

Commentary: Assignment 5 – Tracy Collier and Juliet Chambers-Coe

What outside or inner forces impede or motivate the movement of the women in the pictures. How freely does the woman with the cat sit, or is there an inner need to move? Does the woman with the dog want to slow down or go on a different pathway? How do the outside forces of the cat, dog and imagined wind impact on their weight, space and time?

Remember that the mental factors of flow are progression/precision and Jung's Feeling. By this we mean, are they able to progress easily, or is their progress somewhat hampered, limited? Are they being 'careful', or 'carefree'? Are they able to progress and do they need to be careful? And how do they feel about that ability. They might be compelled to move or feel stuck. Is there an ease or not about the circumstances they find themselves in?

Flow: The effort element 'bound' or hampered flow consists of the readiness to stop normal flux and of a movement sensation of pausing.

The effort element of 'free' flow consists of released flux and of the movement sensation of fluid.

Laban tells us that "The flow of movement is strongly influenced by the order in which the parts of the body are set in motion" (Laban, 1980, p. 18). A study of Flow can be traced by the patterning of movement as it progresses toward and away from the centre, or trunk. Laban says,

Movements originating in the trunk, the centre of the body, and then flowing gradually out towards the extremities of the arms and legs are in general more freely flowing than those in which the centre of the body remains motionless when the limbs begin to move" (Laban, 1980, p. 18).

Unlike the other motion factors of Weight, Space and Time, Laban indicates that Flow can be traced, identified and 'felt' in direct relation to the movement of parts of the body – "The control of the flow of movement is therefore intimately connected with the control of the movements of the parts of the body" (Laban, 1980, p. 18). Laban tells us that

It is relatively easy to observe a movement flowing freely in an outward direction from the centre of the body through the articulations [of the spine, limbs and joints]. The flow of movement is bound when the feel of it takes an inward direction, starting at the outer ends of the extremities, and progressing towards the centre of the body (Laban, 1980, p. 19).

Further, not only can we discern Flow in the patterning of movement in and around the centre of the body and the breath but in relation to its dynamic interplay with the other motion factors. Laban says that "Certain elementary actions have a natural tendency towards 'free flow', for example *slashing*, in which the flow of movement is suddenly and energetically released; others, for example, *pressing*, require restraint of flow so that the movement can be stopped at any given moment" (Laban, 1980, p. 18). We can find differences in the stresses of an effort, for example the Weight element might be more accentuated in a Thrust/(Punch) which may make it feel more like a 'Slam', for example. But if you made a series of 'Slams' with Bound flow it would make that sequence of movements quite menacing. Whereas a Free

flow 'Slam' has a sense of just responding in the moment. An outburst maybe, a freely released and forceful energy.

Flow for me is very much the actor's tool. It is the colouring pencil that gives greater meaning to the other Effort elements. When in relationship to the other motion factors as a primary, foregrounded quality or even as secondary undercurrent, Flow tells us about character because, "The variety of human character is derived from the multitude of possible attitudes towards the motion factors, and certain tendencies herein can become habitual with the individual. It is of the greatest importance for the actor-dancer to recognise that such habitual inner attitudes are the basic indications of what we call character and temperament" (Laban, 1980, p. 20).

The psychological element of Flow is helpful in terms of Laban's *Progression* and *Precision*. The need to take care over the execution of an action tells us something about the mover's attitude towards the task. If someone throws down something that is precious to themselves or someone else then that tells us something about their relationship to the other person, or the object itself at that part of the character's journey. It can also indicate how accustomed to carrying out an action someone might be. When we start to learn something new, we tend to employ more Bound flow and it is not until we have found the rhythm of that action in our bodies that we are then able to use Free flow and be confident that the outcome will be successful.

If we then think of Progression, this can of course be a lack of ability to Progress if we are pushing a piano up a hill for example. The object being the reason for our Bound flow lack of Progression. But what interests the actor much more is the psychological inability to Progress. Do we have an emotional block for example? There are people who can't say 'I love you'. The film *Ghost* has that heart-breaking example within its writing. She says, 'I love you' and he says 'Ditto'. There are those who find it difficult to express anger and as a result can sometimes make themselves unwell due to their inability to release their feelings. There are those for whom their position in life makes it impossible for them to speak out, they are silenced by the society they live in or the position they hold. An historic family feud may prevent a son reaching out to his mother or vice versa. There are so many reasons why we 'are not able' to do something. We are Bound and unable to Progress. How joyous it must be to not have those constrictions, whether self-inflicted or put on us by outside forces.

