

THREE

ALIGNING IN PLANES

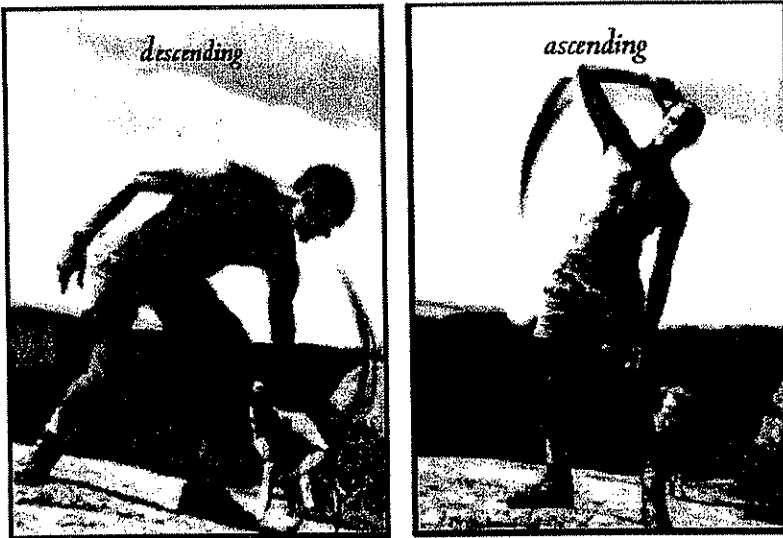
After discovering that aligning in each of the Dimensions transformed us into an abstraction, we turned to planar alignment which is more natural to the contours of the body.

The extension of each Dimension, like lining up many sticks in a row, or unrolling a bolt of fabric, creates the Vertical, Sagittal and Horizontal Planes which are perpendicular to each other. Medical texts use these planes to intersect the body and describe anatomy.

THE PLANES

Vertical Plane

The body at rest most closely resembles the Vertical Plane; length, head to feet; and width, shoulder to shoulder. Extending the arms up and



out, and standing with the legs wide makes a door-like plane.

Horizontal Plane

The Horizontal Plane cuts through the middle of the body, and takes its circularity into account. A belt around the middle, a tape measure around the chest, gives us our Horizontal body Plane. Extending the arms and legs Horizontally gives us a table-like Plane.



Sagittal Plane

The body's Sagittal Plane is from the nose or belly button to the spine or back of the head. Placing our legs one in front of the other and reaching our hands in Front and Back extends the body's Sagittal Plane to a wheel.



All Planes have a pull in two of the Dimensions. Think of a taut rope when it vibrates, it has a second Dimension. A flat piece of paper has two Dimensions, 11 x 8 ½ let's say. These two Dimensions create more surface with concave and convex possibilities.

The Planes of the human body have similar proportions to the Golden Mean rectangle¹. One Dimension is longer than the other and is the domi-

1 *Choreutics*, p. 108.

nant pull. Each Plane shares a Dimension with another Plane. (The missing Dimension is the stabilizer of that Plane: the Sagittal Dimension maintains the Vertical Plane; the Vertical Dimension stabilizes the Horizontal Plane and the Horizontal Dimension balances the Sagittal Plane.)

We can think of the Planes as resembling a table, a wall, a wheel.

FORMATIONS

People create formations by means of planar alignment. Standing shoulder to shoulder, they create a row, like an army or troops. It is a feeling of united we stand, a mass mind. It can grow into a powerful front. When two people are angled toward each other, in Horizontal Plane alignment, they make an enclosure, a circle, a community, a natural form for sharing ideas all on the same level. Everyone can see each other and stay in touch. Sagittal Plane alignment creates a line, a file, one person behind the other, a protection or a leader and follower.

A Circle: An Enclosure

Dr. Kestenberg Widened her body and extended a gesture of invitation to Jane who pulled up her chair, automatically placing it in a circular relationship to her. Jane did not choose to sit alongside, as she might have done to listen at a concert. Shoulder to shoulder would have established a Vertical Plane, more appropriate for watching a movie or some event in front of them.

Jane, who had worked with children for many years, told us that it is hard for children to form a row, or a line, but easy for them to make a circle. The circle works best for children because the teacher can see everyone and everyone can see the teacher. The teacher is then poised for communication with each child.

A Wall, A Front, A Blockade

When two people stand side-by-side, the total effect is a rectangular form which includes height and width creating a wall or door-plane, the Vertical Plane. The formation gives a message of solidarity, a front or blockade, not conducive for sharing the fine points of a negotiation.

For a couple, the Vertical Plane alignment represents a common focus and a united front, also a barrier or protection for something or someone else. The alignment may be inadvertent, or result from physical necessity, like driving in a car. In order for strangers to get to know each other from this position, one has to rotate to address the other. A rotation would introduce the Forward/Back Dimension, adding it to the Side/Side Dimension to create more of a table Plane.

