



## CREATIVITY OF FORMAL ANALYSIS IN THE STUDY OF BALLROOM DANCING CHOREOGRAPHY

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**Abstract.** The article presents a structural analysis of the dynamics of position development in a pair in ballroom dancing with the use of research tools based on the method of formal analysis by Alexander Georgievich Gabrichevsky and the analysis of body movement in space by Rudolf von Laban. The aim of the study is to identify the distinctive features of the evolution of form in ballroom dancing. On the basis of formal analysis, the objectives of the research were to study ballroom dancing in spatial and temporal terms, to structure the dance form in vertical and horizontal planes, in the correlation of the categories of rhythm and meter, as well as in the context of static and dynamic time. The result of this study is a synthesis of the categories of space and time, which showed the leading trends in the development of the aesthetics of modern standard dances in the periods of modernism, postmodernism, and metamodernism. The comparative method made it possible to identify the characteristic features of the dynamics of form development in modern standard dances of the aforementioned periods. The uniqueness of the performing style in the categories of space, time, and their synthesis are revealed and analyzed. Illustrative examples of the study of the position of couples in the vertical and horizontal planes using the figure icosahedron are presented. The study also presents a conceptual map of the development of ballroom dancing in the context of the modern, postmodern, and metamodern eras. The main provisions of the study are the unity of spatial and temporal chronotope in ballroom dancing, considered as spatial and temporal parameters of expression of cultural and artistic meanings of modernity, postmodernity, and metamodernity, as well as the subordination of artistic time to rhythmic logic, based on metric alternations and movements, ordering the overall composition in the artistic space of ballroom dancing. This study provides a promising toolkit for analyzing the development and dynamics of forms in broad application in the fields of dancesport and choreographic art forms. It will also help to identify choreographic art in the cultural metamodern landscape.

**Keywords:** Alexander Georgievich Gabrichevsky, ballroom dancing, creativity, dance aesthetics, dancesport, form, formal analysis, icosahedron, metamodernism, Rudolf von Laban.

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## 1. Introduction

Ballroom dancing, with its graceful elegance and expressive choreography, has always occupied a unique place in the world of art and sport. In our time, the period of metamodernism, which is characterized by the mixing and intertwining of cultural and philosophical trends, the aesthetics of ballroom dancing acquires new meanings and dimensions. It becomes a kind of artistic reflection of metamodernist ideas about synthesis and hybridity, where past and future, classical and modern are combined in dance movements. In the context of contemporary cultural evolution, characterized by a complex mixture of tradition and innovation,

we draw attention to a promising study – the aesthetics of ballroom dancing in the period of metamodernism.

The period of metamodernism is characterized by synthesis and dialogue between different philosophical and artistic directions. It provides unique opportunities to explore the transformation of aesthetics in the context of ballroom dancing.

Ballroom dancing, being an inseparable part of a rich choreographic culture, includes a variety of styles and schools, each of which gives its own character and aesthetic expression. In this context, the aesthetics of ballroom dancing becomes a reflection of the multifaceted nature of metamodernism, which allows dancers and choreographers to combine technical complexity with deep emotionality, creating a creative synthesis.

## 2. Methodology for studying form in ballroom dancing

### 2.1. Method of formal analysis by Alexander Georgievich Gabrichevsky

The present study is an attempt to reveal the aesthetics of ballroom dancing through the prism of comparative analysis of structure and form in the periods of modernism, postmodernism, and metamodernism. In the issue of determining the evolution of the characteristic features of the aesthetics of ballroom dancing, the priority is given to the formal analysis, with the use of cultural-historical method of research, justified by the integral flexibility in the field of art history cognition.

Monographs and articles by art historians, culturologists, and philosophers, archival video materials and photographs of performances by ballroom dancers from modernism to metamodernism served as a factual basis for the research.

Gabrichevsky's (2002) work *Morphology of Art*, in particular, the method of formal analysis, which examines the work of art in spatial and temporal relation, allows us to analyze the development of choreographic forms, movements, and poses. Using the example of ballroom dancing, let us consider the development of the forms of the basic movements and their transition from static to dynamic time, carried out through movement, which embodies the synthesis of space and time.