The Jung association with Feeling is also interesting. It again goes along with not being able to do something. We say 'I don't feel able to say that to him.....' or 'I don't feel it is my place to go there' This is all relative to Bound flow, being unable to Progress. 'I get the feeling I need to tread carefully here' Bound flow Precision. 'Feel free' we say, when there is no reason why we shouldn't just plough ahead. Students have often confused Feeling with emotion, but for me it is the alchemy of Weight with Flow which gives rise to emotion. For example, combining the Sensing in Weight effort that comes with sadness with a sense of 'holding' that sadness and not allowing it to be outwardly expressed when in Bound flow, sits in the body and overcomes us with a deep emotion. Or allowing that sadness to explode freely out of us in a sense of being overcome by it are both combinations of Weight and Flow. In my opinion the two need to be present for us to experience emotion. Weight on its own without a sense of how we Feel about the Lightness or Heaviness does not product an

emotional sensation and equally Flow by itself without the something (What) that is held or released is not an emotional experience. I find this useful in supporting actors to find emotion without exposing themselves to painful memories. By experiencing the physical attitudes of Strong or Light the actor can decide whether or not they feel able to express that Sense of Weight when accompanied with Flow – holding onto or releasing that ‘sense’. The body holds the physical memory of what happens in our personal stories and so when we experience a physical sensation, emotional qualities can surface. Flow “plays an important part in all movement expression, as through its inward and outward streaming it establishes relationship and communication” (Laban, 1980, p. 75) within one’s self and with others.

Equally and importantly, Bound flow should not be confused with Strong weight, and Free flow is not to be confused with Lightness. This is a common error in practise. That Flow can be felt so aligned with one’s sensation of Weight doesn’t mean they are the same. On the contrary! The skill is to practise differentiating the two motion factors and witnessing the moments of embodiment where they come together to create a new mode of feeling and moving. Interesting Laban suggests that Flow and Time are often closely linked in the ancient Greek sense of Flow-as-rhythm, because “the much misused word ‘rhythm’ literally translated from Greek means ‘flow’” (Laban, 1980, p. 172), but he goes on to explain in detail how they are distinct. Whilst “Flow cannot be imagined without a movement evolved in time...Flow and Time should be observed apart from one another because a slow movement as well as a quick movement can both have either free or bound flow” (Laban, 1980, pp. 172-173).

It is also worth noting that Flow, in addition to Weight, Space and Time can be “altered in their intensity” (Laban, 1980, p. 173) and it is useful to consider Free and Bound Flow as having a ‘Grade’ of intensity which are “adaptations to the needs of an action when dealing with a practical task, and sometimes they arise from an inner mood or disposition” (Laban, 1980, p. 173). One might consider a grade of 0-10 intensity in both free and bound qualities which tells the mover and observer something about the value or stakes at play in the movement. Laban refers to a + and – system for considering intensity of effort qualities (1980, p. 173-175). Grades might move between ‘exaggerated’ effort exertion or reduced exertion of a particular effort factor and reveal nuanced shades of meaning in movement embodiment and compliment the “Flow Admixture” which give variation to the eight basic effort actions (Laban, 1980, p. 172).

My Commentary, by Tracy Collier.

So, this is the final scrutiny in terms of individual motion and mental factors in isolation, so to speak. I have found it interesting to dissect the drawings in this way because it has allowed me to uncover more intricate nuances in the work as I am having to be very specific about what it is I am examining.

The Woman with the Cat is interesting in this case as there is evidently Free Flow in her very being. Her movements for me have all been Free, the shelling of the peas is accomplished in Free flow, and her breathing is Free and as I said in previous commentaries, she has for me a sense of Floating. My movements for her were continuous even though they were few. The space in-between the movements was flexible and expansive. So, there was always room for me to move. My question came around whether or not the fact that she doesn’t actually want

to get up make her Bound flow at any point. The hampered Progression element is slightly skewed as it's not that she is 'unable' it's that she 'doesn't want to' so I was playing with how that differed in terms of her flow. It felt extremely different in practice. The 'unable' to move scenario really felt uncomfortable, I imagined that I was not allowed to move from where I was and this created a lot of anxiety in me and tension therefore came into the body and my desire to move increased drawing out the sense of Bound to-the-spot. I then moved to the 'didn't want to move' scenario and this just felt luxurious and free of tension. It translated as Free to sit rather than not wanting to move. The lack of tension in my mind and body left no room for a feeling of Bound flow. The fact that there was no need to move added to this feeling. It was very different when I imagined myself being called upon to move and then Bound flow did kick in as I reluctantly rose to my feet. I enjoyed the freedom that not needing or wanting to move gave me. I also looked at the fact that the cat was sat there next to me. There is a law in our house that if you have the cat on your lap you can't move, as disturbing the cat is not allowed. It also acts as a great excuse not to be available for chores. However, this cat is not on her lap but sat beside her, perhaps influencing her sense of free flow as Laban tells us, "the movements of a cat or a cat-like creature are mostly free-flowing" (Laban, 1980, p. 11). There is a shared experience between them that might indeed have some influence on her willingness to move. For the most part my explorations of this drawing gave me Free flow, which was not a surprise to me, even though there is not very much movement in the drawing. There is a sense of yielding to nature and the moment in time where the woman and cat find themselves.

