

The transformation between symbolic system and dance/movement

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Abstract

This paper¹ focuses on the teaching and development of Laban's theories in the Dance Department of the Chinese Culture University in Taiwan, particularly the transformation between symbolic system and dance/movement. Teaching content and strategies are shared in this paper, and past experiences are reflected upon in looking toward the future. In 1963, when the Department was founded, there was a five-year diploma course for dance. This was developed into a Bachelor of Arts degree course beginning in 1974, and into a Master's degree course in 1999. Since the 1980s, Laban theory taught in the Department has fallen into three subject areas: Movement Analysis, a core subject of both the B.A. and M.A. courses; Labanotation; and Dance Technology. The Department was the first to offer a Labanotation course in Taiwan, the topic also being taught in the teacher's course at the 2009 summer school. Movement Analysis has been adopted as the core subject of B.A. and M.A. courses in the Department.

Keywords: Labanotation, movement analysis, development of Laban Study, dance pedagogy

Movement Analysis has been taught in the Dance Department of the Chinese Culture University in Taipei since 1992. The essence of the subject is Choreological Studies, a core subject based on dance pioneer Rudolf Laban's educational concepts and movement theories. Choreological Studies is an analytical tool for observing, creating, performing, and directing performance; it enables students to evaluate their practice and facilitates the integration of theory and practice. It has been a core subject of undergraduate and postgraduate courses at Laban London since 1987, and is one of the research methods used in M.Phil. and Ph.D. courses.

The word *choreology* was first used by Laban to mean "the science or logic of dance" in his early work in Munich, Vienna, and Zurich around 1920. During this period, Laban's keen interests were both to identify dance as an independent art, and to promote dance composition from a series of steps to a whole body concept (Ullmann, 1966). He saw choreology as a comparable discipline to musicology; it pervaded his research into movement studies. For him, the original meaning of the term was the study of human movement, which not only involved the movement of dance, but was also concerned with human behavior, expressive movement, and non-verbal communication. He saw it as a search for the kind of grammar and syntax of language of movement, dealing not only with the outer form of movement, but also with its mental and emotional content, for he contended that "body and mind are inseparably united" (Ullmann, 1966, preface). In later years, Laban concentrated his study in the field of "writing dance" (notation systems). He separated his studies into three branches: the study of the dancer's space (choreutics), the study of the dancer's dynamics (eukinetics), and a notation system

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(kinetography), now called Labanotation. These three branches of study became the fundamental theories of Choreological Studies (Hodgson, 1990).

Valerie Preston-Dunlop (1987) developed the four investigation modes of Choreological Studies: experiencing, exploring, documenting, and analyzing. These modes can be applied in several ways:

1. To provide different ways of knowing dance through physical experience, intellectual comprehension, and the feelings that dance gives;
2. To promote choreological knowledge through interaction between theoretical approaches and practical investigations;
3. To study all the strands of the dance medium through the intrinsic methods of dance. (Hodgson, 1990)

It is with these notions that Movement Analysis has been taught in the Dance Department of Chinese Culture University for over 20 years. However, we always encourage our students to develop or create their own symbolic signs according to and appropriate to the different forms of dance and movement. The realm of movement studies at the University is open-ended, though. We encourage students to find and develop their own interests, and allow them to focus on any type of movement, not just within the field of dance.

Presently, students are working on these challenges:

1. Finding their own symbolic signs to facilitate exploration or creation of their own movements. Based on one of Laban's symbolic systems, the student can invent new signs, which may have been ignored or omitted from the original notational system.
2. Focusing on a specific object except dance and trying to create new forms movement with specific symbolic systems. For example, website language can be applied to create representations of locomotion movements or dance fragments. Figures 1-3 show examples of website language applied to movement exploration.
3. Trying to develop a symbolic system for the study of classical Chinese dances. The strategy for fulfilling this goal is through a specific curriculum mode, which is the Theory of Amoeba.² This kind of curriculum mode helps develop one's creativity by absorbing globalization knowledge.

² The Theory of Amoeba was developed by Yin-Cheong Cheng. Cheng (2002) proposes six curriculum modes: the Theory of Tree, Theory of Crystal, Theory of Birdcage, Theory of DNA, Theory of Fungus, and the Theory of Amoeba. According the situation, teachers may choose any mode to design their own curriculum. The Theory of Amoeba emphasizes making full use of global knowledge with minimal local constraints. Fostering institutional knowledge is to fully use and accumulate global knowledge in the local context.

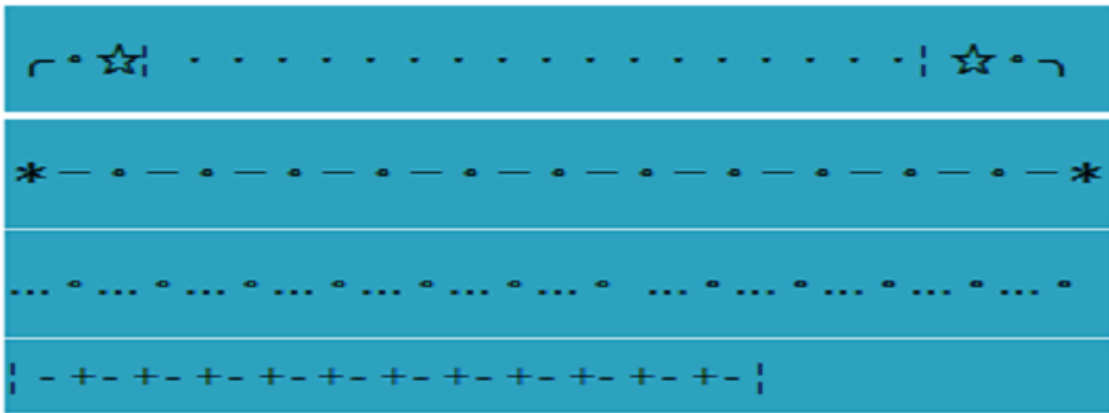


Figure 1. Website language-based notation used when exploring locomotion movements.

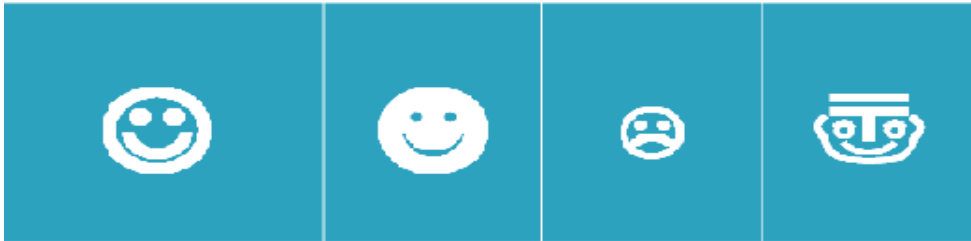


Figure 2. New website language-based notation symbols used when exploring facial expressions and movements.

$\langle (\sim \smile \sim) \rangle$	$\sim (\sim \nabla \sim) \sim^*$	$(\sim \sim \sim)$	$(\sim \sim \sim)$
$(\sim \sim \sim) \rangle$	$\langle (\sim \sim \sim) /$	$\langle (\sim c \sim) \gamma \underline{\xi}$	$(\sigma \sim . \sim) \sigma$
$\sim (\sim \nabla \sim \sim)$	$(\odot \odot \odot) a$	$(\cdot Q \cdot)$	$(\wedge \nabla \wedge) /$

Figure 3. Website language-based notation used to represent dance fragments.

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