



routledge performance practitioners

Rudolf
LABAN

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Laban noted that the tendency to consciously and conspicuously change qualities, to conceal and reveal Efforts, and to freeze expression in patterned and predictable ways is how humans identify and recognize the individual. He wrote in his notes that voluntary dissolution or masking of Efforts could be seen as a form of deception, whereas involuntary dissolution or masking of Efforts could be seen as states of dysfunction or illness. The attempt to mask is visible, just as the attempt to perform is seen as just that: an attempt. But it is also possible to see the struggle of an individual to drop a mask and to be freed from dysfunctional patterns as a struggle to heal.

Taking further the theory of how Effort reveals personality and the conflicts therein, he added that any living movement has the possibility of a countermove in itself. The countermovement might be something like falling backwards when one intends to move forwards, or dropping into passivity at a moment when direct action is required. Effort preferences can lead the body into having internal "arguments" about where one is heading. In such instances, one can literally find oneself coming and going, stumbling, tripping, or displaying a lack of commitment to any one direction. But when such counter moves are not restricted or confused they can also function as counter-flow, counter-space, counter-weightedness, or counter tension.

Countering is different from conflict in that give-and-take is inherently present; countering is, literally, the dance of negotiation. In inner conflict, the mind bounces from one pull to the other, and reconciliation between the two is often the challenge of the dramatic, onstage and in real life. In countering, the fullness of choices is palpable, and the tensions between them serve to enhance awareness of the degree of personal agency the mover has.

An exercise to illustrate this: Try walking forward, while imagining being called from behind, noting the negotiation that takes place internally in order to respond to both aims. Which direction wins out?

We have understood that Laban favored movement over position, dynamism over stasis. "Life is a special rhythmical case," he wrote. "Existence as a polarized unit is not life. Life is full of organic radiation." (NRCD notes) The study of Effort provides a way for living beings to become more conscious and integrated with biophysical realities and to utilize these for creative and healing purposes. He wrote that "we must distinguish between the psychology of thought and the psychology of adaptive acts. But in the end, there is no other

function than physicality." Our behaviors and their patterns reveal what we are conscious of as well as what we are not conscious of, and, through movement, the unconscious can be made visible, and recovered as part of the fabric of the self.

GRAPHING LIFE

Laban loved visual representations of ephemeral ideas. He made lots of charts, many of which found their way into his books in narrative forms. The one that follows is from random notes, but further explains his notion of life as movement:

MASS:

Accumulation = tension
Disaccumulation = Relaxation

ENERGY:

Accumulation = Charge
Disaccumulation = Discharge

The rhythmical accumulation of both mass and energy is life, which yields change and ongoingness. Experiment with how the words above affect any gesture. Tension and Charge are words that would inspire Bound Flow, whereas Relaxation and Discharge yield Free Flow. Laban saw Bound Flow as controlled successive discharge and Free Flow as spontaneous eruptive discharge. He preferred derivations of Bound Flow for performer training, in part because he believed Bound Flow has more "charge," which yields richer characters.

EXERTION AND RECUPERATION

Another graph:

Relaxation	Tension
Discharge	Charge

Relaxation and Discharge in combination would appear to be close to what Laban later called the indulging side of Effort, or "going with" a

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