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Dance in the “Encyclopedia of Artistic Terminology”: Reflections on the GAKhN Choreology Project

Abstract: The First (Philosophical) Volume of the *Encyclopedia of Artistic Terminology* was to include entries on dance, ballet, choreography, choreology and gesture. Although the texts are not known, and it is not clear whether the entries were ever written, the decision to include them is telling. It signals that, from the very beginning of the State Academy of Artistic Sciences (GAKhN), dance assumed an important place in the institution. Wassily Kandinsky famously included movement in his synthetic art project, giving an impulse to the establishment of dance studies at the Academy. Throughout the 1920s, the Choreological Laboratory ran a substantial research programme. The article provides a brief overview of dance studies at GAKhN and discusses the place of dance in the *Encyclopedia of Artistic Terminology*.

Keywords: dance, choreology, kinemology, Wassily Kandinsky, Aleksei Sidorov

Kandinsky and Dance

The First (Philosophical) Volume of the *Encyclopedia of Artistic Terminology* was supposed to have entries on dance, ballet, choreography, choreology and gesture.¹ Although the texts are not known and it is not clear that the entries were ever written, the intention to include them signals that, from the very beginning of the State Academy of Artistic Sciences (GAKhN), dance assumed an important place in the institution. One of GAKhN’s founders, Wassily Kandinsky, famously listed movement among other arts in his syn-

¹ „Slovník Filosofského oddělení“ (1929), in: The Manuscript Department of the Russian State Library (NIOR RGB). Fond 547. Kart. 10. Ed. khr. 1, See: <https://gachn.de/slovník-filosofského-oddělení-nior-f-547-10-1-ca-1929> (23.08.2025). On the history of the project see Plotnikov 2023 and his article in this volume.

thetic art project, and this gave a strong impulse to the establishment of dance studies at the Academy.

In the early 1900s, when Kandinsky studied with the Munich artist Franz von Stuck, new dance made its appearance in Europe. In contrast with classical ballet, it put music and expression of feelings above old-school technique and privileged intimate solos, initially almost entirely by women. Before the First World War, Munich had a reputation as the capital of modern dance. Prior to her debut in the Münchner Künstlerhaus in 1902, Isadora Duncan visited von Stuck in his villa and performed for him. Stuck photographed his daughter as a skirt dancer and sculpted a relief of veil dancers in the manner of Loïe Fuller (Munich Dance Histories 2025). The same year, Japanese actress Sada Yacco included Munich in her European tour. In 1904, the *Traumtänzerin* (Dream-dancer) Magdeleine Guipet became a short-lived sensation: she improvised dances while supposedly in a hypnotic state (Eidenbenz 2011: 2). Maud Allan and Ruth St Denis, North-American performers of exotic “oriental” dance, made their appearance around 1906. Dancers and choreographers Sent M’ahesa, Clotilde von Derp, Alexander Sacharoff, Rudolf von Laban and Mary Wigman debuted in Munich.² In January and April 1914, the Laban School performed there, and Wigman presented her solos, “Lento”, in a long silk dress, and her demonically expressive „Hexentanz“ (“Witch Dance”). These and other artists created a burgeoning scene for modern dance, the first scene of its kind in the world. The chronicler of modern dance, Hans Brandenburg, with his artist wife, Dora Brandenburg-Polster, lived and worked in Munich; while he wrote on dance, she illustrated his published work with her sketches of dancers.

Exposed to these developments, Kandinsky became interested in movement and experimented with dance, as we will see later. Already in 1908/09 he started a project in *Gesamtkunstwerk*, a synthesis of the arts, with the composer Thomas de Hartmann and the dancer Alexandre Sacharoff. Kandinsky considered movement a basic element of art. Exploring the synthesis of the arts and synaesthetic perception of art works in his manuscript, „Über das Geistige in der Kunst“ (“On the Spiritual in Art”), he included dance, both

2 Sent M’ahesa was the pseudonym of the Swedish dancer Else von Carlberg (1883–1970); Clotilde von Derp (Clotilde von der Planitz, 1892–1974) and Alexandre Sacharoff (1886–1963) founded their own dance theatre ca 1919; Rudolf von Laban (1879–1958) was an innovative dancer, choreographer and movement theorist; Mary Wigman (1886–1973) studied with the latter and subsequently became one of the best-known modern dancers.

in its own right and as part of the "monumental" or total work of art, the Wagnerian *Gesamtkunstwerk*. Discussing theatre staging and directing, he distinguished three elements: "musical movement", "painterly movement" and "dance-artistic movement" (*tanz-künstlerliche*), and he envisaged their effective synthesis in the audience's perception (Weiss 1979: 203). The artist backed up the changes that modern dancers made to old ballet: "The reformers of ballet have in our own times turned their eyes toward forms from the past, whence they seek help even today. We are faced with the necessity of creating a new dance form, the dance of the future" (Kandinsky 1994c: 205).

