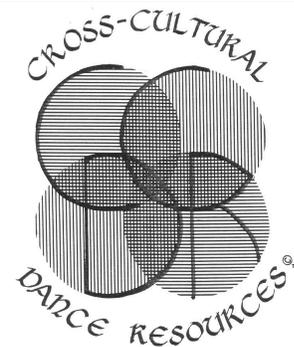


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Reflections on Intracultural Dance Research: Investigating the Kinesthetic Culture of Spanish Bullfighting and Flamenco Dance

Adair Landborn

Adair Landborn was the seventh recipient of the Halla Kealiinohomoku Research Choreographer-in-Residence. Her PhD dissertation, Kinesthetic culture: a comparative study of the movement practices of Spanish bullfighting and flamenco dance, was completed at Union Institute and University in 2006.



The year is 1992; the location is the Casa de Campo park, located on the right bank of the Manzanares River to the west of Madrid, Spain where I am taking private lessons from a Colombian matador, Jaime, in the art of bullfighting—tauromachy. In Madrid to study flamenco dance, I am testing the popular theory that knowledge of bullfighting leads to better understanding of the flamenco arts. Jaime praises my movement style and urges me to try these movements in the arena of a tiente, an informal setting where students of tauromachy test their skill and courage as well as the bravery and fortitude of yearling calves. “No, thanks. I just want to study the movements of the bullfight,” I insist.

The sun is hot and Jaime is patient as he explains the animal psychology and behavior that is intrinsic to his movement technique and passion for the art. Suddenly, my body senses a direct link. As I practice a movement with the capote, the heavy, brightly colored canvas cape of the matador, somatic knowledge arises out of a distinctive rotating movement of my wrists and hands, causing me to exclaim, “I practiced this same movement just this morning in my flamenco dance class!” Theory, when tested and confirmed by direct somatic experience, transforms into embodied knowledge.

As a dancer, it is embodied knowledge that I value most highly. My 2006 dissertation examines how the cultural values of two overlapping domains—flamenco dance and bullfighting—are embodied and sustained through somatic processes and kinetic enactments. Using Laban movement analysis, ethnographic participant observation, and somatic inquiry, it traces connections through the somatic phenomena of their respective movement vocabularies and the behavioral protocols that influence their public performance. It investigates the movement principles of bullfighting as they occur in the movement vocabulary of flamenco dance, identifying such shared movement motifs as spiraling and arcing body shapes; maintaining direct eye contact; dynamic phrasing characterized by intensity, acceleration, and impact; and a unique organization of muscular tensions energizing the space around the body. It examines flamenco dance in the context of the *kinesthetic culture* of Spain, which includes the unique practices and performances of the bullfight. Coining the phrase *kinesthetic culture* facilitated my inclusion of both the sensory and kinetic aspects of embodiment in my intracultural research.

All people live within a *kinesthetic culture*: *kinesthetic*—the sensation and experience of motion, and *culture*—the patterns of living passed from one generation to another within a human group. Analysis of an individual’s movement patterns provides evidence of his or her distinctive personality, but also evidence of the culture(s) affecting him or her.

Intracultural Dance continued on page 4

Excerpt from a Letter to CCDR by Nancy Zendora Kolodney, February 1, 2010



*Nancy Zendora Kolodney has a strong personal vision shaped by the art, aesthetics, ceremonies and atmospheres of older cultures. She directs the New York based, Zendora Dance Company, which performs both nationally and internationally. Zendora was the fifth recipient of the Halla Kealiinohomoku Research Choreographer-in-Residence in 1992. Her article, **From the Fire to the Eagle: a Bird's Algebra in Desert Time: The Zendora Dance Company at the Roaring Hoofs Festival Outer Mongolia**, was featured in the CCDR newsletter Spring/Summer 2004, Issue 24/25, page 7-10. She is a Life Member, loyal friend, and an active supporter of CCDR.*

