director to interpret aesthetic demands.

Apparently, the heavily nuanced term DANCE is defined in terms of WHY, HOW, WHEN and WHERE it is done.

Edited by:

Dr. Venancio L. Mendiola

Former DEAN, College of Arts and Sciences (CASS)

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