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## Sound, Dance and Motion from Franz Boas's Field Research in British Columbia to Franziska Boas's Dance Therapy

### 1. 'No Other Art Moves Me as Deeply as Music': Listening to New Sounds Opens a New Path

The article introduces a path that starts from the Franz Boas's (1858-1943) anthropological field research in British Columbia about dance, movement and sound among the Indians until the 1930 to the practice of dance and sound as a therapeutic issue in Franziska Boas's (1902–1988) work in New York.

Her father, widely regarded as the founder of American cultural anthropology and credited with an understanding of culture as a learned behaviour, emphasising the significance of cultural diversity, is considered one of the pioneers of ethnomusicological studies (O' Neill, 2015).

Born in Minden, Westfalia, deeply in touch with the German scholarly tradition (Lévy Zumwalt, 2019; Liebersohn, 2018; Müller-Wille, 2014; Stocking, 1996), his major early interests lay in Maths, Physics and Geography (Boas, 1881, 1887b; Cole, 1999), but his fieldwork in 1883 to Baffin Island, Canada, expanded his scientific inquisitiveness. After meeting and living together with indigenous Inuit peoples of the region, he ushered in a new study, as evidenced by several papers with ethnographic notes from that first expedition, collected in the monograph on *The Central Eskimo* (Boas, 1888b).

When he returned to Berlin after the expedition in Cumberland Sound, he could meet a group of Bella-Coola Indian singers, already studied by Carl Stumpf, the German philosopher, director of the Experimental Institute of Psychology in Berlin. Well known for his theory of tonal sound fusion (*Tonverschmelzung*) and his anti-naturalistic *Tonpsychologie* (1883, 1890), Stumpf indeed had listened and registered, with wax cylinder phonograph, a group of Bella-Coola Indian singers and Nuskilusta's songs in Halle (Martinelli, 2014, 2015; Stumpf, 1886). After a few months, the same ensemble, which was touring Germany at the time, was studied by the young Boas in Berlin, during his work at the Royal Museum of Ethnology under the direction of Adolph Bastian. Two years later, Boas will

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remember that study shared with Stumpf, after meeting again Bella-Coola people, this time in British Columbia: 'Some songs of the Bilqula, a tribe inhabiting the adjoining parts of the coast, were collected and published by Prof. C. Stumpf and myself, and published by Professor Stumpf in the 'Vierteljahrsschrift für Musikwissenschaft', 1886'. (1888, p. 52).

Meanwhile, the exhibition of Bella-Coola Indians in Berlin and the collections of the *Museum für Völkerkunde*, with new purchases sent by Johan Adrian Jacobsen from the west coast of North America, had boosted in Boas a deep interest in British Columbia. In July 1886, he sailed to New York, and from September 1886 to January 1887 he engaged in his first Northwest Coast field research with Indians listened in Berlin: that area caught his attention for the rest of his life.

Consistent with his epistemological and cultural relativism, Boas introduced a holistic approach to his intermittent fieldwork in the Northwest Coast between 1886 and the 1930, by Bella Coola, Thompson River and Kwakiutl Indians (translated by Boas 'smoke of the world', 1896, p. 231). There, extended observations and interviews allowed him to collect and draw up a wide range of notes about oral histories, myths, ceremonies, as well as social and political forms (Boas, 1887a, 1888a, 1889, 1911, 1927, 1944a).

Following his sensibility (Cole, 1999, p. 32) – 'No other art moves me as deeply as music' he stated in a letter to his wife Marie Krakowitz (Lévy Zumwalt, 2019) – he focused on music as one of the fundamental features of culture immaterial objects. In Boasian perspective, music, linguistic utterance, poetry, myth, dance, were deeply related arts (O'Neill, 2015, p. 132), which shared analogical sound and symbolic dynamics; hence his holistic approach to music, alongside language and dance, without forgetting social organisation and religious forms (Boas, 1896).

