
Nahumck. Introduction to Dance Literacy: Perception and Notation of Dance Patterns.

To the Editors

In the Spring 1980 issue of *Studies*, Diane C. Freedman reviews the book *Introduction to Dance Literacy: Perception and Notation of Dance Patterns*, by Nadia Chilkovsky Nahumck. In so doing, she takes Dr. Nahumck to task on several points, notably on the question of what is meant by "literacy" in dance. As a pragmatic practitioner of Labanotation and an ardent advocate of dance literacy, I find myself disturbed by high-level quibbling. Nahumck's book is a welcome step forward in dance literacy by its very attempt to make people aware of this valuable end product in the use of notation. It is a tool through which a greater understanding of and access to information in dance is made possible.

In reading the book I too questioned at whom the book was aimed: if for those already knowing Labanotation, then the basic explanations were superfluous; if for those knowing none, then insufficient. But the general focus of the book was in the right direction, and it should arouse enthusiastic support as an important step forward—who else has written such a book? Nahumck is breaking new ground. Perhaps the book needed more working through; such books can well use trial periods before publication to gather general reactions and eliminate the inevitable typographical errors. There is so much that is commendable in the book, however, that seems to have been given scant treatment in Ms. Freedman's review.

I question whether it is necessary to experience movement sequences physically in order to become dance literate. My husband reads Russian yet cannot speak it, and his is not an unusual case; others read foreign-language publications without speaking the language fluently. Would they be called illiterate in that language? In dance there may be full understanding of the content without the physical ability to bring the movement to life. Must one be able to act to understand Shakespeare's plays?

Notation is not yet an integral part of the study of dance. A few have made a start, but there is still a long way to go before we achieve anything comparable to the use of music notation in the study of music. Nahumck has contributed a book which I see as an important step in the right direction. It is her fate to be a pioneer, to break new ground, and hence risk much criticism. It is possible that others who follow may produce better books, building on her groundwork. I would like to see a review which gathers together the positive elements in the book, providing incentive to others to produce similar works.

Dr. Ann Hutchinson Guest
The Language of Dance Centre,
London

Reviewer's Reply

My review of Nahumck's book was directed at an audience of scholars interested in visual communication. This relatively new field is composed of participants from many disciplines; communication among members of such a diversified group is dependent on conceptual clarity. Scholarship must be evaluative if our understanding is to advance.

Guest is unhappy with my criticism of what she considers a pioneering effort. Yet to leave the inadequacies of basic works unnoted would be a disservice, since the function of such works should be to provide the most solid possible basis for further development of the field. I do not consider insistence on conceptual clarity to be "high-level quibbling."

Guest's response is based on the undefended assumption that language and movement are precisely analogous, an assumption with which I disagree for reasons elaborated on in my review. I did not mean to imply that one must be able to duplicate dance movements to understand them. But competence in a symbolic system based on movement depends on a kinesthetic sensitivity. One way to develop this sensitivity is through study of the Laban system.

I share with Guest and Nahumck the desire to promote future research in this field. But I believe that our cause is best served by careful scrutiny and evaluation of all contributions.

Diane C. Freedman