

SEMIOTICS OF DANCE

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Abstract

The paper presents the development of dance as a sign language meant to facilitate and speed up communication during training, performances, dance recitals and competitions. The improvement of the specific activity for this field was achieved by involving students in a great number at both faculty and university level.

Keywords: dance, semiotics, signs for specific dance movements, expression, facial expressions, gestures, nonverbal communication, types and forms of communication, transformation of ideas, movement in space.

1. Introduction - semiotics of dance

Dancing is a non-verbal communication. It has a very important role in nonverbal communication, we have - signs related to movement, gestures, facial expressions and posture, which can be found in dance. The first theorists, who have studied the importance of communicative gestures, mimic and teachers were great orators of the Antiquity and rhetoric.

2. The new age - a study of gestures

Establishing a new discipline in the field of communication sciences, namely kinesis. Its subject is the means of communication through gestures and mimic. Meaningless gestures elementary units are called Kinema and significant gestures, similar morphemes in linguistic communication called kinemorphemes. While living creatures communicate through signals, people communicate through certain signs. Notification by signaling is a natural phenomenon and the meaning is a cultural creation. Among the fields of art, dance is most related to these forms of communication. Dance is an art form that can express complex - human thought and feeling through the body used as an instrument in many genres and in many cultures.

3. Dance - a type of communication

Dance is a form of communication between you and your body, between you and the other people. It is a non-verbal, spontaneous type of communication, involving the participation of both consciousness and the subconscious, a communication in a relaxed, secure situation, created by the rhythm of music and the social convention associating dance with moments of entertainment, of "fun". *By "the specific sign terminology" we can communicate rapidly and efficiently.*

In dance, expression is controlled, deliberate, and appropriate to its type and spirit. The inner state of the dancer is expressed through facial expression. Consequently, the dancer's mood will influence the message of the dance. On stage communication during dance there is an organic bond between the development of a succession of physical, expressive actions and the way the spectator will be able to categorize it in the general field of understanding the artistic message and relieve imaginatively and emotionally the inner life of the character (dancer). The latter conveys the states, feelings and emotions of the dance by signs, facial expression, gestures, expressiveness, but also through his posture.

4. Gestures and mental life in dance

Each person has a different way of manifesting himself, expressing his feelings and thoughts in a particular manner by specific actions, attitudes and gestures. Through these movements, the individual expresses the irreducible aspects of his personality and the social influences. We can study, for instance, the case of 2 dancers who, while executing the same choreography, involuntarily generate in their movement particular elements. The subjects may be influenced by their inner states, which will mark their dance.

Society and environment have a major importance in the mental formation of the individual. Thus, society can educate and form you according to the standards of a fighter (winner) or those of a loser. This can be seen in a dancer's behaviour, look, gestures and posture.

There is a strong correlation between the idea of a movement tendency and the muscular actual manifestation of this movement. A good example for this is the fact that *the dancer understands the movement shown by the choreographer* but cannot execute it for objective reasons (fatigue, lack of concentration, lack of necessary physical qualities, etc.).

5. Movement in dance

According to the principle of expressiveness, any inner movement has a corresponding body movement. Most of these movements are produced involuntarily, but progressively along with certain movements that will keep their spontaneous and natural feature, others will be learned consciously and will develop becoming significant and intentional gestures. They get a higher meaning, by which man willingly and consciously relates to the atmosphere he is experiencing.

The signs represent gestures that replace words and may constitute a standalone language. Dancers use signs to build their choreography in order to send the audience the desired message. For instance in "Paso Doble" the dancer must express the atmosphere of a corrida and consequently his gestures will be those of a toreador fighting a bull.

6. Research

The research aims at contributing to:

The development of this sign language in the field of dance meant to facilitate and speed up communication during training, performances, dance recitals and competitions.

Promoting dance activity among adolescents and young people, as well as in the current computerized society by choosing heterogeneous dance psychological programs - for different tempers and types of adolescents means creating bridges of communication between them.

This generates the identification of the most attractive means of dance, finding dances specific to their age and tempers; the purpose of the organizers of mental-artistic activities is to shape young people's temper as much as possible according to their nature, for a better integration in society and for an effective outcome in their future professional activities, relieving school stress and strengthening the body for all kinds of activities.

Research objectives

It addresses precisely these requirements, dance communication through signs, issues coming from the practice and required by practice.