Appeal to Gabrichevsky's (2002) concept of the synthesis of space and time, which we project onto ballroom dancing, gives us a certain toolkit for analyzing the form of this type of choreographic art with its visual and expressive properties. Under the category of space, we refer to the position in a pair, figures, movements, and poses, everything that is connected with the position and movement of physical bodies. The spatial organization of any work of descriptive art has general principles of construction. Firstly, it is realized on the surface, acting as a kind of platform for spatio-temporal synthesis. Surface as a "boundary of volume" (Gabrichevsky, 2002) allows to create a three-dimensional material datum within which the composition of the work is formed. Planes as a type of surface set the coordinates of spatial dimensions and form the compositional structure of the work. Gabrichevsky (2002) distinguishes two main types of planes: vertical and horizontal (Provornaya, 2018). We apply these two types of planes in relation to the staging of the body and the position in a pair in ballroom dancing.

Under the category of time, we refer to the music and musical performance of modern standard dances: "In Gabrichevsky's concept, the defining category is time. This category is formative not only for temporal arts – it is also important for understanding the properties of spatial arts" (Provornaya, 2018, p. 75).

Gabrichevsky (2002) refers to dance as a temporal art. In any kind of choreographic art, music plays a paramount role. From music comes the character, structure of the dance and its entire dramaturgy. Gabrichevsky (2002) classifies the category of time itself, based on two universal elements: rhythm and meter. There is also a division of artistic time into static and dynamic time. If rhythm prevails in the work, it indicates dynamic time, while if the main property is meter, the time is considered static.

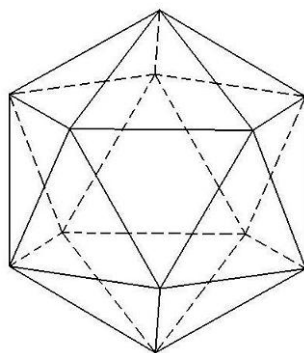
Also, in the work we turn to a phenomenological approach in the study of the position in a pair in ballroom dancing:

"Gabrichevsky gave particular attention to the philosophy of art, arguing that its purpose was to understand the structure of art within the broad context of cultural philosophy. Moreover, for him, the philosophy of art was based on the phenomenology of the artistic, while the qualitative science of being (nature as a creative whole) was constructed on the basis of the ontology of art" (Pogodin, 1997, p. 201).

## 2.2. Analysis of the body in three-dimensional space by Rudolf von Laban

In order to identify the dynamics of the development of modern standard dance forms, in particular, the position of dancers in a pair, we will turn to some theoretical works devoted to the study of the body and movement in space. The fundamental work of the 20th century in the study of choreography is the work of von Laban, according to which movement is studied in three-dimensional aspect (in vertical, horizontal, and sagittal planes) – in the figure icosahedron (see Figure 1), consisting of 12 points (4 points on each plane):

"From a mechanical point of view, the inclination of the body can be analyzed in any direction, however, since Sway in ballroom dancing is in side direction of the body (in the coronal plane), the forward or backward inclination (in the sagittal plane) is excluded in the analysis" (Shioya, 2018).



**Figure 1.** Rudolf von Laban's icosahedron (source: created by authors, based on Mugnolo & Plümer, 2020)

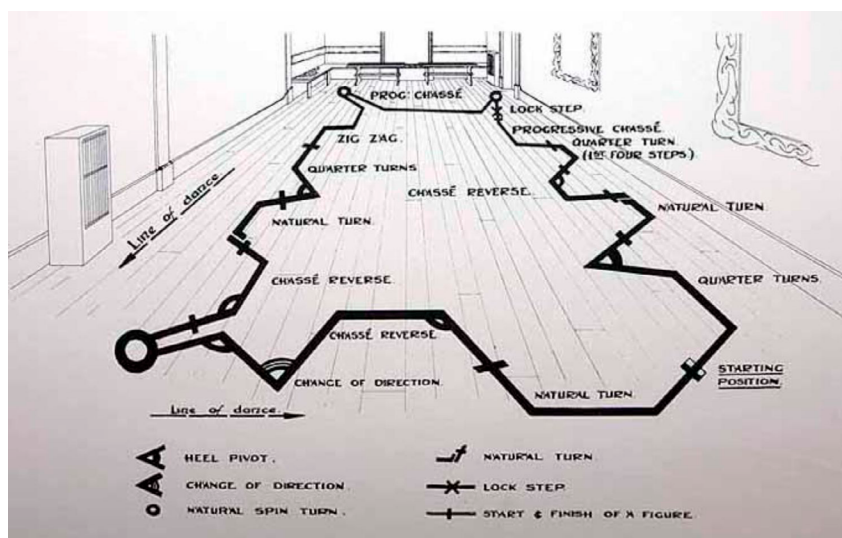
We agree with the author of the article "Analysis of Sway in Ballroom Dancing" Shioya (2018) that sway analysis is considered only in the coronal plane. Since the main objective of our research is to analyze the form in ballroom dancing, we need to examine the form in all planes, including the sagittal plane.