## 2. Notes on Sound, Dance and Motion in Franz Boas's Field Research

From the winter of 1886–1887, Boas started to visit the coast peoples of British Columbia (Boas, 1888a) becoming more familiar with the life, costumes, ideas of these non-homogenous tribes. In situ for the first time, he attended to the Kwakiutl winter dance, or *hamatsa* ceremonial, in which was celebrated a novice initiation through the encounter with a class of spirits, the *Ham'aa* (derived from the root *ham*, Boas, 1888a, p. 58). In 'On certain songs and dances of the Kwakiutl of British Columbia' Boas affirmed:

We distinguish two classes of dances: social and religious. The first were celebrated at great festivals, the latter exclusively in winter. Religious winter dances are the most interesting. (Boas, 1888a, p. 49)

The study stated that most of the dances were connected with the mythology of these peoples, while others were merely or better explained as a kind of social

entertainment. Besides, as discussed in a later paper (Boas, 1896), religious dances emerged from mythology that continually enriched and diversified the ritual.

In 1897–1902, Boas zealously pursued his work in the Pacific Northwest – at that time still considered academically almost whimsical –, by collecting materials about dance, musical performance, sequences of behaviour and by pioneering the use of sounds recordings. His epistemological signature style consisted in applying a rigorous research methodology, learned from the natural sciences and rooted in his German *Bildung*, to ethnographical field research (Liebersohn, 2018; Stocking, 1996).

In his books *The Mind of Primitive Man* (1911) and *Primitive Art* (1927), Boas organically analysed the above-mentioned field materials, scrutinising the so-called cultural immaterial objects, such as language, poetry, music, dance, gesture and life group displays (dioramas). In considering these cultural immaterial objects, Boas constantly highlighted not only the relevance of holistic perception but also stressed the rhythm as a common element in the realms of both language, music and dance.

### 3. Boas and von Hornbostel: a Unity of Perception

In this view, he seemed to be in tune with Hornbostel's considerations about the unity of the senses and the arts as exposed by the Austrian musicologist in *Die Einheit der Sinne* (1927):

What is essential in the sensuous-perceptible is not that which separates the senses from one another, but that which unites them; unites them among themselves; unites them with the entire (even with the non-sensuous) experience in ourselves and with all the external world that there is to be experienced (Hornbostel, 1927, p. 296)

[...] Since the sensuous is perceptible only when it has form, the unity of the senses is given from the very beginning. In the mask-dance, music and painting, sculpture and poetry, are not yet separated from one another; colours and forms are still drawn into the sounding whirl of human action and its cosmic meaning. (Hornbostel, 1927, p. 299)

It would be useful to dwell briefly on the assonance between the Boasian perspective about sound, music, dance, gesture and that of Erich Moritz von Hornbostel, regarding senses and arts. Indeed, Boas and Erich Moritz von Hornbostel, the director of the Berlin Phonogramm-Archiv from 1905 to 1933, had been regularly in contact between 1907 and 1935, by sharing overseas correspondence comprising 46 letters.

Thus, Boas, Stumpf and von Hornbostel were united by a common scientific experimental training and they periodically confronted each other concerning their multifaceted pioneering research work, which opened the field of ethnomusicology, at the time still defined as *vergleichende Musikwissenschaft*

(comparative musicology). They consistently exchanged research findings in the nascent field of ethnomusicology, as can be evinced by their correspondence.

Von Hornbostel in particular was a point of reference for Boas, for theoretical, technical and methodological questions related to the nascent ethnomusicology. The forty-six letters (conserved in the APS Library, Philadelphia) testify it, where the two scholars intertwine theoretical reflections centred on the study of music and language with technical issues, derived from the use of phonographic recordings and the relative shipments of wax cylinders by Boas to the Phonographic Archive in Berlin.

Furthermore, Boas and von Hornbostel discussed on several occasions about rhythm and gesture: in a letter sent to Hornbostel on 3rd August 1920, Boas answered to the director of the *Berlin Phonogramm Archiv* about the “problem of variability in motor habits and gesture language of different races” and his effort “to direct the attention of psychologists to it”. Boas expressed the need to get material adequate for stating this problem clearly:

I always talk about in my lecture and try to direct the attention of psychologists to it, but so far nothing has happened. Variability in motor habits in the whole race is very wide, certain of these habits are seized upon and imposed upon the race as a whole, being then found with strong individual variations. (Boas, 1920)

Facing the universalist theories of gesture language maintained by evolutionists, Boas underscored the learned, culture-specific nature of body movement (Farnell, 1999, pp. 349–350): in fact, he detected cultural specific patterning in dances, as well as in the complex hand gestures and body movements along with song and oral performances, by stressing the rhythm as a common element for these cultural phenomena (Boas, 1896, 1940, 1944).

