

## Transmission: From Archive to Production Re-imagining Laban—Contemporizing the Past, Envisioning the Future

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Rudolf Laban (1879–1958), thinker, artist, innovator and fundamental in the rise of Central European Modern Dance, is well known for his dance notation system but less so for his dance theatre works. Over the course of two years, I researched two ‘lost’ works, *Ishtar’s Journey into Hades* and *Dancing Drumstick*, choreographed by Laban in Monte Verita, Switzerland, in 1913. Following a ‘Dance as Cultural Heritage’ award from the Swiss Federal Office of Culture in 2014,<sup>1</sup> my company, *Summit Dance Theatre*,<sup>2</sup> mounted these two works for performances in Switzerland. The reimagined dances, *Drumstick* and *Ishtar’s Journey into Hades* were premiered in Teatro Del Gatta, Ascona, October 2015, as part of *Laban Event*, an international conference, in Monte Verita, Ascona, overlooking Lake Maggiore, in the Italian region of Switzerland where Laban first conceived the works and established his dance school.

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This discussion outlines the archeochoreological methods devised and used in practice to draw Laban's early choreographic work *Dancing Drumstick* (1913) out of the archives and into the theatre. I define archeochoreology as a method of searching for 'lost' dances, using choreological principles and contemporary developments of Laban's principles of space and dynamics. The process involving the examination of the material remains of the work, including archive documents and the transmission of these in studio practice to reimagine the work for contemporary dance audiences, creates a new 'living archive' and potentially changes perceptions of existing documentary archives through embodied experience and observation of the work in practice.

In this chapter, I focus primarily on the transmission process of *Dancing Drumstick* from archive to production, and discuss key issues in relation to the staging process including: identifying what the 'material remains' of Laban works are and how these elements are translated for production; what the process is for interpreting, transferring, transmission of live archive/documents into practice; how specifically interpretation is used; what archeochoreological methods are used to 'reimagine' the work; and the notion of the 'body as archive' and embodied knowing. My work is not about exhuming relics. It uses live arts practice to draw attention to significant historic work which would otherwise be forgotten. I have devised a method to reimagine the Laban works—bridging archival gaps to create what I call a new 'living archive'. This transmission process from archive to production uses performance as a tool for translation and transformation and the dancer's body as archive and 'place' for creative exchange.

My role in reimagining these works requires a certain amount of detective work, of finding evidential remains, then deciding how I will use this information to discover and understand the works further through interrogation of practice. It is this theoretically informed and embodied practice that creates a deeper understanding of the possibilities and potential of the work. My understanding of *Dancing Drumstick* is formed through different sources including engagement with historic references, cultural contexts and use of archives. How archives are defined and used is a source of debate, with Lepecki claiming archives can place works under 'house arrest' (2010, 35). Foucault's proposal on the other hand, that the archive 'does not constitute the library of all libraries' (1972, 130) and Lepecki's view suggest that using archives as a way to find, foreground and produce (or invent or 'make', as Foucault

proposed) difference (2010, 46) encourages newness and moves away from sameness. Lepecki's metaphor of archives where work is kept inside confines, preserved and held in its original form, not deviating from the source material suggests that evidential remains can limit the work. Foucault's ideas of invention and difference resulting in newness, and Lepecki's proposal of 'virtual inventiveness' (2010, 46) suggest creative approaches, such that material evidence does not have to limit, but that limits can be used to facilitate, much like the parameters set up in an improvisation task.

Providing structures for movement responses through improvising facilitates the discovery of new or different movement possibilities. Sameness suggests a dull reworking of something already in existence. A contrary view could question the necessity for newness, calling instead for the reliance of sameness. So how, as an artist, do I use material remains? For me, the function of material remains is not to capture and hold; their very existence, rather, encourages interpretation. My approach also experiments with creative responses resulting from the converse situation; the absence of material remains. The boundaries are absent but there if I choose to define them, and at the same time, limitless. I am, however, somewhat bound by the context of the original work, the choreographer's intention and ideas. Creative/interpretive thought processes begin as a result of discerning what the archival evidence or material remains might be. This virtual inventiveness comes through a combination of the practice of making and the intangible thought processes existing in the mind of the creator. The process of how this is transmitted to the dancer to activate or facilitate the translation of ideas in embodied practice creates a new form. The use of choreographic activation of the dancer's body as an endlessly creative, transformational archive provides limitless opportunities to access new modes of working (see Franko 1993). My work aligns with the view that archives are a place of creative exchange, and the involvement of the dancer as a means to experiment with and facilitate movement language correlates with the view shared by Foucault and Franko of the body as a creative, transformational archive and Lepecki's view of transformations and transmutations which take place through the bodies of new performers (Lepecki 2010, 35).