Similarly, if two people are standing shoulder to shoulder, as their team gets the winning touchdown of the game, they would then turn into the Horizontal to embrace each other. The Vertical Plane will not allow for an embrace, (except perhaps for a side-side rocking embrace).

The shape of the body will adapt to the pulls of Space and assume postures which resemble one of the three Planes. Genetics, culture and individual patterns influence alignment which conveys an underlying approach to communication².

A Tunnel, A Row, A Train

- ❖ Experiment with stepping toward and away from someone. The pull of Space between you should feel as if you were stretching a rubber band. In order to get in front or back of that person, you would step out of the Sagittal alignment, rotate, and place yourself in front or back.
- ❖ Now, take the other person's hand as if to lead him or her across a puddle. You might adjust yourself up or down a little to accommodate. This has a minuet kind of quality. It uses the Up-Down Vertical Dimension and the Forward-Back Sagittal Dimension thereby forming a trace-form of the Sagittal Plane.

In the Sagittal, one person is ahead and one behind. Being in front takes courage. The follower has time for fear. One may clear the way and make room for the other to proceed, or go ahead to scout out the situation. The Sagittal leads to action.

A relationship can naturally develop from being Dimensional to becoming planar. Two people can put out their arms in the Sagittal Dimension as they approach to shake hands. They locate a point between them. This is Dimensional. We locate a person first through a Dimension before we can have a relationship. As we get into the Plane, the relationship becomes richer and more complex. For example, I locate you Dimensionally to tell you something. If you are interested, we establish a forum for communication.

2 See *As Others See Us*.

Cuándo pasa la comunicación de dimensional a plano?

TRANSITIONS IN COMMUNICATION

In any type of interaction, we are likely to see variations between Dimensions and Planes and to make transitions from one Plane to another. In the Vertical Plane, we don't have to communicate. We are together. We feel our power. We can confront opposition. To communicate visually, we have to turn our heads into the Horizontal alignment. To continue to communicate, we have to shift and bend to add some Forward pull to the Sideways Dimension to create the circle. Now we can communicate, develop our strategy. We are now insiders and can be open with each other.

We can communicate visually in the Sagittal and Horizontal, but less so in the Vertical without turning our heads. We can communicate by touch in the Horizontal and Vertical easily, but less in the Sagittal where we are in a line.

The first alignment is in the Horizontal Plane and occurs in the first year of life. It is the embrace between parent and baby. This communicates holding and security. In the second year of life, the Vertical Plane shows the baby's size and power as she learns to walk and climb and say no. In the Sagittal Plane, in the third year of life, we can move ahead independently, not holding hands or being held. We know where we are going.

ALIGNMENT AND RELATIONSHIPS

When we are talking or relating to another person, alignment refers to the space between us. Are we facing each other? Is she along-side of me? Is one of us higher than the other? Is one in front or in back? Our movements are in relation to someone or something else.

We took this opportunity to look at our own seating arrangement. Pam and Deborah were sitting in a Horizontal alignment. Their chairs were slightly angled towards each other. As Jane went to join them, she automatically pulled her chair into their circular arrangement. This established a circle, a Horizontal Planar alignment. When three people make a circle, each person can see everyone else. Each person is on the same level. They can easily address each other. No one is above or below. Communication can be facilitated. No one knew what would happen next, but we were ready.

Notice alignments at home with your family and friends. Notice how the alignment changes when the activity changes. Where do people sit? How are they facing? Did you offer specific seats? What are the resulting alignments?

In one discussion, we noticed that aligning in the Horizontal Dimension seemed to diffuse disagreement. Two people can easily see each other in the Horizontal, and can also look away. They are relating but not confronting. We saw an example of this when Judy was directing Jane in the

