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Computer-aided dance analysis in practice – with Labanatory

Hungarian folk dance has strict structure, which plays an important role in its authenticity. Besides the connections of dance elements, it is important to consider quantitative features of a dance such as the frequency of dance elements and the frequency of connections. The number of occurrences of a dance element or several consecutive dance elements in a dance performance can be counted with a computer tool if the dance is notated and its notation is digitized.

Labanatory has been developed in Hungary as a tool that is capable of searching for repeating patterns in Labanotation scores, that is to identify recurring movements. The paper shows the software in use: how the researcher can use this kind of tool in practice. It shows actual examples of detecting recurring notated movements with several kinds of searches (simple, compound, wildcard, symmetric, and augmented searches). It points out that searches have to be used in an iterative way during the analysis when creating 'good' queries from Labanotation symbols. Notation parts can be labeled in the program in any phase of the analysis and the researcher can revise the label markers offered as a result of a search. From the labeled dance parts, the user can make basic statistics on the analyzed dance performances.

The examination of original dance texts is very important in dance education. It is beneficial if a student can access fieldwork-texts directly, not only through the teacher's filter. The student can focus on dance elements in accordance with his own interest by creating his own queries and performing the related computer searches. He can detect dance elements of any length and examine any consecutive combinations of them. Evaluating search results can allow the student to interpret dance structures in new ways.