

Commentary: Assignment 6 from Tracy Collier.

Assignment 6: Completion of exploration

From your overall exploration of these drawings using Effort theory, what do you feel your relationship is with both of these women? Express your response in any way you wish. There will be elements of the process that have really resonated with you, and in this final part of the exploration I would like you to highlight those elements in relation to the women themselves.

It really is about taking into consideration the whole of the previous 5-session process and allowing whatever is dominant to finish the work. Also, it is always interesting to discover what differences there are not only between the two women in the work but also the way you move or behave, who did you find the greatest affinity with, who seemed more familiar to you?

What we can clearly see is that this power [of a hitherto unexplained nature] enables us to choose between a resisting, constricting, withholding, fighting attitude, or one of yielding enduring, accepting, indulging in relation to the 'Motion Factors' of Weight, Space and Time to which, being natural accidents, inanimate objects are subjected. This freedom of choice is not always consciously or voluntarily exercised; it is often applied automatically without any contribution of conscious willing. But we can observe consciously the function of choosing movements appropriate to situations; that means that we can become conscious of our choice and can investigate why we so choose. We can observe whether people yield to the accidental forces of weight, space and time, as well as to the natural flow of movement in the sense of having a bodily feeling of them, or whether they fight against one or more of these factors by actively resisting them.

The variety of human character derives from the multitude of possible attitudes to the motion factors, and certain tendencies herein can become habitual to 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/Ullmann. *The Mastery of Movement*. 1980, 4th edition, p. 20.

Here we are at the end of this journey. Or are we? I feel that it has really only brought us to the beginning of another. The submissions for this final assignment have very much been about your realisations of new possibilities for yourselves as creatives and analysts. It has been heartening that so many of you have found new ways to express yourselves and explore the possibilities that have presented themselves to you. Congratulations to you all.

For me, I have come to the place of renewal, realisation and joy of having taken some of you to a place where you would like to continue further on the journey alone, or in the company of others.

It was interesting for me that so many of you had the same experience with the drawings, in that, at first the *Woman with the Dog*, seemed so clear and seemed to hold so many possibilities in terms of development. For me she held the comedy and the chaos and her efforts qualities were akin to my own. I felt I knew this woman and that she would be the starting point for any movement piece I might create. She seemed more complex than the *Woman and The Cat*, on first appraisal. But, as I have continued to explore these images with you, I have begun to see that her complexity is more connected to external forces rather than her own inner narrative. Her desire was quite simple: to regain equilibrium. That itself is interesting. The playing with regaining balance and composure is rich with possibilities.

My love for and sense of connection with the *Woman and the Cat* has grown extraordinarily. This is where I found peace and gentleness and warmth. I think also that I have arrived at the conclusion that they share the consistent feature of being in relationship to the world around them. Environmental challenges creating one response and the lack of those challenges creating another. The *Woman and the Cat* is the place that I often find that I am aiming for, but the *Woman with the Dog* is what happens to me on the way. This idea of one being the desired aim and one being the reality lends itself to joint storytelling. So many ideas of how to create that in movement are present in my thoughts and my studio work has given me plenty of material to work with.

It was interesting that one contributor had intended to create a final movement piece but due to injury was unable to do so. Their conclusion was to film much more of the process along the way. This is something I have always done as it allows me to be the 'other', to observe with an objective eye and to see what the audience will witness. Do I see what I thought I was intending to show? It is also a good way of adding in other factors to my work. The soundscape for instance. To view the work and play different soundtracks alongside it and to see how the meaning changes has been so useful to me. We as viewers have an innate need to create meaning, and it is all the contributing factors in a piece of theatre that shape what meaning we perceive. I think that is why I love film music so much, as these composers are painting audio pictures for visual pictures. Also, what else is in the frame. One contributor has emphasised the role of the 'frame' in terms of filming. The relationship between the mover and the camera, and what environment is created within that frame. How it changes if we change the view-point of the viewer. The difference between working with film and working in theatre is that we can be more detailed with what the audience see with film. Changing the view of a theatre audience is a bigger task in many ways. That is something worth striving for though.

So much food for thought.

I am going to leave this here as I am still to answer many of my own questions around how this movement piece would come together. I do hope you have enjoyed the course and that it inspires you to move forward with the interrogation of different stimulus to feed your creativity. Drawings are only one way, but maybe you have been able to see other possibilities in the world around. You will each receive individualised feedback on your final submission which will land in your inbox, do look out for it.

From Juliet Chambers-Coe:

Laban was well-known for using his skills as a visual artist to explore his theories of movement and dance in addition to symbolic notation and the written word. For Laban, dance is the material manifestation, the visual and kinesthetic language of the 'invisible' 'silent' world of symbolic action "a world too deep for speech" where "sequences of movements are the sentences of speech, the carriers of the messages emerging from the world of silence" (Laban, 1980, p 87). Furthermore, this "hidden, forgotten landscape" can tell us "about things and realities important to us all" (Laban 1975, p. 89). For Laban movement and visual art went hand-in-glove as he developed his concepts and theories for a movement and movement analysis practice.