The specifics of staging performers in ballroom dancing assumes a stand in a pair, in which the partners become in close contact in the area of the body center, at the level of the coccygeal area. In the figure of icosahedron, the center is the point of intersection of all lines. In our study, based on these works, we propose to analyze the development of dancers' stance in pairs, movements, using the coordinate plane, where the point of contact between partners is the starting point, and the end point is the parietal region of the head.

### 3. The influence of the historical era on the compositional design of ballroom dances

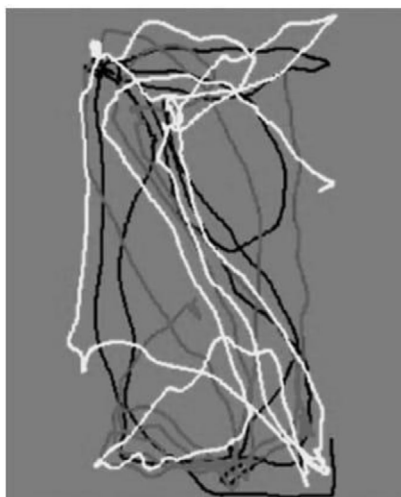
The period from the late 19th century to the mid-20th century marks the modern era. During the Art Nouveau era in Western Europe and America, industrialization and technological progress were in full swing. Undoubtedly, these factors influenced the development of art and culture, which were reflected in such trends as, for example, cubism, futurism, or kinetic art.

The ballroom dances of the modernist period embody the spirit of the time. The figures of the dances are associated with geometric linearity, which in turn is reflected in the compositional pattern. For a visual comparison, let us give illustrations of the initial period of formation and the modern stage of development of space development on the dance floor. In the electronic article by Powers (2024) "The Evolution of English Ballroom Dance Style" on the example of quickstep dance we can observe the structuredness and orderliness of dance compositions of ballroom dance of the initial period (see Figure 2).



**Figure 2.** Compositional construction of figures of the dance quickstep of the initial period (source: created by authors, based on Powers, 2024)

Regarding the current stage of development of compositional pattern and space exploration on the dance floor, we give an illustration from the article “A Time-Motion Analysis of Ballroom Dancers Using an Automatic Tracking System” by the authors (Zaletel et al., 2010) (see Figure 3). Also, using the quickstep dance as an example, the authors show the movement trajectory of three dance couples of the adult category. In this version, we can observe the chaotic movement of dance couples, the abstract nature of the compositional design, a kind of reflection of the increased pace of life of modern society.



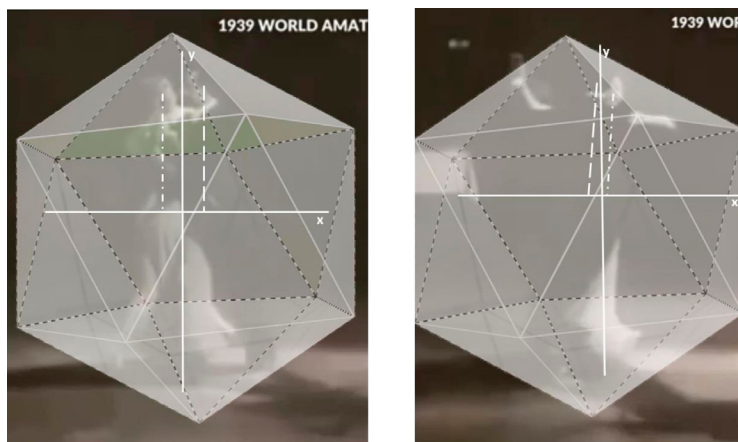
**Figure 3.** Trajectory of movement of three dance couples in the dance quickstep at the present stage (source: created by authors, based on Zaletel et al., 2010, p. 51)

## 4. Comparative analysis of form in ballroom dancing in the periods of modernism, postmodernism, and metamodernism

### 4.1. Ballroom dancing in the modernist period

Ballroom dancing of the modernist period in the context of Gabrichevsky's (2002) theories is characterized in the category of space as follows. As ballroom dancing developed around aristocratic and social dances, the performance of them was at first “relaxed, natural and restrained” (Powers, 2024): “All the movements are light, unaffected, and can so easily be spoiled by exaggeration. The best dancers are the quietest; they do not show off their skill” (Moore, 1935, p. 36).

