

A Reflection On:

The Dynamic Architecture of Communication: Moving, Feeling, and Observing: Space Laban Movement Analysis (LMA)

Mary Rose Nicol

This workshop held on July 21-23, 2006, at Cecil St Studio, Fitzroy was led by Sandra Kay Lauffenburger, B.Ed, M.Sc, CMA, Certified Laban Movement Analyst, Registered Somatic Movement Therapist, Dance Movement Therapist, and Psychodynamic Psychotherapist. For over 24 years Sandra has been teaching and working with SOMATIC MOVEMENT EDUCATION across the fields of dance, exercise, therapy, and creativity. She has been in private practice since 1985 and in Canberra since 1992 (The Ouldeah Centre). Sandra presented this comprehensive framework for understanding movement in all its rich layers, providing tools for movement training and observation that are personally and professionally meaningful and profoundly enlivening.



The workshop explored the feeling of the Kinesphere, the Dimensional, Defense, and Diagonal Scales, as well as the communicative subtleties contained in each. Ties to Affect Theory were also explored. The workshop was designed for practitioners of Dance-Movement Therapy but was open to anyone interested in Laban Movement Analysis and the exploration of non-verbal communication for professional or personal reasons. It built on the basic components of the Space element of LMA through didactic, somatic, dance, and playful experientials.

Mary Rose Nicol studied Dance-Movement Therapy in a Grad. Dip. of Visual and Performing Arts program at RMIT, is a Registered Midwife and Maternal and Child Health Nurse, and graduate of The Living Water Center NSW, in Transpersonal Psychodynamics, Breathwork and Sandplay Therapy.

Several busy weeks have gone by since I was immersed in the language of Laban at Sandra's workshop. I have sat down with my vague notes and hazy diagrams to try to remember!!!

I remember experiencing the enjoyment of my mind being stretched to embrace the concepts that were just a bit of hazy memory from earlier study. I remember my body stretching, moving, exploring through the framework being presented. I remember the respectful atmosphere that comes through sharing with others who come from different backgrounds and interests and the resulting enthusiasm to learn and study more.

We began with an exploration of Kinespheres – moving in different ways to find out what our kinesphere is like – using woollen thread to mark it out on the floor – then standing in this representation and feeling what our inner kinesphere is like, the internal shapes –using the wool to “draw” this. So interesting to see what emerged over the floor in different parts of the room. We found different ways of moving through the kinesphere – using the central, peripheral and transverse paths. Seeing what it was like to move within the diagrammatic representation of another person's kinesphere. Noticing the differences felt when moving in these different ways and places. Moving at the different levels. “What is it like to make transitions – from inner to outer, high to low? What feels most/least comfortable to me at this moment? Where is my attention -internal or external?” These were some of the questions Sandra used to stimulate our reflection.

We reviewed and experientially explored the basics of axes and planes before getting to the scales. We looked at the way in which Space can be considered as a series of points and locations, with common patterns and individual variations – comparable to handwriting. These ‘common patterns’ were mapped by Laban onto solids – resulting in scales. Scales are said to be evocative of different feelings.

We moved through the Dimensional Scale (central pathway) and the Defence Scale (peripheral pathway) – based around the Dimensional Cross – formed by the three dimensions – horizontal, vertical, and sagittal. This was linked to stability, centering and settling. We worked in pairs to see the scales in relationship and discussed the way in which they can relate to communication and conversation.



Left forward high – beseech, seduction, yearning, specific aspiration (Glide) *INTEREST*
 Right back low – appreciation, held back, discarding (Slash) *CONTEMPT*
 Left back high - compromised, conflicted, strangled, choiceless (Dab) *FEAR*
 Right front low - confident, curious, diving in (Wring) *DESPAIR*
 Right back high - oh la la! nostalgia, c'est la vie (Flick) *STARTLE*
 Left front low – stop, controlled, ‘leave me alone’ (Press) *DISGUST*
SHAME is described as being central – immobilising, drawing inward, a place of minimal expression.
 The following jottings from my notebook were helpful in considering this material.
 *‘The scales serve movement as musical scales serve music’ (Bartenieff & Lewis, 1980) p.29).
 *We need a formal way to think about Space – the way we feel in it, the way we use it or we get ‘lost in space’. *What are my affinities? What are my clients’ affinities?
 *Laban was an explorer who named what he saw - we should continue that exploration.

The diagonal scale was experienced as much more expressive and dynamic. Based on the form of the cube – incorporating the diagonals and the eight directions. To begin with we played with the idea of moving into the diagonals until we were beginning to fall. Seeing what it is like to follow the different directions. Feeling where the counter-tensions are. Finding what brings stability.

We then moved through the diagonal scale and together, as a class, explored the feelings evoked by each place and later looked at the corresponding effort quality. Following an introduction and review of Affect Theory, Sandra discussed her exploration of the Primary Affects as related to the diagonal scale. Briefly, the Innate Primal Affects, as described by Sylvan Tompkins (1962-63), are Startle, Interest, Distress/Despair, Fear, Joy, Anger, Contempt, Disgust and Shame.



The thread throughout the workshop seemed to be looking at the way in which the concept of ‘Space’ is related to interpersonal communication – the way in which we relate to, and express ourselves in, the world around us.

Thank you Sandra for a stimulating and enjoyable workshop.

References:
Bartenieff, I., and Lewis, D., (1980) Body Movement: Coping with the Environment, Pub. Gordon and Breach. N.Y.
Tompkins, S. (1962-63) *Affect, Imagery, Consciousness*. v. 1 & 2, New York, Springer.

The following is a partial summary of the class participants’ associations to the scale, followed by the corresponding effort quality in brackets and the Affect attributed by Sandra in italics:

Right forward high – hope, wanting, aspiration, vision, yearning (Float) *JOY*
 Left back low- intense, contained, struggle (Punch) *ANGER*