The origin of rhythm must not be looked for in religious and social activities but the effect of rhythm is akin to the emotional states connected with them and, therefore, arouses them and is aroused by them. [...] The repetitions in prose narrative as well as the rhythms of decorative art, so far as they are not required by the technique are proof of the inadequacy of the purely technical explanation. The pleasure given by regular repetition in embroidery, painting, and the stringing of beads cannot be explained as due to technically determined, regular movements, and there is no indication that would suggest that this kind of rhythm developed later than the one determined by motor habits. (Boas, 1927, 317)

Towards the end of his career, Boas continued the study of music and dance, as products of human culture, enhancing their connection with rhythm and motor

habits. In collaboration with his daughter Franziska, dancer and researcher, and with the Russian anthropologist Julia Averkieva, he recorded in 1930 Kwakiutl dance and movements, as witnessed by *Visual Fieldnotes from Fort Rupert: Studies of Kwakiutl Dance and Movement* (Ruby, 1980). These early documents of visual anthropology were the only clips filmed by Boas and they enriched his already collected productive materials for coming studies of rhythm and gesture in dancing societies.

#### **4. Franziska Boas's 'Inner Dance': Dance and Sound Move Emotions**

The dancer Franziska Boas was deeply influenced by the research conducted with her father in British Columbia in the early thirties and by his humanitarian principles. Back to the East Coast, she applied her field observations by exploring the integration of dance and movement into two therapeutic settings: her studio in New York, where she worked with dancers, and the Bellevue Hospital.

In 1933 Franziska founded and directed the Boas School of Dance at 323 W. 21st Street, one of the first interracial dance organisations in the United States (Lindgren, 2005, p. 4). There, she pioneered dance as a potential holistic practice, gathering the emerging hypotheses and intuitions that movement was not only a way to express emotional states but that modifications in movement could initiate emotional healing (Lindgren, 2006, p. 59).

Always in New York, at Bellevue Hospital, from 1939 until 1943 she volunteered her services within an arts programme, with a research team led by a couple of psychiatrists Lauretta Bender and Paul Schilder. At Bellevue, Franziska practiced alongside the child psychiatrist Lauretta Bender, with whom the dancer co-signed the first papers on meetings and journals on the arising field of dance therapy (Bender & Boas, 1941, 1978). 'Creative Dance' (1941) was the first comprehensive discussion of dance therapy techniques with children (Levy, 1988, p. 111), later inlaid into a Bender's book, *Child Psychiatric Techniques* (1952). Bender was then known by drawing up a test named after her: the Bender Gestalt Test, or Bender Visual-Motor Gestalt Test. Published in 1938, her pencil-drawing test was a psychological assessment and screening instrument designed to evaluate visual-motor functioning, visual-motor perception skills, eventual neurological impairment and emotional disturbances in both children (ages three and older) and adults (Bender, 1938).

Franziska Boas was also greatly influenced by the psychiatrist Paul Schilder (Levy, 1988, p. 114), Bender's husband, a Viennese psychiatrist who was an associate of Freud. Later known for his classic treatise *The Image and Appearance of the Human Body* (1950), at that time Schilder was already developing his work on

body image, gesture and movement repertoire, deeming it as the close expression of an individual's body image.

Embracing Schilder's theory, Boas aimed to verify if variations in movement habits could influence the body schema and image, as this latter affects the movement repertoire. She postulated that the provision of new movement experiences external to an individual's usual preferences expedited the awareness of self and the ability to explore dimensions of personality otherwise not available. Hence, she strove to design a variety of body experiences for her dancers and patients to facilitate the widening of their movement repertoire and the improvement sought for their body image. Among the proposals for new movement activities, several postures were studied to encourage the exploration of the horizontal dimension: lying down, crawling, using all fours, cavoring... were typical floor exercises to take the edge off the body and to free posture rigidities.

Everything which disturbs or changes the relation of the individual to the vertical plane (gravitation) affects the motor mechanism of the entire body. The whole system of postures is fundamentally different when an individual is lying on the ground, or when he is standing. (Bender & Boas, 1978)

In this regard, Franziska actively promoted the re-enactment of behavioural patterns similar 'to the animal or primitive in man', by arguing the deep relation between movement and emotions, due to their primal and instinctive characteristics: 'The source of all dance is in a primitive muscular response to emotion' she stated (Boas, 1938, p. 71). During the dancing sessions, Boas observed in fact how patients projected their emotions and mental states into their movements: through this form of nondirective practice, the nonverbal communication could uncover personality characteristics and eventual related problems or mental distress.