The formulaic reference to "dance of the future" copied the title of Isadora Duncan's lecture, „Der Tanz der Zukunft“ ("Dance of the Future"), originally published in German in 1903 and translated into Russian in 1906. Kandinsky may have seen Duncan performing in Munich and Moscow. He drew a parallel between her role in reforming ballet and the role of avant-garde artists in revolutionising academic painting. Both did it by returning to the ancients: "[...] thus originated the link forged between Isadora Duncan and Greek dance and the dance of the future. This happened for exactly the same reasons as those that prompted the painters' search for help among the primitives. Of course in the case of dance [as in the case of painting], this is only a transitional stage" (ibid.: 205). The artist could sympathise with Rousseauist philosophy of "natural" movement and the rejection of conventional beauty advocated by Duncan. She argued that no movement can be "ugly" if it comes from the inner nature: "a child ought to dance as naturally as a plant grows. An inner force ought to come to the surface and find expression, the inner voice" (Duncan 1928b: 119). Only the movement that comes from within, from the dancer's "nature", can be harmonious and spiritual (Duncan 1928a: 54). In tune with her, Kandinsky claimed that "[...] conventional 'beauty' of movement must be thrown overboard [...]. Just as in music and in painting, there exist no 'ugly sound' and no external 'dissonance' [...], so too in ballet we will soon be able to sense the inner value of every movement, and inner beauty will replace outer beauty. From these 'unbeautiful' movements that now suddenly become beautiful streams forth at once an undreamed-of power and living strength" (Kandinsky 1994c: 205–206).

Duncan prophesied that the dancer of the future will be one whose body and soul have grown so harmoniously together that the natural language of that soul will have become the movement of the body. From all parts of her

body shall shine radiant intelligence. In the German original (the English translation appeared a quarter of a century later), the concluding sentence reads as follows: „Ja, sie wird kommen, die Tänzerin der Zukunft, sie wird kommen als der freie Geist, der in dem Leibe des freien Weibes der Zukunft wohnen wird“ (Duncan 1903: 45). In “Über das Geistige in der Kunst” Kandinsky used the same German word, *der Geist*, which can be rendered into English as either spirit or intelligence. Like Duncan, he believed that the highest and most perfect artistic expression is of the inner character, inner voice, or of true nature. The historian Michael Huxley summarises the conclusion of “Über das Geistige in der Kunst” in the following passage:

Kandinsky characterizes three types of painting: the impression, the improvisation, and the composition. The first concerns the artistic realization of an external impression; the second, a “largely unconscious, spontaneous expression of inner character”. [...] Kandinsky describes the third type as “an expression of a slowly formed inner feeling, which comes to utterance only after a long maturing”.

(Huxley 2017: 266)

In 1908 Kandinsky began experiments with Alexander Sacharoff, who relocated to Munich to study dance (two years later, Sacharoff debuted at the Münchner Künstlerhaus and later performed at the Munich Artistic Theatre). In an article he wrote back in Russia, Kandinsky recalled:

I myself had the opportunity to carry out some small experiments abroad with a young musician and a dancer. From among several of my watercolors the musician would choose one that appeared to him to have the clearest musical form. In the absence of the dancer, he would play this watercolor. Then the dancer would appear, and having been played this musical composition, he would dance it and then find the watercolour he had danced.