The Woman with the Dog was a very different experience in the studio. The will of the Woman was very much Free flow, her mind journeying ahead of her but a contradiction in the execution of that journey which was fraught with obstacles made her motion factor mostly Bound but with explosions of Free flow. Those explosions of Free flow took me back to the chaos I had experienced before in the other explorations and interestingly the comedy returned. My exasperation with the problematic dog, wind and rain all added to the chaos of my non ability to Progress. I also had to be very careful as I negotiated this journey in the high heeled shoes, I had imagined her to be wearing. If I wasn't careful about my progress then I might turn my ankle as I was not totally in charge of this journey. I put tension in my legs and belly to keep me stable and this created a sense of Bound flow in my lower body. My upper body remained quite Free flow as I allowed the sway needed in my body to stop me from toppling. I felt a little like a high rise building that in order to maintain its structure has to yield to the wind and allow the sway. This upper/lower split added to the chaos I experienced in movement. My emotional centre was very tense and therefore felt very Bound. I was getting cross the Strong weight and Bound flow in my centre really creating the alchemy I spoke of above. I flitted between Dream Mode taking hold as my focus was very self-orientated and Awake, paying Attention and making Decisions when responding to what was happening with the dog. The Awake being forced on me by a sudden pull of the dog or a gust of wind. Exploring Flow has given depth to this woman and I have felt her to be substantial physically but a little 'flaky', mentally. Not at all in control of her destination or her journey.

Observations of submissions, Tracy Collier

There were some really beautiful submissions and ideas put forward with this assignment. I have been interested in how there is definitely a need to relate Flow to the other motion

factors to make sense of it in relation to the pictures but Flow itself can be explored in many imaginative ways. Observations of a stronger link and understanding of Jung's work with Flow were noted and that Flow 'amplified the other motion factors'.

Flow was described as an 'entwined factor' and that there was a variant in the amount of freedom surrounding slowing down in contrast to suddenly stopping. Flow it was said 'allows us to see 'will' on display'.

There was wonderfully poetic writing in which the contributor took the Flow elements of the two pictures on an actual bus journey, the circumstances of that journey made a difference to which picture she found herself in. There was also a fabulous picture of 'Flow Doodles' that were a result of the starts and stops of the bus and the moments of journeying. The depth of colour in the pools of bound was enchanting, the picture was then taken back to the sea to experience the effect of the sea and sea breeze on Flow. It was most fulfilling to experience. Flow was described as 'debris' which was reflected clearly in the picture. Pauses on the journey 'leading to dream spaces with turbulent flow'.

There was a lovely comment on the Woman and the Cat, that there was a 'gentle possibility of movement' and that the curved pencil strokes of the drawing were associated with Free Flow. There was a lovely image of the cat having arrived with a 'peaceful plop. Both Woman and Cat's stillness being 'happily chosen'. The Woman in the Dog on the other hand was caught in a moment of 'stickiness' as indecision gave a sense of forced or strongly felt pause.

There were several filmed movement pieces with very clear approaches to Flow. One was exploring the influence of the dog and the umbrella on the Flow of the woman and then finding the Flow from within. Three very clear examples of the differences. There was also that thought from another contributor who felt that the dog and possibly the wind were 'encouraging free flow' but the struggle that the woman experienced to maintain 'decorum' was being revealed in a 'comedy of manners'. The Free Flow of the Woman and the Cat being a result of 'acceptance'. And there was an imagined simultaneous sigh between woman and cat.

One submission gave an articulate exploration of movement with just the hands and upper body of the contributor, the Bound Flow being uncomfortable to watch, the change came when the breath was allowed and Free Flow took over allowing the body to find its length and ease.

A melody is mid-way through composition, with variations for the Woman with the Dog, the lines on the paper to the left and the dog. A lovely sense of depth in the dog sniffing around in one variation and a clear sense of the undulating progress of the woman. There is a slightly rambling feel to it which is interesting.

Some vivid images are being formed with the idea that Flow can be captured with Ink on paper or trapped in a cup. This coming about as the contributor was exploring the realisation that often what we see is not what is actually happening, The Lady and the cat being in 'full possession of her weight' might be construed in her immobility to be Bound Flow but with no fight the contributor observed that 'she is freely moving'. Hence the ink in a cup representing

the flux inside the woman which is not seen by the observer. Interesting differences in terms of inner and outer forces on flow were discussed.

A 30"x40" painting was presented which was dense with moments of both Precision and freedom of brush strokes. Both elements complementing each other and needing each other to find their form.

A beautiful and hauntingly atmospheric poem was produced around the exploration of Flow in relation to a non-living organism. Focusing on single drop of rain/sweat on a journey down a window/face. Flow was not just investigated but also used in the treatment of the words and a cascading over dubbing creating the sense of overlapping droplets catching up with and overtaking each other in their own Flow journey.

Again, I can only thank you for the depth of exploration and the inventive approach to the work .

We are now into the final assignment. I strongly feel that I would like to release you from some of the questions in the assignment if you are on a journey that has taken you away from the actual images. I would love to allow you to follow the ideas that you have had and maybe focus on just one small point if that is what you wish. The questions are there to help you if you need that framework and something is clear to latch on to. But if you are beginning to develop something slightly abstracted from the original drawings then that is fantastic and please feel free to continue on that exploration. My only request is that you make note of how the final submission relates back to the drawings so I can be clear about your journey and the direction your exploration has taken you. I am very excited by the final submissions and hope that you really enjoy this final push.

May I also wish you all a very Happy Christmas and New Year. Tracy x