Discussing the relationship between dance-as-therapy and dance-as-art, she later stated that 'the primitive animal-like impulses may furnish material for sublimation into an art expression' (Bender & Boas, 1978). Insofar, Franziska implemented gradually the work with dancers and children, by including in the scope of her practice three main areas of interest borrowed from psychology and psychoanalysis, as exposed above: (1) the re-shaping of body image through movement explorations; (2) the use of projective techniques in psychotherapy; and (3) the use of psychomotor free association through movement improvisation.

In Boasian dancing work, the use of sound and music also formed an essential mainstay, as a way to elicit movement and emotional responses. The musical accompaniment henceforth was fittingly matched, privileging percussive sounds that produce rhythmic repetition and specific effects connected with the

perception of time, space and tension. Franziska explained these reverberations as follows:

The drum bounces its listeners in space and creates a desire for rhythmic action. The cymbal softly played cuts space and spreads out in all directions horizontally. The gong fills space and suspends the hearer in it. Sharp sounds produce strong tension and penetrate space. Soft sounds produce weak tension and fill space. Regularly reproduced sounds produce repetition of movement and activate space. Crescendos produce increase in tension and fill space with activity. Descrescendos decrease tension and quiet the space. Accelerandos increase speed of movement and activate space. Retardandos decrease speed of movement and empty space of action. (Bender & Boas, 1978, p. 121)

Thanks to sound and music, activity and passivity were specific qualities explored and balanced during the dancing, by encouraging free and non consciously self-directed movement. The experience of stillness and the eyes closed approach allows to perceive space relations and emotions with a heightened consciousness of tensions so that 'passivity can lead to extreme activity precisely because of this sensitivity to all stimuli both internal and external' (Boas, 1971, pp. 22-23). In this regard too, Franziska was in tune with the concept of 'inner dance' (Boas, 1944b), which reevaluated the free, instinctual coordination inside the bodily awareness and openly regarded dance as a privileged form of expression of affective and cognitive processes.

Some may have subconscious meaning in relation to thoughts and feelings or speech. But dance happens for its own salt. The movements become symbols of tensions, feeling and inner thoughts. To dance one must sense changes in weight, velocity, tensions and volume. One must be able to feel large and small space, dense and open space. One must be willing to allow the laws of motion to control the body and carry it where they will. [...] This requires the courage to "lose oneself" in the happenings which are going on within the body and mind. (Boas, 1971, p. 22)

At the Sixth Annual Conference of the American Dance Therapy Association in 1971, Boas asserted the therapeutic potential of dance, as one of the tools to involve individuals with all facets of existence, entangled in the community. In her view, dance is 'a cohesive, driving force', which can flow both in therapy and art, depending on the purpose: if released, this force moves through the body and uncovers the thoughts, feelings, and the spirit of the dancer.

Franziska Boas constantly investigated the function of dance in inner and social life, considering it as an expression of the human spirit: in this perspective, her research path in the field of dance seems to be rooted in the research field conducted with her father in the 1930s in the Northwest Coast, where they both could

investigate the cultural, healing and spiritual meaning of performative dancing rituals, such as winter dances, by the Native Americans of British Columbia.

### Summary

The article briefly introduces a path, that starts from the Franz Boas' anthropological field research in British Columbia about sound, dance and motion among the Indians until the 1930s to the practice of dance and sound as a therapeutic issue in Franziska Boas' work in New York.

**Keywords:** Franz Boas, Franziska Boas, Erich Moritz von Hornbostel, dance, rhythm, motion.

## Klang, Tanz und Bewegung von Franz Boas' Feldforschung in British Columbia bis zu Franziska Boas' Tanztherapie

### Zusammenfassung

Der Artikel skizziert in einer knappen Übersicht den Weg von der anthropologischen Feldforschung von Franz Boas in British-Columbia über Musik, Tanz und Bewegung der Indigenen bis in die 1930er Jahre., bis zur Praxis von Tanz und Klang als therapeutische Werkzeuge in der Forschung von Franziska Boas in New York.

**Schlüsselwörter:** Franz Boas, Franziska Boas, Erich Moritz von Hornbostel, Tanz, Rhythmus, Bewegung.

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## Candelieri, From Franz Boas's Field Research to Franziska Boas's Dance Therapy

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