In Figure 4 (left) we see on the example of the first step of the figure natural turn in quickstep that the position in the couple is absolutely vertical, there is no inclination, relaxed frame, steps are small, eyes (faces) of the partners are directed at each other. In Figure 4 (right) on the third step there is also vertical position in the couple, there is practically no inclination. The dance of that time is not energy-consuming, the performers dance at ease. Thus, inside the figure of icosahedron the dance in this variant contains mainly vertical plane, the conditional coverage of points inside the icosahedron is minimal.



**Figure 4.** John Wells and Renée Sissons: slow waltz. World Amateur Ballroom Championship in 1939 (source: created by authors, based on Mayer, 2012)

The analysis of the category of time in ballroom dancing of the modernist period shows that the music of ballroom dancing was divided into classical (waltz), jazz (quickstep, foxtrot, blues) and tango music. Music at competitions and evenings was played live by dance orchestras and bands.

THE GREAT CONFERENCE					
SPEEDS					
Quickstep	.	.	.	54-56	bars per minute
Valse	.	.	.	36-38	" "
Foxtrot	.	.	.	38-42	" "
Tango	.	.	.	30-32	" "
Yale Blues	.	.	.	30-34	" "

**Figure 5.** Tempos of ballroom dances, approved at the Great Conference of Ballroom Dance Associations. London, England, United Kingdom, 1929 (source: created by authors, based on Powers, 2024)

In the above illustration (see Figure 5) we see a table with the standardized music and tempo of ballroom dances approved at the Great Conference of Ballroom Dance Associations (London, England, United Kingdom, 1929) (Richardson, 1945). The tempo of the music was faster than modern standards except for the tango (a little slower). At the time, the Viennese waltz was not yet on the program, instead it was the blues.

The process of formation of dance music was accompanied by a kind of confrontation between musicians and performers of ballroom dancing. Musicians aspired to play jazz music in various tempos and interpretations of its inherent tempo, performers wanted to dance at their usual tempo. The solution was that in "1935, British world champion Victor Silvester formed the first British Strict Tempo orchestra, which made authorized recordings of ballroom dances at standardized tempos that continue to this day" (Powers, 2024).

The elements of rhythm and meter related to the category of time are identified in the musical performance of the ballroom dance program as follows: in the early stages of formation, meter prevailed. For example, in waltz steps were performed for every fraction, in

quickstep for every two fraction one step. Then gradually figures with syncopated steps were added to the list of figures, which was the impetus for the development of rhythm in the musical performance of ballroom dancing. These trends indicate that in the context of Gabrichovsky's (2002) theory of division of artistic time, the initial period of formation of the dance vocabulary of ballroom dancing was in the category of static time, then evolutionary passed into dynamic time. Thus, we see the transition of musical performance from static to dynamic time through movement, which embodies the synthesis of space and time. This synthesis in this period is expressed in the more passive movement of the performers on the dance floor.

Since ballroom dancing of this period carried a social character of performance, aesthetics, and emotional expression were reflected in the spontaneity of performance and natural emotions.

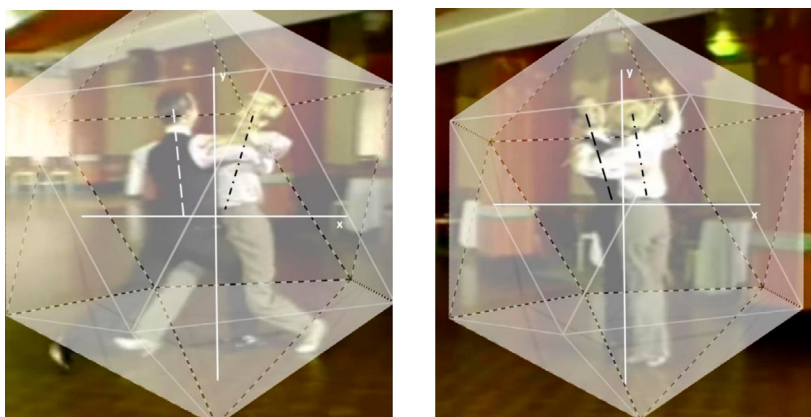
#### 4.2. Ballroom dancing in the postmodern period

The second half of the 20th century in culture and art is called the period of postmodernism. Postmodernism is primarily characterized by the development of mass culture. Deconstruction, eclecticism, intertextuality are some of the basic principles of postmodernism:

"In the process of deconstruction, as if repeating the path of construction and destruction of the Tower of Babel, whose result is a new parting with the universal artistic language, mixing languages, genres, styles of literature, architecture, painting, theater, cinematography, destruction of the boundaries between them. It was such eclectic mixes that formed the basis of the aesthetics of postmodernism" (Man'kovskaya, 2018, p. 198).