Now, returning from Mexico where I taught a workshop in "Poetics of Performance," I was very impressed by the National Center for the Arts which is a complex of buildings housing studios, theaters, library, bookstore and dance shop both intimate and large public indoor and outdoor spaces, places to exhibit and perform. Each building, which

was made by competing architects, is dedicated to each of the arts: theater, music, plastic arts, dance, and film. The students study for a BA for \$100 a YEAR!! Mexico is not a paradise but it is in this case a testament to their respect for artists and their training. In the Dance Department one can focus on several areas: choreography, research, performance (classical or contemporary) teaching, or social/recreation dance and documentation which includes Labanotation and video. In my workshop I had performance students as the choreography tract students were preparing their final projects. Two adventurous teachers also took part; one a friend translated for me. They were very sophisticated movers and jumped right into the instructions. I worked with Laban's concept of Effort and close, mid, and far reach space (self. others. environment) with different eye focus (closed, direct, and eyes as windows) the last instruction was to make group choreography in ten minutes with Haiku. The work turned out to be a good process and some interesting results for so short a period. Then we looked at a video of my work and discussed my point of view. Since I am beginning a piece on Mexican/Spanish surrealist artist Remedios Varo I was impressed by one student commenting on the combination of image and abstract in my work likening it to her work. They all hugged me warmly and thanked me profusely. What more could one ask for in an afternoon of sharing!!!



"Poetics of Performance" Workshop



I also performed some vocal work at the Media Center of the National Center for the Arts in another part of the city, a church with many interesting spaces. Twelve film projectors and two groups of sound makers of which I was one performed for 3 hours to an audience of 800 or more. It was thrilling, although as it went around, I drank too much Tequila and got sick the next day well worth it though. The group of young people in their 20's and 30's were very lively. Even though I don't speak Spanish much they made me feel very welcome.

I stayed with Pilar Urreta who teaches Choreography and Laban at the National Centre. She lives in the mountains between Mexico City and Cuernavaca with two dogs. Her neighbors, even with modest incomes, live in walled compounds, which lets one know the danger that people feel. Still I met some unusual people dedicated to changing society who are part of yearly festivals, which combine all the arts. Some have studios in their homes, give classes and live in very beautiful places. Some also work for universities in art departments.

I felt very lucky to connect with these people and will look forward to returning. I have let them know about CCDR and hope they become members.

VYTAUTAS (VYTS) BELIAJUS

By L. DeWayne Young

The following is the Epilogue reprinted from Vytautas (Vyts) F. Beliajus, "Mr. Folk Dance, USA," Memoirs of a Lithuanian Immigrant 1908-1994, edited and published by L. DeWayne Young, 2008. The book, as well as many VILTIS issues can be found in the CCDR archive and library.

Throughout the years of publishing VILTIS, Vyts always stated he fervently looked ahead to each milestone, each anniversary: the Silver 25th, the 45th, the Golden 50th, and implored the Divine One for sufficient health and means to reach each one. He gave his all to achieve these goals. In the course of his active and productive life, he succeeded in all of them, reaching the Golden Anniversary of his beloved VILTIS on September 24, 1994, but his own life was stopped within four days of that event when he died in Denver, Colorado on September 20, 1994. His large VILTIS family celebrated his life and achievements at the Golden Anniversary in Denver, September 23-25, 1994.

From the beginning when, as a young lad he chronicled his life in the villages of Lithuania, through his years as an immigrant in the USA, learning the American language as well as dances of other ethnic groups, and then embarking on a career of teaching those ethnic dances throughout the nation as well as internationally, Vyts never faltered through financial and critical health problems in achieving his dream of spreading peace and humanitarianism.

His achievements are chronicled in his own words in this biography/memoir, from introducing "firsts" throughout the folk dance world, teaching dances and customs of other nationalities, publishing folk dance books, and consistently publishing VILTIS – a binding and consistent communication between folk dance friends and groups that achieved a peak in the glorious days of international folk dancing. Vyts's friends and "family" were coast-to-coast as well as international, bound together with his unflagging correspondence and appearances.

His yearly activities, up to the final days of his life, would range from nation-wide teaching tours to attending folk dance and ethnic cultural events from coast to coast. Vyts taught workshops at Stockton, California for 22 years; Kentucky Dance Institute; Maine Folk Dance Camp; Lighted Lantern in Colorado; Texas Folk Dance Camp; Oaxaca, Mexico camp and many others. He made dedicated appearances at such diverse venues as the annual Christmas concert at Brigham Young University in Provo, Utah; Milwaukee's Holiday Folk Fair; California Folk Federation and Canadian events and others. Vyts also made international junkets as well as local Colorado events including those of the Colorado Folk Arts Council where he served as president and advisor for years.