(quoted *ibid.*: 268)

The same year he wrote this, 1920, Kandinsky became head of the Institute of Artistic Culture (INKhUK), a new institution established with the aim to study art and provide it with a scientific foundation. In the “Program for the Institute of Artistic Culture”, he proposed to search for “the effect on the psy-

che" of painting, sculpture, architecture, music, poetry and dance. The artist located "movement of the body and its parts" as an "individual art" contributing to what he termed "a monumental artwork" (Kandinsky 1994e: 464). He was concerned with reforming old ballet, which had "become more or less museum relics". Yet, if earlier Kandinsky had credited modern dance with this mission, in 1920 he claimed the changes would come from "the circus movements of acrobats, gymnasts, clowns, and last but not least, comedians", including slapstick comedy (ibid.: 466). He also mentioned "movements used in rituals", commenting that "certain gestures, distinguished by their extreme schematicism, possess a superhuman power of expression" (ibid.: 467). As earlier, he believed that, when studying movement, one should pay attention to both the perception of movement by spectators and the sensation of one's own movement "from the standpoint of the inner impression" or "psychic experience" (ibid.: 468). His focus on inner experiences of movement echoed contemporary research on muscular sense, or kinaesthesia, and it was in line with the philosophy of modern dance.

In June 1920, Kandinsky presented his programme to the conference of the Free Workshops. INKhUK brought together avant-garde artists Aleksandr Rodchenko, Varvara Stepanova and the Stenberg brothers, and the theorists Aleksei Gan, Osip Brik and Boris Arvatov. It quickly became clear, however, that Kandinsky, from an older generation, had very different interests from the radical artists. In January 1921 he left, and at the end of the following year INKhUK became attached to the Academy of Artistic Sciences. Just before leaving, Kandinsky turned his programme into the project of GAKhN's Physico-Psychological Department. Later, he developed some related ideas at the Bauhaus. In one of the early essays written there, „Über die abstrakte Bühnensynthese“ ("Abstract Synthesis on the Stage"), Kandinsky re-stated that a "monumental abstract art" should include "organised movement – the resources of dance – temporal, spatial, abstract movements not of people alone, but of space, of abstract forms, subject to their own laws" (Kandinsky 1994a: 506).

Choreology

What started as a project turned out to be Kandinsky's legacy. His intellectual heir at GAKhN was Aleksei Sidorov (1891–1978), a full member and Academic Secretary after 1924. It is likely Sidorov came across modern dance at the

end of the 1900s, when Isadora Duncan toured Russia, and almost certainly in 1913/14, when, as a graduate from Moscow University, he spent a year in Munich on a scholarship. While in Munich, Sidorov had the chance to see many dance performances, including the German-Dutch choreographer and dancer Gertrude Leistikow and the Laban School. He and Kandinsky may have met either there or, earlier, in Moscow. They shared views on why and how to study movement and had a plan for a special discipline on dance, for which Sidorov coined the term “choreology”.³

Beginning in the mid-1910s, Sidorov worked on a manuscript, *Sovremennyyi tanets* (*Modern Dance*), which he published as a book in the winter of 1922/23 (Sidorov 1923). The first Russian monograph on contemporary dance, it borrowed some ideas from Hans Brandenburg’s monograph with the same title yet gave an original account of several contemporary dancers and choreographers, including Russians.



Fig. 1

3 In the early 1920s Rudolf von Laban independently coined the term “choreology” for dance theory (Laban 1966; Sirotkina 2023).

Following Kandinsky, Sidorov regarded dance as an “artistically organized movement” in time and space, emphasized dynamism as opposed to statuary posing, and favoured “pure” or abstract movement as opposed to narrative. Also following the maitre’s guidelines, he planned to study both the viewer’s perception of dance and the artist’s inner experience of it (Sidorov 2017: 80). He started experimenting with dance in September 1921, while Kandinsky was still in Russia. First at the Moscow Psychoneurological Institute and then at GAKhN two years later, Sidorov staged several dance performances by different dancers and choreographers and asked the audience to answer a questionnaire that he designed. Although he did not publish the results, the sketches of the dancers, their names and some answers to the questionnaires were preserved in the archives.⁴

Under the influence of “hypnotic dancers” Magdeleine Guipet and Lina, cases known to him from literature, Sidorov also contemplated experimenting on dance under hypnosis (Sirotkina 2021); it is not clear whether he succeeded. When, in 1921, Kandinsky mentioned “Prof. A. A. Sidorov’s laboratory”, he almost certainly had his dance studies in mind.⁵ In May 1922, Sidorov found a home for his research at GAKhN, the Choreological Laboratory, the first institution specialised in dance studies (Misler 1996).