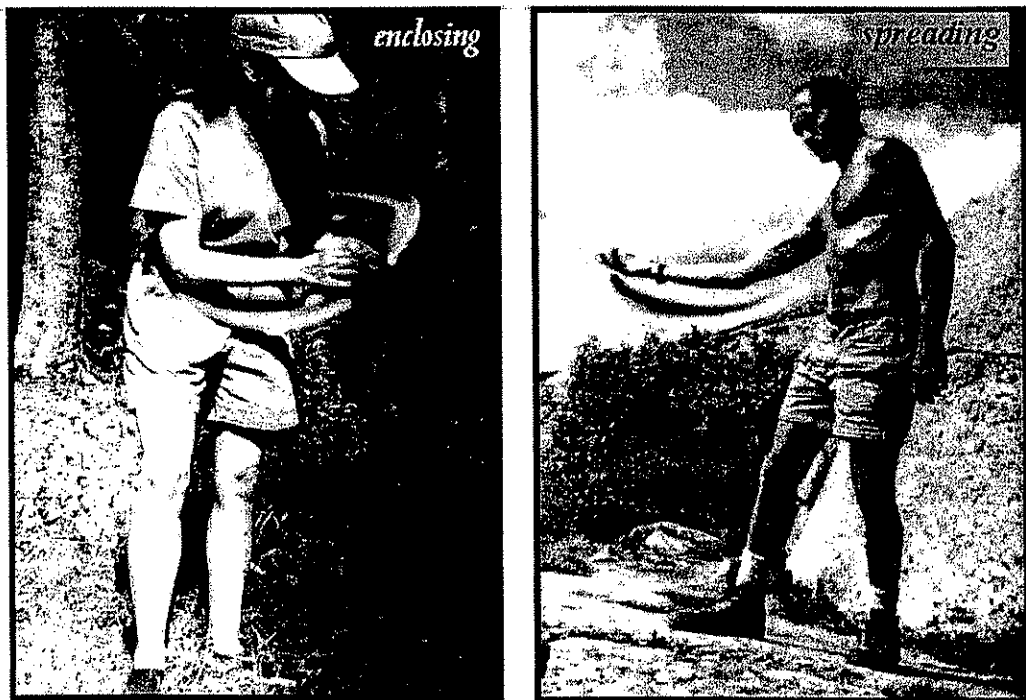
THE GEOMETRY OF MOVEMENT

Horizontal Plane. Jane could accept or reject the offer without accepting or rejecting Judy.

"Won't you sit over here," asks Dr. Kestenberg, motioning Sideways Out. Jane gets up and does this, reflecting the same opening as she accepts the invitation. Then Judy casually says, "Come back here for a moment," as she does a Sideways-Across Movement. Jane comes back. We all laugh, because it was so natural and effective. It also started to look like Jitterbug partners.

They then try it as a disagreement. Dr. Kestenberg says, "Please sit here." Jane says no, by shaking her head and closing her body with a Shrinking Movement.

"Please sit there," says Judy (Dr. Kestenberg). "It's a nice chair," says Jane, "but I would rather stand." Jane has agreed with Judy, but doesn't accept the offer. She is showing that she is with Judy, though disagreeing. It is not personal. Jane is not rejecting her as a person, just rejecting what she wants her to do.



Jane could make this statement by using two gestures, one opening out to the side, and one rejecting, crossing her body, sequencing one comment after the other. "No thank you, I really don't have time." (Enclosing). "Another time." (Spreading). Or, she could use two gestures with different parts of her body, one to accept, the other to reject, making both statements at once; "I wish I could." Ellen tries it. She conducts Pam and Deborah from Across to Open. "Don't stand there, stand over here." "It's

the Jitterbug again." These are sequences of the Defense Scale using Planar gestures. We find in the Horizontal Plane that we can turn toward and away easily. We ask for Deborah's attention, but she turns away, making us sad.

The best Horizontal Alignment, we agree, is a circle. When three people make a circle, they can easily address each other at an open angle.

Dr. Kestenberg explains:

"Alignment seems to be what makes contact possible. In misalignment, contact gets skewed. I see this all the time when the baby and mother are misaligned, the baby in front and the mother trying to feed in the Horizontal Plane. I have always called it support, but now I see that the alignment has to be there to develop a certain kind of relationship; one of acceptance or rejection."

HOW RELATIONSHIPS DEVELOP IN SPACE

We first locate a person through the senses: sound, touch, sight and Dimensional movement. Then we create a give-and-take in the Plane. I locate you Dimensionally to tell you something. If you are interested, we establish a form for the communication. As we get into Shaping the Plane, the relationship becomes warmer and much more complex.

"Theoretically," Dr. Kestenberg speculates, "communication is always a Planar Alignment. This is more natural to our physical selves. Dimensional Alignment seems to have brought us to a more abstract or functional relationship. Once we get all the Alignments worked out, they will work for all the Scales. We will know what Alignment has to be there for a good contact, a bad contact or a distorted one."

(An aside: Dr. Kestenberg turns towards Pamela; "Don't you think this is a new kind of psychology of relationship?" "Hm," is her answer.)

EG: "I see how many different kinds of relationships can be present in these forms. If people align more along the Vertical Dimension, they may meet more easily when the issue is value. Or they may have problems because they are always testing their level.

"A relationship can be harmonious in the Sagittal Plane and indifferent or hostile in the other Planes. For example, we can be well matched in value but have little in common in action. But perhaps you mean this in a more general way. Once people can align, they can proceed into many forms of productive relationship. But if there is never a joint alignment, they can't get to that central point of communication."