His constant correspondence with VILTIS readers would record weddings, births, deaths, folk dance events and other person-to-person information. The 50 years of VILTIS and the 15 issues of his newsletter to men and women serving in the Armed Forces before the magazine began, provide a rich encyclopedia of ethnic information including events, culture, history, dances, costumes and even recipes.

Folk dances that Vyts introduced to the international folk dance community are still enjoyed and will continue to be enjoyed for years to come. His contributions to the international folk dance movement in the USA are innumerable and immeasurable. For generations yet to come, the mention of his name will always be connected to "Mr. Folk Dance, USA."

The theoretical total of an individual's movement patterns includes movements of work and play, and choice of artistic expression. It includes movements affected by societal expectations and religious inhibitions. It includes movement limitations that individuals experience due to the terrain they move through, the clothing they wear, or the climate they live in. It is made up of the many normative ways of moving and understanding movement that are integral to the culture and unconsciously enacted. It is affected by the degree of emotional volatility individuals bring to living, the state of their health, and all the many other realities of their lives. It includes movements patterned during peak experiences—joy, risk, faith, and ecstasy—and in the depths of emotional anguish—desperation, anger, loss, fear, and grief.

These intense life experiences are embodied in an individual's movement and take collective form when ritualized and celebrated formally through movement traditions and public rituals. The realities of Andalusian rural life provide daily opportunities to work closely with animals; this is physical work—kinetic and somatic—that entails significant interspecies interaction and considerable risk. The constant proximity of horses and bulls leads rural Spaniards (male and female) to both identify with and to differentiate themselves from their animals. The power and elegance of bulls and horses as well as the human will and ability to dominate these animals are celebrated through the bullfight and occur as recurring motifs within the flamenco dance lexicon.

Kinesthetic culture connects members of a cultural group at the somatic level—the common kinetic vocabulary of their shared life experiences, movement sensations, movement memories, and vicarious movement experiences. It includes assumptions about the significance of certain movements, gestures, or postural attitudes, and cultural values affecting responsiveness, impulsiveness, passivity, and activity. Kinesthetic culture includes patterns of rhythmic interaction and entrainment and gives expression to its members' assumptions about life, death, space, time, reality, human nature, animal nature, and the organization of the cosmos. Dance emerges from, takes its form in, and is made manifest in, this rich matrix.

The concept of kinesthetic culture has integrative value; it addresses culturally patterned movement phenomena as both sensation and action, and makes it possible to examine them in both the personal and collective realms. In her dissertation, *Embodied knowledge: The cultural patterning of movement and meaning*, Dr. Cynthia Knox asserts that all movement is culturally patterned. Though our movements may be based on underlying human developmental patterns, evidence of innate movement potentialities, the actuality of movement involves human contact and humanness and therefore is liberally inundated with the cultural. The human infant does not survive without contact, in fact relies on human contact in order to know how to be human and in this process culture is central. (1992, 50)

Dr. Knox notes that eventually “the infant becomes capable of more variation within the cultural parameters, more capable of elaboration within a narrowing frame” (84). Thus, children who learn how to be human in the context of flamenco dance and bullfighting will, through mimesis, instruction, and verbal, aural, tactile, and rhythmic awareness, quickly develop skills and emic knowledge of these two cultural practices. They will unconsciously allow the tacit rules of cultural performance to influence their embodied expression and creativity.

This capacity to elaborate within a narrow frame constitutes a primary cultural task in the context of flamenco dance and bullfighting, tantalizing children, youth, and adults with its continual challenge to prove cultural competency through artistic mastery. The parameters affecting performance are many; they include flamenco's strict rhythmic structure or *compás*, the ritual protocols in the bullring, and the sanctioned social behaviors and habitual body postures of each performance context. The performative practices of flamenco dance and



Photo: Keith Drosni

Adair Landborn, Ph.D., C.M.A.

bullfighting express a fundamental tension between the innovative potential of individual expression and the constraining rules of the game.