Fig. 24

4 The Manuscript Department of the Russian State Library (OR RGB). F. 776. Kart. 4. Ed. khr. 20.

5 “O metode rabot po sinteticheskomu iskusstvu” (“On the method of working on synthetic art”). Unpublished manuscript in the Russian State Archive of Literature and Art (RGALI). F. 2740. Op. 1. Ed. khr. 198.

At the Academy, Kandinsky proposed to organise three cycles of seminars corresponding to three concepts: 1) elements of different arts, 2) construction in art and 3) composition in art (Podzemskaja 2017: 49). While he conceived of construction in art as formal and structural, composition was intuitive, closer to music. For almost twenty years, Kandinsky produced paintings titled “compositions”: the earliest one was completed in 1910, the last one was dated 1939. The first seminar cycle took place in 1921; the second one, on construction, featured only two papers, “Construction in Fine Arts” by the artist Pavel Kuznetsov and “On Construction in Dance Art” by Natal’ia Tian, then the head of the Choreological Laboratory. The third seminar cycle, on composition, never took off, although dance composition drew attention of researchers at the Choreological Lab.

In his choreology project, Sidorov was assisted by the friend of his youth, Aleksandr Larionov (1889–1954). An engineer by training, Larionov attended, like Sidorov, the Symbolist circle of the Moscow sculptor Konstantin Krakht. The members of this circle worshiped Charles Baudelaire and studied both Helene Blavatsky’s theosophy and Rudolf Steiner’s anthroposophy. Like Sidorov, Larionov was involved in mystical societies, including the Rosicrucian Order. They both hoped to shape general, or theoretical, art studies in the sense of the German *Allgemeine Kunstwissenschaft*, and dance studies in particular, by drawing on ancient wisdom and hermetic knowledge. In May 1923 Larionov replaced Tian (who had had an accident and had left Moscow to recover) as head of the Choreological Laboratory. A dancer, Tian invested more in choreographing rather than in studying dance by objective methods. By contrast, Larionov returned to Kandinsky’s “basic elements” and “artistic organization of movement”, which he suggested examining by the method of “precise psycho-physiological experiment” (Kondrat’ev 1923: 442–443). He gave a general definition of “plastika” (plastique) and drafted a list of topics study including spatial composition, or the artistically appropriate use of space; graphic elements of plastic poses and the relationship between plastique and music (Khoreologicheskaja laboratorija 1923: 11). This programme was close to Kandinsky’s 1920 Programme, in which he proposed to “write down, to draw, to notate (musically), etc., these remarks and those on the associations aroused by movements” (Kandinsky 1994: 468). He also emphasised the need for rigorous objective methods: “both the movement of the whole body and, for example, the hand, the fingers, or just one finger,

must be recorded photographically and graphically, together with accurate observations of their effects" (ibid.: 468).

In his book on modern dance, Sidorov repeated the call for objective experimental methods and the use of modern technology to record and scrutinize movement. He intended to achieve this by establishing the Choreological laboratory, first at the Psychoneurological Institute, from where he may have taken anthropometric instruments, a set of psychological tests, and a photo camera. Eventually he moved the lab to GAKhN, with better facilities. There he and his colleagues could photograph dancers who walked, moved or posed, individually and in small groups, costumed and not, thereby studying construction and composition in choreography. Five young women with gymnasium education and gymnastic, ballet, or plastic training, M. M. Olenich, L. V. Zubkova, E. M. Sokolova, L. G. Veselova, and Z. D. Fedler (only their initials are known), were recruited as models; all had to sign a formal consent to participate in experiments nude, if required for a better examination of movement (Sirotkina 2021: 171). Sidorov also invited various artists to sketch dance and prompted choreographers to share their individual notation systems for recording dance. He made sketches himself and tried to devise his own notation system.