These principles were widely applied in the aesthetics of ballroom dancing as well. The combination and borrowing of movements from other types of not only choreography but also sports became an integral part of the dance vocabulary of ballroom dancing.

In the context of the category of space, ballroom dancing of the postmodern period is considered in the following way.



**Figure 6.** Richard Gleave and Janet Gleave: slow waltz demonstration (source: created by authors, based on Old dancing videos, 2024)



In Figure 6 (left) on the example of the first step of the figure natural turn in the waltz we can observe that the position in the couple is no longer vertical, the performers are slightly deviated from each other, the frame is more rigid, the steps are longer, the eyes of the partners are directed past each other. In Figure 6 (right) on the third step the performers are also slightly deviated from each other, there is a tilt to the right (the naming of all actions comes from the partner). Thus, a horizontal plane is integrated to the vertical shaping of the position in the pair. In this variant the dance is more energy-consuming and active. Inside the icosahedron figure, the position in the pair begins to fill the horizontal plane, the conditional coverage of points inside the icosahedron increases.

Regarding the category of time, the period of postmodernism is characterized by the fact that at competitions, along with the orchestral performance of ballroom dance music, the playing of sound recordings is practiced. Pop music is also added to the repertoire of classical, jazz, and tango music.

The program of modern standard dances includes the Viennese waltz (instead of the blues). The tempo of dances is standardized according to the regulations of the current rules.

The development of the rhythm element in the musical performance of ballroom dancing related to the category of time in this period continues, while the meter is present only in the Viennese waltz and categorically refers to static time.

The synthesis of space and time in the period of postmodernism is expressed in the progressive movement of performers on the dance floor.

The aesthetics of ballroom dancing during the postmodern period was characterized by a moderate expression of emotions in the spirit of aristocracy.

### 4.3. Ballroom dancing during the metamodern period

The term *metamodernism* has been dominant in philosophical and cultural studies, art history literature, and digital publications since the beginning of the 21st century. Turning to the theme of metamodernism in the subject field of art history represents a new installation of conceptual analysis of the study of its identification in art. If modernism was characterized by such features as naivety, reason, hope, progress, postmodernism was characterized by irony, cynicism, deconstruction, nihilism, metamodernism is characterized by oscillation, pragmatic romanticism, revival of spirituality, sincerity, sensuality.

Oscillation as a central category of metamodernism implies oscillation and simultaneity between two completely opposite concepts, for example, "oscillation between enthusiasm and irony" (Vermeulen & van den Akker, 2010), construction and deconstruction, oscillation between aspects of modernist and postmodernist cultures. The eclecticism of contemporary dance art demonstrates the oscillation of different dance cultures, which are clearly expressed also in the forms of dance.

At the present stage, the artistic processes and, in general, the aesthetics of ballroom dancing have been influenced by the entry of this type of choreographic art into the sphere of sport. In 1997, the World DanceSport Federation was recognized as an official federation and member of the International Olympic Committee for the entry of dancesport into the Olympic Games (Picart, 2006).



This factor contributed to the trend of sportiness in competitive ballroom dancing:

“The goal of competitive dancers is to win the competition. To be at the top of the standings, dancers are obliged to use all available means to attract the attention of the tournament judges, on whom the dancers’ passage up the tournament ladder and being at its top depends” (Kondrashev, 2022);

