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PERFORMANCE STYLE RESEARCH CANTOMETRICS

Cantometrics and Related Studies of Communication

—Anna L. Wood, with a statistical section by Michael M. Flory

Song style is the formal elaboration of some instinctive and universally human mode of dramatizing or exteriorizing human feelings. Each song style is dominated by one or the other of these patterns — Alan Lomax, c.1961.

Cantometrics is the study of singing as normative expressive behavior, and of folk song style as a "systems-maintaining framework" which models key patterns of co-action in everyday life.

From the 1960s through the early '90s musicologist Alan Lomax and anthropologist Conrad Arensberg directed a series of comparative studies of human communication in relation to culture. Their research was based upon the hypothesis that every performance tradition incorporates behavior patterns that are important for human continuity and therefore play a fundamental role in the transmission of culture. They looked for features of sung, danced, and spoken communication that are widely observable and universally present, and occur in similar degrees and combinations in the majority of performances of a cultural group, regardless of content or message. These familiar elements and recurrent arrangements — the manner or "style" of performance — are what people unconsciously expect and respond to as culture members.

World Regions

This model of performance style represents a synthesis of Lomax's research in folklore with scientific endeavors concerned with explaining the reflexive, largely unconscious manifestations of culture, including Arensberg's interaction theory, Raymond Birdwhistell's kinesics, and George Trager and H. L. Smith's para-linguistics, among others. It treats performance as a highly structured flow of communication symbolizing culturally shared domains of behavior and interaction — the unconscious organization of public, commonplace behavior. At this level of observation, congruence of function — in this case distinctive ways of handling organization, energy, space, force, timing, sequence, dominance, and gender in diverse environments — can be shown to link behaviors of different classes. Thus style analysis is a method of operationalizing theorized connections between the artistic and the social, between one expressive system and another. Since in singing, music, dance, and speech such phenomena tend to be stable and strictly patterned, it was surmised that they arose in connection with older modes of human adaptation.

The unprocessed data consisted of large samples of recordings and films of music, dance, and speech from the main world regions. Together with disciplinary specialists, Lomax and Arensberg developed systems of measurement and evaluation to distinguish and code scaled multinomial variables for the analysis of this material in several linked studies, which were carried out over two decades: Cantometrics, Choreometrics and Parlometrics (parallel studies of song, dance, and speech style); Phonotactics (the distribution of vowel phonemes in song); Minutage (breathing in song); studies of instruments and orchestration, voice qualities, folk song texts, and popular music; and a cross cultural classification of culture by subsistence type. Factor analyses were applied to the coded data for each study and the factors were cross-correlated between datasets. Performance data was also tested against a specially adapted ethnographic framework based on the cross-cultural sample and coded analyses of ethnological evidence by George P. Murdock and other anthropologists who had done cross-cultural work of relevant interest.

Examined thus, the main variations in expressive traditions trace the limits imposed by geography and parallel the movements of culture and history. Statistical analyses of performance data yielded geo-classifications of cultural traditions, hypotheses linking performance factors and culture, and an evolutionary model of style. The distributions, hierarchies, and associations of the data bore out contemporaneous findings by geneticist and paleoanthropologists about human origins in Sub-Saharan Africa and the ancient and historical diffusion of human groups. This outcome had been generally predicted by Alan Lomax as early as the mid-1950s.

Among the project's collaborators and advisors were musicologist Victor Grauer; dance analysts Irmgard Bartenieff and Forrester Paulay; linguists Edith Trager Johnson, Fred C. Peng, and Norman Markel; anthropologists Barbara Ayres and Edwin E. Erikson; programmer

and statistician Norman Berkowitz; composer and musician Roswell Rudd; and web architect Michael del Rio. Others who worked on the project included multi-media producer Gideon D'Arcangelo; ethnomusicologists Robert Garfias and Andrew Kaye; data analyst Christopher Pino; multimedia editor Carol Kulig; dance analyst Mary Lobel; anthropologists Monika Vizedom, Joan Halifax, and Stephanie Krebs; and folklorists Bess Lomax Hawes and Ethel Raim.

The research was administered by Columbia University and Hunter College and supported by the National Institutes of Mental Health, the National Endowment for the Humanities, the National Endowment for the Arts, the National Science Foundation, the American Council of Learned Societies, the Rockefeller Foundation, the Apple Foundation, and numerous other private foundations and corporations.

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