In mid-1920s at the Bauhaus, Kandinsky sketched from the photographs of the German expressionist dancer Gret Palucca (Kandinsky 1994b). Kandinsky visited Palucca in Dresden in 1926 on his way to Dessau, but he drew her dance poses from the photographs made by Charlotte Rudolf. According to the art historian Lee Edgar Taylor, the classroom where Kandinsky taught was next door to the dance studio, and he and his students could make sketches of the dancers. He asked the students to do it schematically, drawing lines and points only, and he gave them only ten seconds to complete each sketch. This was in line with the Bauhaus method of reducing the object to a minimum. Kandinsky used "a mere five lines, only two of which are angular, to represent Palucca's figure: A single, short, line for her feet; the two, angular, lines for her body; and two short lines for the bend of her right arm" (Tyler 2017: 135). He commented that the entire body of the dancer, from her head down to her fingertips, was at every moment an uninterrupted composition of lines. For this purpose, he admitted later, old ballet could be as good as modern dance, since ballet had pointes – "a terminological reference that must derive from 'point'. Running quickly on the tips of one's toes leaves behind points on the floor" (Kandinsky 1994d: 558).

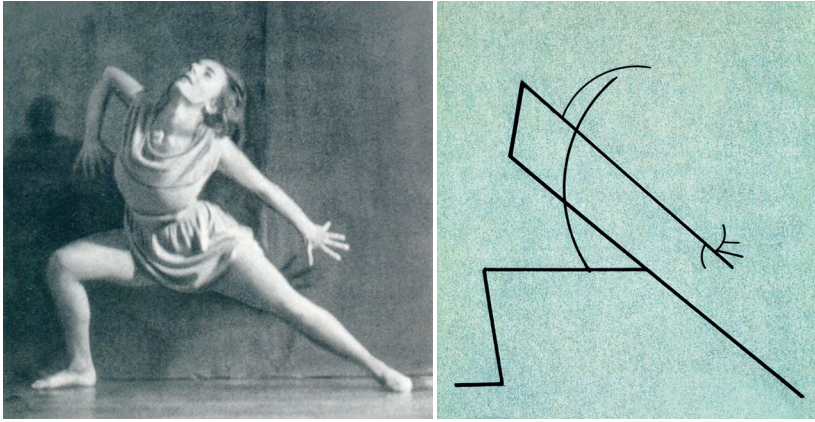


Fig. 5 and 6

Between 1922 and 1929, when the Choreological Laboratory was active, Sidorov and his assistants took hundreds of photographs of dancers, acrobats and athletes. One photographic series coming out of the Choreological Laboratory recorded various types of gaits in different footwear and barefoot. Another one pictured historical dance, with dancers costumed according to different epochs – Egypt, Assyria, Ancient Greece, etc. One series examined symmetry: dancers posed against a geometrical background inscribed into the figures of a rhombus, a circle, or a square. Sidorov and Larionov tried to deconstruct dance poses into geometric figures, to examine bodies in space, and to analyse the body's shapes “in the form of a spheroid, vertical, horizontal and inclined line”.⁶ Divided into elements and fixated within a frame, movement became subject to construction and composition. Finally, there was a series with multiplication of images on one print – the so-called multiple photography. This brought together dance and film.

6 Larionov, Aleksandr: “Programma raboty Choreologicheskoi laboratorii” (Programme of the Choreological laboratory work, 1923). Unpublished manuscript in the Russian Archive for Literature and Art (RGALI). F. 941. Op. 17. Ed. khr. 3. L. 16–21.

Kinemology

In his Programme of the Institute of Artistic Culture, Kandinsky mentioned, besides dance, "the circus movements of acrobats, gymnasts, clowns, and last but not least, comedians" (Kandinsky 1994e: 466). Modern dance shared the language of expressive gesture with silent cinema. The post-Duncan generation of dancers introduced a version of modern dance known as *Ausdruckstanz*, or "expressive dance". In Russia, it was represented by a few choreographers including Inna Chernetskaia. She studied in Munich prior to the First World War and might have met Kandinsky there. Chernetskaia based her Synthetic Dance on the idea of the synthesis of movement, drama, visual arts and music. Sidorov praised her artistic productions as "a synthesis of ballet, pantomime, drama, maybe cinema, and most marvellously of all, dance".⁷

In September 1924, Sidorov gave a talk on "Dance and Cinema" at GAKhN's Cinematography commission. Two months later, he and Larionov submitted a project that could potentially bring research on dance, film and photography together. They proposed establishing a special discipline, a science of movement, which would study dance and other kinds of bodily movement, cinematography and rhythm. For this discipline, they coined a term "kinemologiiā" (kinemology) (Sirotkina 2017).