I draw as closely as possible from available sources and use Laban's known methodologies: improvisation, space harmony and effort. The translation of ideas and distance from the time the works were created,

along with my contemporary development of Laban principles to create a methodology to reimagine, and my interpretation of sources suggest the work materializes in a new form. So what is this form and why is it significant? Dance historian Lesley-Anne Sayers states, “at issue here is not the simple case of one work being inspired by an earlier one, but a more complex one in which a new work emerges from a close analysis and creative dialogue with an earlier work and its contexts” (Preston-Dunlop and Sayers 2011, 30). This emergence of the ‘new’ from existing materials has led me to examine my process of creative interpretation in this context.

Gathering material remains for Laban’s *Dancing Drumstick* was an extensive process, leading me to UK archives including the National Resource Centre for Dance, Surrey and Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance, London, the second Dalcroze International Conference in Vienna, and the Kunsthau in Zurich. Documents and letters written by Laban to Suzanne Perrottet (1889–1993) between 1910 and 1914 were translated for me by Laban’s great granddaughter, Miriam Perrottet, at the Kunsthau in 2014.<sup>3</sup> Detective work was all the more difficult because material remains of Laban’s dance works are scarce. Despite being well known for his Labanotation system, published in 1928 to document movement, few of Laban’s choreographic works are notated, if at all.<sup>4</sup> Laban eventually moved away from notation because he felt it did not adequately record or reflect the qualitative content of movement. His belief in moving ideas forward rather than fixing them is evident in works such as *Die Grunen Clowns* (1928), which appeared in various forms with different numbers of dancers. It was not notated, aligning with his view that works did not necessarily need to remain the same. I was researching Laban works from 1913, before his notation system existed and prior to his publishing of *Effort* with F. C. Lawrence (1947)<sup>5</sup> and *Choreutics* (1966), the principles of which I use retrospectively to reimagine his works. Letters written to Suzanne Perrottet expose Laban’s thinking about the culture and his ideas at that time, but there are few actual, that is, tangible, remains of *Dancing Drumstick* to draw from. With such limited resources, how is it possible to mount the work for performance? ‘A complete exhumation’ of a work where little evidence of the original surface form exists is almost ‘impossible’ (Hodson and Archer 1987).

I have devised a method of practice using choreology to mount the Laban works, one that I established through my previous recreations of

*Green Clowns* (1928) and *Nacht* (1927).<sup>6</sup> I have also drawn from my embodied research and previous collaborations with former student of Rudolf Laban, Valerie Preston-Dunlop, as ‘living archive’.<sup>7</sup> Reimagining uses my approach of contemporary developments of Laban’s principles of *Choreutics* (1966) and *Effort* (1947) to make and shape the work. Laban’s theories of choreutics and movement as living architecture are significant in my practice because this work provides a direct link to the artist and creates a foundation from which to operate in the present. I propose this process of reimagining as a form of contemporary practice.

## REIMAGINING

Much has been written about Laban’s theatre practice (for example, Preston-Dunlop 1998, 2013; Bergsohn and Bergsohn 2003; Doerr 2008; Bradley 2009; McCaw 2011; Preston-Dunlop and Sayers 2011) but embodied practical recreations of Laban works are rare. Views on Laban’s way of life, the vegetarian colony in Monte Verita and the emerging philosophies evident in the work he did there are documented in a number of sources (for example, Preston-Dunlop 1998; Doerr 2008), and it is this context that provides much of the inspiration for my reimagining of *Dancing Drumstick*. The terms used here to describe the process of mounting Laban works can be ambiguous. I use the term reimagine or (re)creation to imply a creative process which generates a new form. The tension here is the wider issue of identity, which goes beyond the parameters of this chapter. I will, however discuss the terms used in relation to my work.