Shaping the plane

SUMMARY OF PLANAR ALIGNMENT

1. Two people standing Side-by-Side form a united front. They become 'We.' It creates a confrontation. This looks like the line-up for the Virginia Reel square dance. From here they can easily go Forward and Back or Side-to-Side without changing alignment. They can move as a unit. Vertically aligned, everyone is ready for the command "let's go." It is the alignment of horses in the starting gate.

The statement is: 'united we stand.' We don't have to communicate. We are together.

2. To get into communication, we have to shift and bend the line. We have to add some Forward pull to the Side-Side Dimension to create the circle. Now we can communicate and develop our strategy. We are the insiders and can be open with each other.
3. In the Horizontal, Vertical, and Sagittal Plane alignments, where we are touching one another, we can communicate non-verbally. When we are opposite, we can communicate visually. To demonstrate this, stand in front of someone and lead her out of the room, or go behind her, and lead her out by your contact on her shoulder. There is definitely a sense of leader and follower, a sense of "let's go, we are on the move."
4. Developmentally, the first alignment is embracing in the Horizontal Plane between mother and baby. This communicates holding and security. The second is the stance to show our size and power, to be someone. When a group unites in this stance, it is a mass, a 'We,' it is prepared to confront opposition.

The third is the Sagittal Plane, where we can move ahead independently. We are not in a touching mode as with the first two. If we take hands, we can create a wheel-like movement, as in a dance, or we can form a train, and move in a line.

5. Planar alignment allows for more complementarity. The fullness of Shape allows for a contouring, convexity and concavity. The Shape promotes a sense of conforming to the Space provided.

This form encourages complementary relationships. For instance, in the Horizontal, I embrace you and you allow yourself to be embraced. I may be Wide, but the other person could be Narrow. Here we are aligned, for sure, but in a complementary way. A relationship of nurturing is established. One fits into the shape of the other. A unit is formed into which two people fit.

ALIGNING IN PLANES

6. Opposite ends of the Dimensional continuum create a more dominant-submissive relationship. We are measuring each other, how far in front, how far above. We are unequal competing partners. Equal and opposite tends to occur in confrontations or when we are trying to match an opponent, when we will not be less or different. We can stay in Horizontal and Vertical alignments, but it is strange to stay in the Sagittal, action-oriented alignment. It is like a frozen picture. (Commitment is the thought process related to the Sagittal Plane. Laban/Lamb/Ramsden)

Facts About Planar Alignment

1. Planar alignment allows more complexity than Dimensional alignment.
2. Shape presumes an enclosure. I can Enclose Space by scooping it, like a spoon or shovel. Planar Shaping brings us into a new relationship with Space. Just as Directional movements develop from Shape Flow, recreating more distinct paths between self and object or goal, Shaping brings relationship into Planar Movement.
3. Shaping takes us out a world of identifying things, locating objects and pointing, to a world of relationships, holding, shaping and molding the environment.
4. The body can be extended into the three Planes in a rectangular, static way, or can use a more natural body contour, Shaping it and making a kind of enclosure of the Plane. When we use a full surface and adjust our own body shape to the contours of the Plane, we have a Shaped Plane. Thus Shaping in a Plane opens up a new form of communication which is not defensive but negotiated.

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BUENÍSIMO PARA
SHAPE

FOUR

SHAPING SPACE

Shaping is the way we mold and adapt to people and things around us. The tree Shapes when it grows around a rock, holding onto it in a kind of mutual relationship. We too Shape when we create living spaces and environments. We Shape our experience and the expression of it. We Shape as we share ideas and plans with friends, develop concepts and bring them to reality. Though we are mostly unaware of it, we make contours and Shapes with our bodies which act as containers for the concepts we are expressing when plans and ideas are "taking shape."

Shaping is the embrace of a close friend. We both experience each other. For a child, a favorite teddy bear could be approached with the same care. Having pointed to and reached the beloved object or person, I can now hold it and feel the joy of its shape and texture in my arms. I have brought it to me, and have not lost it or me in the process. We are not just locating each other, at either ends of a line or stick. We have made a partial container by shaping the environment, which holds us both. We both need to be equal participants to shape and mold a complex relationship and not lose ourselves.

A fight or argument, in which two people used Shaping Movement would result in a no-blame negotiated settlement. Each would take responsibility for what went wrong and work towards mutually acceptable solutions, which could include ending the relationship.

❖ Notice your body shape when you talk to a six-year old. Feel how you make a curve to allow for a non-threatening overture. Look at the way close friends sit and move as they talk. These are Shaped Movements.

SHAPING MOVEMENT IN EACH PLANE

Imagine an oval shape around a body, looking either at a photograph or real person. Draw imaginary ovals which would be like an egg shape surrounding that person. Imagine that the person moves along those contours, in the corridor of this Plane. An example is climbing a ladder. The movement is in an oval which describes the Vertical Plane.