The Academy already had divisions for spatial arts (including visual arts and architecture) and theatre studies; the new kinemology division, with three subsections, of choreology, cinematography and rhythmic gymnastics, was to be added to them. The choreology subsection was to continue to study dance and everyday movements. The cinematography subsection was to focus on movement in film, decomposing cinematic action into elements and analysing composition of individual film frames. Finally, the rhythmic gymnastics subsection was to investigate rhythm in dance and work (see Table 1 in Appendix).

Larger and more important than a lab, the kinemology division would have significantly increased the presence of dance and movement studies at GAKhN while raising the discipline's status. Summarising the trend towards an interdisciplinary synthesis, the philosopher and vice-president of GAKhN Gustav Shpet mentioned that the Academy brought together various specialists: "[...] literary scholars, musicologists, theatre scholars and... plastolo-

7 «[...] синтез балета, пантомимы, драмы, может быть кино и что чудеснее всего – танца» (Inna Chernetskaia [n. d.]: 7).

gists” (Shpet 2007: 155).⁸ Under the term of “plastovedy” (plastologists) Shpet united scholars of the spatial arts, architecture and sculpture (for which the Academy had a division of spatial arts), rather than those specializing in dance and human movement. Larionov and Sidorov proposed to expand the list adding dance scholars and “kinemologists” to it. This would distinguish dance from theatre and free space for movement studies outside of the theatre studies that formed a large part of GAKhN (Gudkova 2015). The Academic Council, however, rejected the proposal. The reason might be that GAKhN already had a photo lab (of Boris Podluzskii), a cinema lab (of Grigorii Boltianskii) and the Commission for Experimental Study of Rhythm (with the Dalcrozean Nina Aleksandrova as the head). The Academy also included the Russian Photographic Society as its division. As a result, kinemology as a discipline never materialised. Yet the project stimulated scholars to focus on physical motion as well as its perception, tying together dance performance with visual arts, film and photography.

In the Choreological Lab, interdisciplinary studies of movement continued. In the early 1925, GAKhN held “The Art of Movement” exhibition, the first in a series of four. Featuring photographs of nude dancers, it was closed to the public (Misler 1996). Yet its success called for a second exhibition, now open to everybody. The second Art of Movement exhibition had a bigger range of photographs and included working operations, physical culture and sports, acrobatics and juggling, rhythmic gymnastics, classical ballet, plastic art, dance and film.

In the academic year of 1926/27, the Choreological Lab was finally able to film dance, with the help of the photographer Ivan Bokhonov. Bokhonov worked for the Ministry of Education, Narkompros (the People’s Commissariat of Enlightenment), and was in charge of the photography department of the Mezhrabpom-Rus’ film production company. He made his professional studio available to the Choreological Laboratory for recording four dance pieces (*Bulleten’ GAKhN* 1926: 78). The footage (unfortunately not preserved) was used to visualise the movement characteristic of each type of dance, rather than for screening. For the purpose of representing movement graphically, a method of photographing movement with equal time intervals, chronophotography, was equally suitable and simpler to use.

8 «[...] литературоведов, музыковедов, театроведов и... пластоведов».

In addition, the lab analysed shots from silent films seeking to determine the dramatic moments, or "knots" of action, similar to Roland Barthes's *punctum*. The results were discussed at several meetings of the lab in 1927/28: Sidorov gave a talk on "Problema stsenarii v fotografii" ("The Problem of scenario in photography"), Larionov on "Arkhitektonika khudozhesvennogo dvizheniia" ("Architectonics of artistic movement") and M. S. Gutovskaia on "Analiz foto-stsenarnogo dvizheniia" ("The analysis of movement in the photographic scenario") (*Bulleten' GAKhN* 1927–28: 71). In the same series, the actor Vladimir Nikitin-Gorsky gave a lecture-demonstration on "Zhest, kak orudie akterskogo tvorchestva" ("Gesture as a tool of the actor's creation") illustrated by students from the Lunacharsky Theatre College and the Film Directors Courses. The Lab also discussed the effects of lighting and the spatial composition on movement (*Bulleten' GAKhN* 1927: 76).