Experiment

The aim focused on is nonverbal communication through dance semiotics. The experiment started from the need and necessity to speed up the work of dance teachers in the study of adolescents enrolled in these artistic activities, whether they were meant as professional performance activities, relaxation or leisure activities.

Those who love dancing are getting increasingly interested in and preoccupied with the "*Secret of Dancing*", this artistic field, *Dancing as an educational subject*, which continuously stimulates the thinking and the intelligence of the participants.

The interest of young students in SEMIOTIC DANCE or SIGN DANCE. It has won great popularity amongst young people for its SIGNALS and SYMBOLS. Due to the knowledge it offers it is known as an "Art of dancing".

The research performed on groups of young students from the academic environment of Braşov, by performing a *Semiotic Dance Program* has revealed the essential role of the ability to understand nonverbal communication, dance specific symbols and signs, insistently stimulating the students' creativity and intelligence, but also their need for movement and for the acquisition of new knowledge in various fields.

We have used a *Diverse Program of Semiotic Dance*:

1. Facial expression, gestures and body language.
2. Dance Semiotics – specific signs for dance movements.
3. Artistic executions and aesthetic forms of movements.
4. Coarse executions and insufficiently processed forms of the movements.
5. Specific signs of beautiful movements. Specific signs of unfinished movements.
6. Specific signs of technical movements executed correctly.
7. Signs of movement in space.
8. Dance symbols and the ability of perception.
9. Dance terminology and signs used in dancing.
10. Signals and symbols in the world and life of dancing.
11. Dancers easily communicate among them by: specific signals and signs of the dance movements. Dance signalling prevents problematic situations or brings the success. Signalling avoids lack of timing, and some downtimes during the dance in a show, avoids inappropriate situations, incidents in executing simple or pair acrobatic elements and unexpected situations.
12. Nonverbal communication and way of communicating through movement.
13. Turning an idea into movement by specific signs.
14. Transmit and educational message by dance specific movements.

According to the answers we have got in the questionnaires regarding the novelty of the knowledge on the semiotics of dance in this accessible manner, as well as to the increasing number of *participants in the Semiotic Movement program*, the activity has been received favorably by several participants.

Thus, we have chosen to propose doing the experiment on students from various faculties, oriented towards various jobs in the future, observed during various moments of the day, in different states (physical fatigue, relaxation, stress, joy, grief, enthusiasm) in order to test their ability of perception and their understanding of the messages sent through dance specific signs and signals and through nonverbal communication.

As well, the schedule set on various days of the week but at the same hours for training sessions on "semiotic dance" had a different effect. The initiation of the program was answered by:

- approximately 27% of the young people present in the area where the activity took place, the rest of them willing to participate in future sessions. (*Diagram1*)
- out of which 69% were females during the project, the rest of them being males. (*Diagram2*)

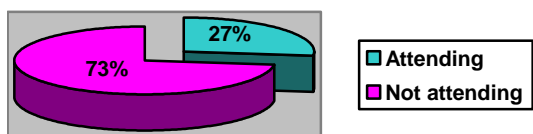


Diagram 1- Young people attending

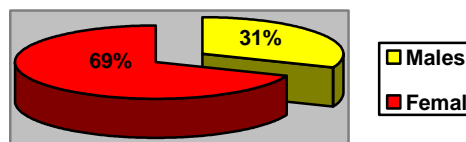


Diagram 2 – Type of participants

The number of participants would permanently increase where the activity took place. One feature of the program was that towards the end of the day and the week the number of participants was increasing, comparing to that of the beginning days, or to the daily morning program. Towards the end of the project we concluded that **the number of male trainees doubled**, while the rest just watched. The assessment was done by approximation, of course, for those who participated in the "Semiotic Movement Classes". Most of the times, evaluations were made by other followers.

Another consideration to be highlighted is the fact that young people showed a preference for the facial expression, gestures and body language; dance semiotics, signs of dance specific movements; signalling; pantomime, nonverbal communication; turning an idea into a movement; sending the message and the ability to perceive it; and also **the competition among students** in understanding and decoding the message through dance specific symbols.

Thus, we had differential activities every time, to include and satisfy all music genres, with a wide coverage for any situation. "The coaches for Semiotic Dance" were divided on workshops.

In our attempt to find out the participants' opinions, we used short discussions under the form of a masked interview, with the participants in the dance program. This was meant not to make the participant feel awkward, as well as not to distort the answers that we were going to get. Those collecting the answers were also taking part in the activity, and then, by a few pre-established questions would find out the opinions of those joining the "Semiotic Movement Program".