Through performative acts, individuals engage directly with the cultural tension between continuity and innovation, between the traditional and the new or groundbreaking. The first requisite cultural task of flamenco dancers and bullfighters is to prove that they know the rules. Once basic mastery is established, the game may be played with verve and passion. Higher levels of mastery require that performers demonstrate technical talents, affective capacity, aesthetic standards, and, ultimately, their ability to enhance the tradition through creative innovation.

The year is 2005; the location is an informal arena on a ranch in the remote and beautiful desert mountains south of the border town of Tecate, Mexico. I am receiving instruction from Mr. Coleman Cooney, director of the California Academy of Tauromaquia, San Diego, California, as I prepare to put my fledgling bullfighting skills to the test for the first time in the tienta arena with a yearling. What new perspectives will emerge from the experience of learning to use the smaller red felt cape, the muleta? How will testing my courage by using my skills with an animal transform my understanding of flamenco dance? I am here to find out. I am here to learn the constraining rules of the game of bullfighting and use that knowledge to develop my potential as an innovative performer in the flamenco dance genre. I am here to conduct somatic lived-experience research—to test the central thesis of my doctoral research—to test my courage.

My focus is on the yearling, even as I try to manipulate the muleta using the techniques I have just learned. I am not as afraid as I thought I would be when Jaime on that long-ago afternoon in Madrid first suggested that I do this. Now encouragements in Spanish and English are called to me from the sidelines around the small arena: advice and reminders and suggestions. The yearling and I are intent upon each other. She passes to my right again and again, each pass unique. We are alone in the center of the circle, as the eyes of those surrounding us remain focused on the improvisational moment as it plays out again and again. When at last I leave the arena, I am relieved and energized. I realize how the experience of self, courage, and agency may resonate as power, confidence, or dominion in my future movement life as a flamenco performer.

In her 1976 dissertation, *Theories and methods for an anthropological study of dance*, Dr. Kealiinohomoku notes that “cultural phenomena are subsumed by these two large categories of ordinary and super-ordinary” (55). “Super-ordinary experiences are the highlights and the punctuations in ongoing existence; they make up affective culture” (56). Flamenco dance and bullfighting clearly belong to the category of the super-ordinary. In accordance with Kealiinohomoku’s description of the super-ordinary, they “rivet the conscious attention of the participants and stimulate affective feelings and the need for resolution” (56).

This description matches my experience of heightened adrenaline and emotional intensity as I faced off with a yearling on that sweltering hot afternoon in Mexico, only a soft piece of cloth between me and her charging horns. It also matches the sense of immediacy, urgency, tension, and passion I derive from the somatic and kinesthetic challenges inherent in flamenco dance. Leaving the *tienta* arena after facing the yearling or exiting the flamenco stage after dancing, I feel emotional relief, satisfaction, even a sense of personal deliverance or triumph that I associate with the “need for resolution” described by Kealiinohomoku.

Bullfighting is not dance, but rather a ritualized cultural practice that shares with dance some specific kinesthetic and somatic attributes. Bullfighting is recognized as an artistic pursuit and the bullfight *corrida* is accepted as a cultural event, so that articles reporting on bullfights and flamenco performances are commonly printed side by side on the cultural events pages of Spanish newspapers. Both traditions enliven Andalusian and other Spanish communities, providing opportunities for sociality, heightened affect, and cathartic release. Both practices manifest as cultural rituals, performance events, social occasions, and unique expressions of individuals and the cultural group. Both performances rely on artist practitioners who are skilled in their movement techniques and spiritually prepared to improvise based on the conditions at hand.

The feature of redundancy in cultural practice is key to understanding the function of improvisational performance. Redundancy in the practice of flamenco dance produces a matrix of consistent formal elements and reiterative patterns of behavior. The occurrence of an innovation in form, interpretation, or behavior is recognized as a result of its contrast in relation to this culturally patterned background. An observer unfamiliar with the culturally patterned movements of flamenco dance may notice only the phenomenon of redundancy and be entirely unable to discern any artistic innovations that occur.