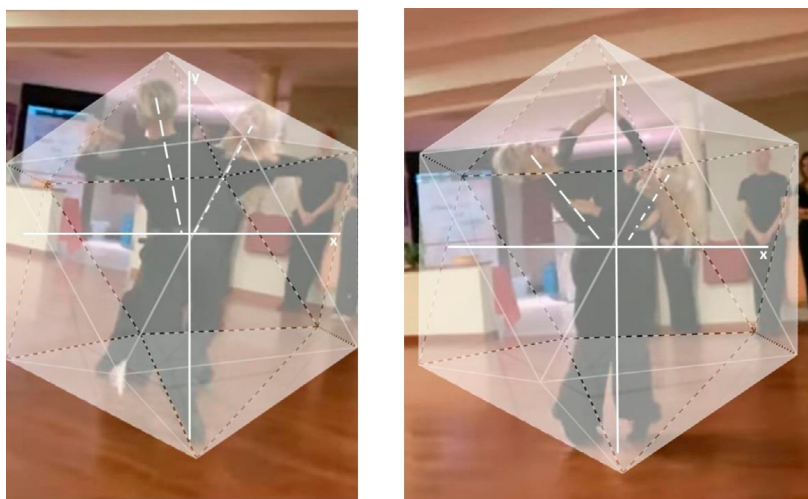
“Judges have a big influence on the rules, judging and, of course, the final result for a dance performance” (Premelč et al., 2019).

Let us give an analysis of the category of dance space of ballroom dancing of the period of metamodernism.

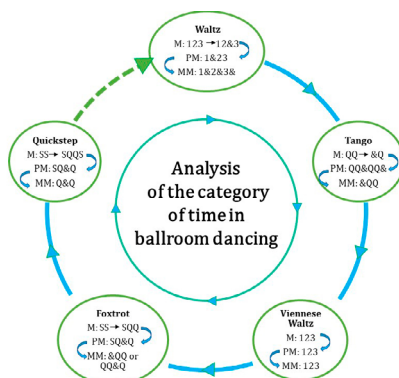
In Figure 7 (left) on the example of the first step of the figure natural turn in the waltz we can already see a sufficient deviation from the vertical, the performers are deviated not only from each other, but also each to the left, the frame is rigid, but at the same time the dance within this form has become more plastic, the steps are long, the eyes of the partners are directed past each other and upwards. In Figure 7 (right) on the third step the performers are strongly deflected from each other, the tilt to the right is greater. The integration of the horizontal plane into the shaping of the position in the couple is intensified. In this variant the dance is the most energy-consuming and dynamic. Thus, inside the figure icosahedron the increase of a horizontal plane is clearly visible, the conditional coverage of points inside the icosahedron is the greatest.

In the context of the time category, this period is characterized by an almost complete departure from the orchestral performance of music at competitions, with the exception of some competitions (*Kremlin Cup*, Russian: *Kubok Kremlya*). The traditional repertoire of ballroom dance music actively includes remixes of popular music.

The following illustration (see Figure 8) shows the development of the category of time, where different rhythms of figures in ballroom dances are given. This infographic shows the



**Figure 7.** Domenico Cannizzaro and Valeria Pittalis: slow waltz demonstration (source: created by authors, based on Cannizzaro, 2024)



**Figure 8.** Analysis of the category of time in ballroom dancing (source: created by authors)

Note: M – modernism; PM – postmodernism; MM – metamodernism.

progressive development of the rhythmic basis of the modern standard dances in the periods of modernism, postmodernism, and metamodernism.

The development of the rhythm element in the musical performance of ballroom dancing program is particularly active, in the figures most of the fractions in a tact are split. Also, in the Viennese waltz there are transformations in the rhythmic plan. Since the ultimate tempo of the Viennese waltz is 60 bars per minute (Issaliyev, 2015), its rapidity allowed to shift the rhythmic pattern only in the reduction of steps by one bar. For example, figures with the execution of two steps for three lobes became common. Thus, the performance of the Viennese waltz in categorical terms shifted to dynamic time.

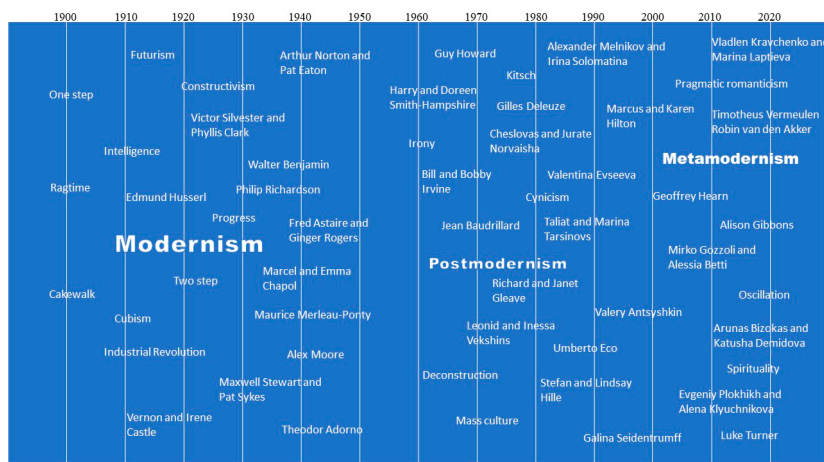
The synthesis of space and time in this period is expressed in the speedy movement of the performers on the dance floor.