Laban developed his theories in a period of artistic ferment in *fin de siècle* Europe, also a period in which advances were made by artists such as Wassily Kandinsky in the union of art and spirituality, where his 1911 text *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, marks the point of contact with art and notions of immanent spirituality. Kandinsky was not alone, however with an increasing number of visual artists such as those in the Art Nouveau movement, openly breaking with tradition. And the Symbolists of the late nineteenth century conceptualised the artist as priest and the painting as "an evocation of the mythic and the mysterious" (Moore, 1999, p. 179).

Laban himself was a visual artist and was influenced by such movements where the abstraction of form and colour offered him new ways of thinking about the body and its relationship to space and energy. Kandinsky urged visual art to emulate music which "has devoted itself not to the reproduction of natural phenomena, but rather to the expression of the artists soul" (Kandinsky, 1977; 19). Laban sought to do the same for the art of movement (Moore, 1999).

Through the development of his 'language of movement', Laban mapped the possible geographies of the human body in the space surrounding it. With knowledge of proportionality he learned as a student of architecture and visual art at L'Ecole des Beaux Arts in Paris, where the study of architecture was not based on function or materials, but the architecture of atmospheres, and "a form of 'felt' architecture... 'full of grandeur, of dignity full of character, and of magical power'" (Winther, 2008, p. 13). Laban applied these same principles in mapping the movement of the human body in motion. Whilst movement *through* space could be easily captured by line-drawings and stick-figures, as we know, Laban was intent on capturing the three-dimensionality and dynamic nuances of the moving body and he looked toward other three-dimensional forms to help him, namely those of Plato (428 B.C) and his solid forms – the cube, octahedron, icosahedron.

The Rudolf Laban Archive at the National Resource Centre of Dance at the University of Surrey holds an enormous collection of Laban's drawings from 1938 until his death in 1958. Throughout the collection Laban's experiments with spatial form, dynamics and the body appear again and again in literally hundreds of pencil drawings and sketches with some more complete than others, and many in colour. That Laban experimented with movement concepts through his visual art remains a key feature of his research and a lasting legacy of how we now think about movement and its spatial and energetic designs.

By utilising visual art, and as we have seen in this course, extending our creative articulations to music, poetry, prose, sculpture, film making, movement improvisations, movement scales and movement-with-text, we have allowed ourselves to experiment with the concepts and ideas Laban gave us. These methods resist fixity and acknowledge

our creative processes as akin to movement itself - as things in continual flux. In all the assignment submissions we witness the spaces each of the participants gave to the unpredictability of life and movement and in these spaces creative seedlings have begun to grow.

So often Laban's work is vertically transmitted (passed down through generations) as 'given wisdom' and because he developed such a thorough taxonomy for practicing, describing and analysing movement it can be tempting to 'stick to the rules' and become absolute about the nature of movement through a Laban-lens. But, in my view, Laban's theories deserve to be tested and embodied anew, with fresh ideas. One's personal experience and interpretation of a 'Laban movement practice' will, in any case, vary the practice itself as it becomes newly and differently embodied and transmitted, horizontally, shared and plural in approach and outcome. Whilst seeking to develop a universal system for comprehending movement, Laban allows for individuality. For example, he doesn't name each combination of the Inner Attitudes/States or the Transformation Drives, as he does for the Action Drive. The nature of Flow perhaps being so personally experienced with differing "grades of intensity" (Laban, 1980, p. 173) that any universal naming would betray the qualities at play and their alchemy in the moment of moving them. Additionally, take another example, Laban's 'movement choir'. The choir seemingly moving as 'one' holds within it discreet and varied body designs and rhythm continuums. Thus, a 'movement practice' is inflected anew by the practitioner undertaking it. I think this is partly what Laban means when he tells us that we must consider the "bodily perspective" (Laban, 1966, p. 83) in our moving and analysing. One's somatic and artistic engagement with the phenomenon of movement gets us closer to understanding its elusive and ephemeral nature *in our own lives* and artistic endeavours.

By taking-up the baton Laban passes to us we can keep running and find new and more comprehensive ways of revealing *movement-thinking* (Laban, 1980) through our own practices and applications of Laban's movement analysis. Tracy, Helen and I have tried to do just that with this online course, and we hope that in some way we have inspired you to do the same.

We would like to wish you all many, many hours of joyful creativity ahead. And thank you again for participating on the course.

From, Juliet, Tracy and Helen for the Labanarium and The National Resource Centre for Dance.

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