Conclusion

Dance constituted an important part of art studies in the course of the Academy's existence. Stimulated by Kandinsky, whose interest in dance he shared, GAKhN's Academic Secretary Aleksei Sidorov founded the Choreological Lab and actively contributed to dance studies. The Lab hosted performances of modern dance and discussions of dance-related issues. It also organised four successful "the art of movement" exhibits. It is therefore not surprising that the *Encyclopedia of Artistic Terminology* planned entries on ballet, dance, choreography and choreology. The articles were assigned: the first one to Sidorov, the rest to Larionov. Sidorov was to write the entries on Ballet (50 lines) and Gesture, and Larionov on Dance, Choreography and Choreology (each 1/16 of the typo sheet long, or approximately 2,500 characters; for comparison, the entry on Theatre was supposed to be a quarter of the typo sheet, approximately 10,000 characters).⁹ None of the articles appears to have been written. By contrast, the existing entries on related subjects, "Movement" by Nikolai Tarabukin and "Gesture" by Mikhail Fabrikant, reduced movement to perceived motion in visual arts rather than physical movement of the body in performance arts. The authors examined the semiotics of gestures rather than their inner sensation. Fabrikant compared gesture with an alphabet: "in a cer-

9 Sidorov was also to write on "Photography", "The Book", "Graphics" and "Erotica".

tain sense, the graphic form of a letter should be regarded as a continuation of G<esture>”, and “the sound of the letter is an indispensable accompaniment of G<esture>”.¹⁰ The semiotic approach was more widespread. Larionov drew a parallel between graphic alphabets and gestures or movements. His interest in mystical alphabets and secret languages, which he shared with Sidorov, motivated their research into existing dance notation as well as attempts at creating new notation systems (Larionov 1997; Sirotkina 2023).

One of the obstacles for completing the entries on dance may have been the conceptual problem of integrating the spectator’s perception of movement with the mover’s inner experience of it. In his “Vvedenie v istoricheskoe izuchenie iskusstva” (“Introduction to the Historical Study of Art”), the art scholar and member of GAKhN’s Spatial Arts Division, Boris Vipper, argued that “not only visual organs but also tactile motor energy is involved in the creation and perception of sculpture”.¹¹ Inwardly repeating the statue’s dynamics, the viewer feels the depicted poses and movements as his own, formed by his motor apparatus. Then, Vipper claimed, the dead material of the sculpture was transformed into a living being (Vipper 1985). Yet he did not contribute to the Encyclopedia’s entry on the “Body”, which, as a result, treated the body solely as a model for visual artists, the anatomical body, rather than a body possessing a sense of movement, or as a first-person experience.

Another reason why the entries on dance were problematic might be that dance had not achieved the status of other arts. For many, dance meant ballroom, or social dancing, a light entertainment of an erotic nature, rather than high art. Writing *On the Spiritual in Art*, Kandinsky noticed that the origin of dance was “apparently of a purely sexual nature. Even today we can still see this original element revealed in folk dance” (Kandinsky 1994c: 205). Sidorov argued that the area of dance studies “had been too long hijacked by emotions of non-aesthetic character”.¹² Even the gentrified ballet lacked what Kandinsky called spiritual vibrations. Although in the 1920s in Russia, as in the West, modern dance indeed laid claims on being seen as high art, the Encyclopedia editors were apparently still ignorant of it.

10 Quote courtesy of Nikolaj Plotnikov.

11 «[...] в создании, и в восприятии скульптуры участвуют не только зрительные органы, но и осязательная моторная энергия».

12 «[...] слишком долго была в плену не совсем даже эстетических эмоций» (Sidorov 2017: 80–81).

It does not come as a surprise that dance was ignored by art scholars worldwide during the interwar period. The French counterpart of the *Encyclopedia of Artistic Terminology*, Étienne Souriau's *Vocabulaire d'esthétique*, also excluded dance until well into the second half of the last century. A philosopher of aesthetics, Souriau assembled a scholarly team which worked on the *Vocabulaire* from 1948 till his death in 1979. His daughter Anne completed the edition in 1990 (Souriau 1991). It was only after the first doctoral thesis on dance history was defended at the Sorbonne in 1965 (by Germaine Prudhommeau), and dance studies made an entrance into academia, that Souriau and other authors of the *Vocabulaire* faced this art. The historian Lætitia Basselier claims that the (missed) encounters between Souriau and dance raise the issue of why the aesthetic philosophy of dance and ballet lacked development in the twentieth century (Basselier 2017).