The aesthetics of ballroom dancing in the period of metamodernism is characterized by a symbiosis of classical and modern elements. This allows this art form to retain its traditional basis, while opening new horizons for creativity and interpretation. In the emotional aspect, couples are distinguished by their expressiveness and artistry.

In conclusion, we present a Table 1, which fully reflects the systematized analysis of Gabrichesky's (2002) formal method on the example of ballroom dancing in the periods of

**Table 1.** Formal analysis of the European ballroom dancing program (source: created by authors)

	Modernism	Postmodernism	Metamodernism
Space (position, movement)	Vertical Relaxed	Horizontal Plane Integration Active	Increase in horizontal plane Dynamic
Time (music, musical performance, rhythm, meter, static, dynamic)	Classical, Jazz, Tango Meter → Rhythm Static → Dynamic	Pop music Rhythm (meter*) Dynamic (static*)	Remixes of popular music Rhythm Dynamic
Synthesis of space and time	Passive movement	Progressive movement	Speed movement
Development trends	Reason, progress	Deconstruction, popular culture	Oscillation, movement



**Figure 9.** Conceptual map of the development of ballroom dancing (source: created by authors)

modernism, postmodernism, and metamodernism. As well as a conceptual map (see Figure 9) showing the overall development of ballroom dancing in domestic and foreign regions in the context of cultural currents.

## 5. Basic provisions

The following scientific results were developed and formulated in the course of the study:

- It was determined that the structural change of form within a couple in ballroom dancing was influenced by the aesthetic tastes and preferences of modern, postmodern, and metamodern;
- The nature of external shape change within a couple in ballroom dancing was analyzed;
- Unity of spatio-temporal chronotope in ballroom dancing is considered as spatio-temporal parameters for expressing cultural and artistic meanings of modern, postmodern, and metamodern;
- Subordination of artistic time to rhythmic logic and based on metrical alternations and movements order the overall composition in the artistic space of ballroom dancing;
- Synthesis of the space-time continuum in ballroom dancing of the periods under consideration are ontologically subordinate to and reflect the cultural coordinates and manner of movement of their era.

## 6. Conclusions and recommendations

Gabrichovsky's (2002) method of formal analysis allowed us to study ballroom dancing in spatial and temporal terms, to structure the dance form in vertical and horizontal planes, in the correlation of the categories of rhythm and meter, as well as in the context of static and dynamic time. On the basis of the synthesis of the categories of space and time, the leading trends in the development of the aesthetics of modern standard dances in a particular period

are revealed. Using a phenomenological approach, we tried to overcome the division of this type of dance art into form and content.

With the help of von Laban's icosahedron, it was possible to clearly identify the evolution of the development of the position in the pair. The comparative analysis of structure and form in the periods of modernism, postmodernism, and metamodernism showed the distinctive features of the development of artistic processes of ballroom dancing. It should be noted that the presented differentiation of dance forms, as well as the periodization of cultural epochs has a generalizing character. For example, in the period of postmodernism, ballroom dancing of the 1950s and 1990s differed significantly.

Based on the formal analysis of ballroom dancing, we see the reflection of certain tendencies of each period. Thus, in modernism – “progress” in the form of structural forms of figure construction, dance compositions, in postmodernism – “deconstruction” in the form of going beyond the form, construction, in metamodernism – “oscillation” between the categories of sport and art.

The art historical aspects of studying the aesthetics of ballroom dancing will influence the scientific and practical results that will be relevant and in demand not only among professional teacher-coaches and performers, but also among art historians, cultural historians, and philosophers.

The scientific formulation of the question, observations, and conclusions can be used and continued in the historical and theoretical works of art historians, cultural scientists, and philosophers, as well as in research and educational and methodological works, in the creation of courses on the history and theory of ballroom dancing, scientific projects of teaching staff, students, masters and doctoral students, as well as in the practice of teachers-coaches and performers of ballroom dancing.

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