The following resulted from the collected answers:

- 76% participated in several "semiotic dance programs", and the rest benefited from moving on music, indoors and outdoors. (Diagram 3)
- Over 88% proved the need to get knowledge during the program, and the rest benefited from "various movement on music". (Diagram 4)
- 58% stated that on the day after, they were content and preoccupied with the new dance knowledge, and the rest enjoyed free exercise. (Diagram 5)

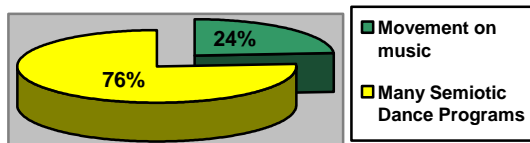


Diagram 3 - Semiotic Dance Programs

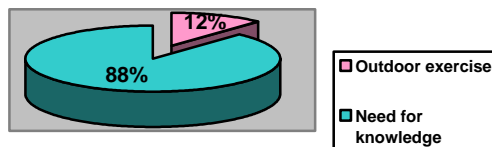


Diagram 4 – Need for Knowledge

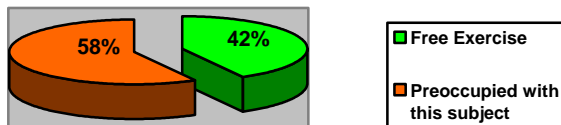


Diagram 5 – Preoccupied with this subject

If, at the beginning, the males were fewer, during the course they recorded greater participation, and their involvement in the outdoor movement became much more expressive. We also recorded that female participants were more willing to constantly participate in the program. We also concluded that most of the participants found interlocutors to share their opinions and states with, thus easing the communication and the ability to socialize. Being a preliminary experiment, the interpretation of results **points out the validity of the hypothesis and implies a challenge in the future**. Even if the results of the research are not very stable because the participants' answers were collected after only "one semiotic movement program was attended", or ... the degree of participation and involvement was at the participant's choice... through a simple evaluation of their facial expression, we see the beneficial effects of the new project.

Another conclusion of implementing the project is the one related to **moral benefits**.

- Many participants, 90% said that they reached a state of inner contentment and full integration into a civilized behaviour – the rest benefitting from atmosphere and relaxation by oxygenating their nervous system. (Diagram 6)
- 75% stated they wanted to get more involved- the rest were supposed to make free time by reorganizing their schedule in order to be able to involve in the "active rest by semiotic dancing outdoors or indoors , outdoor rest and atmosphere". (Diagram7)
- 30% were not familiarized yet with the "new trend" appeared on the "dance market" - "the semiotic movement" in the course halls and outdoors – the rest wanted to collect information about this "new artistic and therapeutic trend". (Diagram 8)

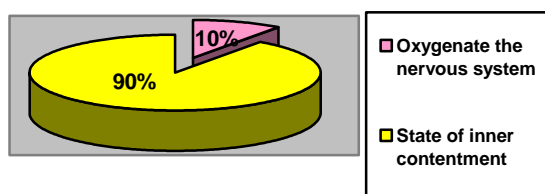


Diagram 6- Integration and Satisfaction

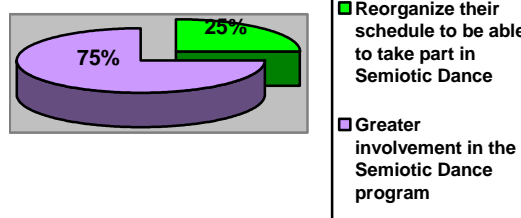


Diagram 7- Involvement in the Semiotic Dance program

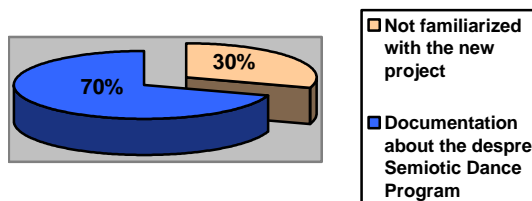


Diagram 8 – Documentation on the Semiotic Dance program

All this information resulted from the participants' behaviour during the program, the performers paying attention to the way their neighbours approach movements and the dance movements of the others, each being supposed to express himself, unleashing the sign language. The challenge of competition was to understand the written message sent by dance movement. The positive side of the detaching action is related to **breaking barriers among fields of study** for the faculties the students included in the project were part of. In many situations, through communication, people from various fields would be attracted by this activity, no matter their age or sex (students in the 1st year, students in terminal years, full time of part time studies, etc.).