Sidorov remained a pioneering but lonely voice in the early history of dance and movement studies. Trying to elevate dance into an art worthy of serious critique and academic attention, he argued that its substance was not the language of the body (*plastique*), and not the language of music (*rhythm*), but the movement itself, or pure movement (Sidorov 1923: 60). To study pure motion, rather than shapes, would be a real breakthrough towards modernity. Yet the hopes that the science of movement, or kinemology, would become part of art studies were never realized.

Lastly, the entry might have been written but was lost in the turmoil of Soviet history. At the end of the 1920s, the modern dance scene in Russia almost disappeared, and the choreology project had to stop even before the final closure of GAKhN. The year of the Great Break and Stalin's Cultural Revolution, 1929, became the last for the Choreological Lab.

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Appendix

Таблица 1: К проекту организации Кинемологической секции при РАХН с подсекциями: хореологической, кинематографической, ритмо-гимнастической (7 ноября 1924 г.). Источник: ГЦТМ им. А. А. Бахрушина. Ф. 517 (ГАХН). Ед. хр. 139 (Материалы Бюро научной информации по вопросам искусства движения, Кинематографической комиссии, Библиографического отдела). Лл. 28–36.

	Хореологическая подсекция	Кинематографическая подсекция	Ритмо-гимнастическая подсекция
IA	Исследование пространственных форм движения — разложение непрерывного процесса движения на его узловые статические моменты, исследование позы, нумерование поз, порядок и группировка статических узлов	Изучение элементов кинематографического действия, слагающегося из непрерывного ряда статических положений	Установление эстетических норм гимнастического движения, индивидуальных и коллективных
IB	Заполнение пространства, законы пластической композиции	Изучение целесообразно-эстетического заполнения пространственно-кинематографических «кадров»	Изучение эстетических норм воплощения гимнастических игр и зрелищ в античности и их современного и их социального значения
IV	Законы координации психических состояний с соответствующими пластическими позами и формами заполняемых пространств, эстетические каноны пластического движения	Исследование законов координации смысла кинематографического стиля с соответствующими способами кинематографического его воплощения	
II	Временные формы движения, соответствие пластических и музыкальных образов	Изучение принципа сжатия во времени кинематографического сюжета, изучение принципа музыкального аккомпанемента кинематографическому действию	Исследование соотношений между ритмом органическим, музыкальным и рабочим, педагогическое значение усвоения ритма (система Жак-Далькроза) —временное начало гимнастики
III	Исследование фиксации движения		

Table 1: “The Project of Organisation of the Kinemological Division at the Russian Academy of Artistic Sciences”, 1923¹³

13 Larionov, Aleksandr / Sidorov, Aleksei: “K proektu organizatsii kinemologicheskoi seksii Rossiiskoi akademii khudozhestvennykh nauk s podseksiiai khoreologii, kinematografii i

	Choreology subsection	Cinematography subsection	Ritmoplastika subsection
Ia	Spatial forms of movement; decomposition of a continuous process of movement into its nodal static moments; poses; order and grouping of static nodes.	Elements of a cinematic action composed of a continuous series of static positions.	Aesthetic norms of gymnastic movement, individual and collective.
Ib	Principles of filling in the space; laws of plastic composition.	Spatial and cinematographic frames, or motion pictures.	Aesthetic norms in gymnastic games and spectacles in Antiquity and modernity.
Ic	Coordination between mental states and plastic shapes; aesthetic canons of plastic movement.	Coordination between meaning and its cinematographic realisation.	
II	Temporal forms of movement; correspondences between movement and music.	Time compression in cinematographic plot and musical accompaniment to the cinematographic action.	Relationship between rhythm in living bodies, music and work; pedagogical significance of learning rhythm (Jacques-Dalcroze's system).
III	Methods of recording movement		

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Illustrations

Fig. 1: Book cover of *Sovremennyyi tanets* (Sidorov 1923).

Fig. 2–4: Sketches by unknown artists, early 1920s (Sidorov's File, see footnote 4).

Fig. 5–6: Wassily Kandinsky (1926): „Tanzkurven: Zu den Tänzen der Palucca“ (“Dance curves: on the dances of Palucca”), in: *Das Kunstblatt* (Potsdam) 10/3, 117–121.