In the bullfight arena, the ritual formalities and protocols observed are also reiterative and redundant, as are many of the basic movement techniques of bullfighting. Observers of flamenco dance or bullfight events with extensive experience and knowledge of the cultural practice will better discern and appreciate the uniqueness of each performance. “Like his [her] counterparts in other formal affective situations [such as bullfighting], the dancer is protected by his [her] habituation. . . . The formulaic nature of dance [or the bullfight] makes it possible to survive stressful and prolonged situations, and contributes to [cultural] homeostasis” (Kealiinohomoku 1976, 102).

Thus, the fixed artistic structures and rules that constrain flamenco dance performance also strengthen its creative practice by providing a stable framework for interpretive or improvisational elaborations. “Improvising, like choreographing, is a rule-based activity and although it might be argued that, theoretically, the entire range of possible movements is at the disposal of a person moving at any given moment, the actions chosen usually reflect the individual’s exposure to certain specific sets of actions that are the result of training—formal or informal—whether as a dancer, acrobat, martial artist, or musician [or matador]” (Puri and Hart-Johnson 1995, 168).

Kealiinohomoku describes *both* redundancy and affect as important elements. She notes that both dance and music compositions “depend primarily upon redundancy and affect as their major devices of communication” (1976, 103).

In discussing the dynamics between these two important elements, she points to the role of redundancy in reducing stress and thus allowing the emergence of affect, noting that “stress removal is especially crucial for super-ordinary occasions” (105).

With regard to cultural research that focuses on dance phenomena, the concepts of redundancy and affect form a very useful binary. Redundancy is as critical to the formation and sustaining of any artistic tradition as innovation is to the vitality of a tradition. And, despite any successful reiteration of or innovation to cultural form, a flamenco performance or bullfight *corrida* will have failed utterly if it elicits no emotional response. Both risk and artistry are required.

The year is 2009; the location is the Taos Academy of Dance Arts in the high mountain plateau of northern New Mexico where I am teaching a group of eight dancers how to participate improvisationally in the art of flamenco dance. I am teaching them how to enter the flamenco social circle, how to relate to the other participants, how to feel the music and maintain the rhythm in their bodies while their minds assess the energy coming from the musicians and other participants. Teaching these students how to keep a cool head despite the intensity building around and within them so that they can make artistic decisions in the moment, I rely on the remembered emotions and somatic and kinesthetic sensations of facing a yearling in the tiente arena south of Tecate, Mexico. Urging students to express their individuality and passion while maintaining the formal elements of the performance recognized by the collective group, I am teaching the skills through which humans create the super-ordinary.

“Enter the social circle. Don’t be shy. Maintain direct eye contact. Really look at people as you walk around this flamenco social circle. Be present. Let yourself be seen by these fellow participants. This is your social circle. They are not judging you; they are encouraging you. Focus. Let the energy of the group support you. They are clapping a rhythm for you. They are calling out encouragements. Enjoy the music. Let yourself respond

to this situation. Express yourself. Enjoy the opportunity for deep play that opens up between you and the musicians. There are no mistakes here inside the circle. Don't worry. There is a formula for leaving the circle when you are ready. Remember the formula and follow it. There! You are out! You took risks. After performing, you can return now to the community, energy heightened, courage recharged, creative spirit brimming with success."

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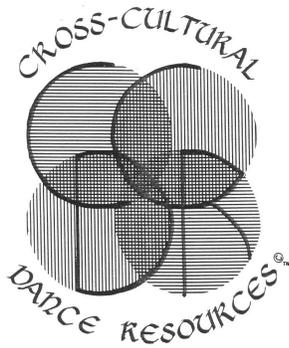
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KUDOS KORNER

Clara Henderson, a long-time member of CCDR, was selected as the winner of the Esther L. Kinsley Ph.D. Dissertation Award for 2009-2010, through the University Graduate School at Indiana University. Her dissertation, *Dance discourse in the music and lives of Presbyterian Mvano women in southern Malawi*, is now recognized by one of the highest honors given for research at Indiana University. Henderson received a monetary stipend that was presented at an awards reception held in April 2010.



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 Cross-Cultural Dance Resources, Inc.
 School of Dance
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Newsletter Co-Editors

ccdr-office@asu.edu