On examining the answers of those who were willing to answer the surveys, we found the following positive aspects: acquire knowledge, making friends in various departments of the faculties, the collaboration with students from various faculties, but also the common ways of expression, timings in the *movement signals*, which could not have had frequently the opportunity of such experience, and neither the chance to share the "same tastes for the dance semiotics".

Results of these activities:

- New relationships 80% ,
The rest were expected to act in the future. (Diagram 9)
- New friendships emerged 65% - The rest were expected to act in the future. (Diagram 10)
- Collaborations and proposals for projects were discussed 40% - The rest were expected to act in the future. (Diagram 11)

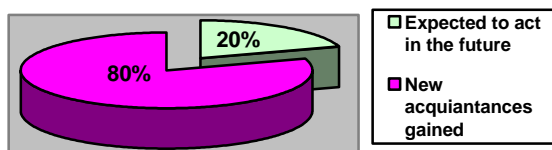


Diagram .9 – New knowledge

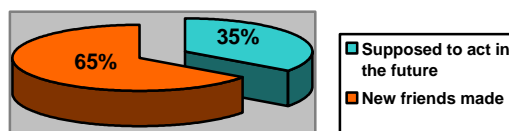


Diagram 10- New friendships through the Semiotic Dance

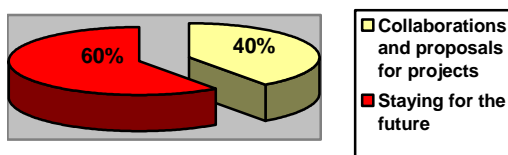


Diagram 11 – Collaborations and proposals for projects through Semiotic Dance

The Poposed experiment pointed out the young people's interest in benefitting from as many "Semiotic dance sessions both indoors and outdoors", as well as the fact that the effects of these programs were felt by the participants. We also got the idea of "continuing with the project", as well as ... extending it for the entire population of the city and county of Braşov as "Mass Semiotic Dance".

7. Conclusions

- a) The presentation of the "semiotic dance" offered to the students and the methods of teaching arouse the youngsters' interest for the "semiotic movement", and "this type of dance" gained great popularity among students.
- b) "Semiotic dance, in contact with the logic and intelligence of movement " as it named in some writings – the knowledge and its advantages, and also the amazing results we reached, is acknowledged as an "art of dancing".
- c) The improvement of the specific activity for this field was achieved by involving students in a great number at both faculty and university level.
- d) This way the showed an interest and special appreciation for " Semiotic Dance" ... at the expense of the "Repetitive dance" (step, Irish, can-can).
- e) The young students need activities to express "Intelligence, creativity, logic, thinking.
- f) A greater interest of the students motivates the activity and the experience exchange with other students from other faculties, multiplying the interdisciplinary projects.
- g) Dance is an important educational component, being used as an educational activity to reach pedagogical performance, until the professional training is complete. From the educational point of view, dance contributes to shaping the personality of young people by nonverbal communication, meant to eliminate the inhibition state from social relations. Dance and the dance ring is a code of manners, socializing and harmony at the same time. The moment you watch a person dancing you can say many things about that person: from small details to temper, gestures, facial expressions, nature, way of communicating.
- h) From **the analysis of results**, dance is an important part of the mental and artistic programs. The dance programs make an essential contribution to understanding nonverbal communication, to get to know the people in the group, to make the group homogeneous and harmonized, until the establishment of connections between partners.
- i) The presentation of the " Semiotic Dance" offered to the students the ways of teaching have stirred the young people's interest for gesture movement and thus "this dance type" became very popular among them.
- j) "the Semiotic Dance, directly related to the beauty of movement – the knowledge, the advantages it offers, as well as its amazing results is acknowledged as an "Art of dancing".
- k) The improvement of the specific activity for this field was achieved by involving students in a great number for both faculty level and university level.
- l) This way an interest and a special appreciation of students for "**Semiotic Dance" ... at the expense of the "Repetitive dance" , permanently stimulating the dancers' intelligence.**
- m) A greater interest of the students , improve the activity and the experience exchange with other students from other faculties, multiplying the interdisciplinary projects.
- n) Dance is ... "the supreme combination ... of Mind, Communication and Body".
- o) Dance is the supreme expression of movement.

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