The wider contextual issues that surround the reimagining of Laban works draw from Lepecki’s notion of ‘returning’ as a method of experimentation. Choreographically experimenting by turning back, or looking to the dance past, without what Lepecki describes as “Orpheus’s curse of being frozen in time” (2010, 29), but is it possible to be frozen in time? Dancers move differently from era to era. Training programs have different demands today and dancers are informed through their experience of current practice, cultural and political contexts and thus cannot really be frozen. Dancers themselves are living archives, embodying their own training practices, influences and experiences. Embodied archives are particularly relevant when contemporary dancers contribute to the choreographic process, rather than being taught specific steps, and improvisation is used when generating and shaping movement material.

These dancers are not pretending to be dancers from 1913 and I am not imitating Laban's 1913 approach, but I am influenced by my understanding of it. My dancers are also influenced by my artistic practice and approach. What, then, is this process of reimagining another's work?

### *The Notion of the 're'*

The proposal of reimagining, actualizing or reviving archives creates an interesting tension: are they at odds? The debate around the notion of the 're', of restaging in particular, is relevant in today's dance practice. Very little 'actual' evidence of *Dancing Drumstick* exists, so according to categories of 're', it is not possible to reproduce, remake or restage as there are too few sources to draw from. Nor could I stage a reconstruction, restoration or reenactment because there is little documentary evidence to rely on. My work aligns with the category of reimagining or reenvisioning, where an artist has less constraint and more freedom to explore and develop their own view of the work and how the work might be. Preston-Dunlop's view is that "[r]e-creation of any sort begs the question: is the new production sufficiently imbued with the originator's style to warrant his or her name being attached to it?" (Preston-Dunlop and Sayers 2011, 23). Contrary to Preston-Dunlop's view, I am not imbuing Laban's style. The question of a choreographer's 'style' is debatable, particularly in this case, when no footage of *Dancing Drumstick* exists. I am more concerned with the spirit of the work, Laban's intention and what he was trying to portray in his works.

By placing these reimagined works in the public domain, could they be viewed as revivals, where works come back into focus? Other terms, such as review, research, reevaluate, rethink, respond, which could be linked to this process of looking back and re-presenting work are also interesting, each posing a different perspective.

### *The 're' and Significance of Interpretation*

Reimagining, where a lack of 'actual' evidence exists, means there are fewer tangible reference points for interpretation than with reconstruction. The approach I take, therefore, is to provide 'virtual' evidence through engagement with contextual sources and create my own virtual material remains through interpreting archival gaps, coupled with the interpretation of visual evidence such as documents and photographs.

Scores are documents, actual, tangible evidence of the previous existence of a work, although how one reads a document is as diverse as the creative processes used to make that work. Dance scores need interpreting and they are themselves an interpretation, recorded in the most part, by a specialist notator who is unlikely to be the choreographer him/herself (Pakes 2017, 7).

The challenge of recreating lost works includes interpreting the work's performance potential (Pakes 2017; Jordan 1987). Lesley Main discusses the extent to which creative imagination should be employed and the notion of contemporary interpretation in her stagings of Doris Humphrey's work (Main 2012), but the absence of identifiable steps from a score provides a different challenge. Pakes refers to the retrievability or irretrievability of 'lost' dances and asks whether performance is repeatable and to what extent dances can persist through time (2017). Pakes illustrates the point that embodied interpretation is significant in the process of revival to understand the appropriate style of the movement, giving the example of the Balanchine Foundation, which employs former dancers to direct or contribute to the process. This approach suggests that dancers can contribute insight into the qualitative content of movement, dynamic phrasing and rhythmic nuance, and the intention and motivation for movement that are not evident or recorded in notated scores. I would suggest that these dancers as living archives can store and transmit that valuable information, but their personal interpretations of felt embodied experience will influence the outcome. In the mounting of Doris Humphrey's works, Main is not engaged with reconstruction but with interpretation. Main refers to processes of interpretive and creative intervention in her use of a notation score (2012, 23). A notation score implies that steps are set and can be reconstructed or reproduced, which in itself is widely debated. What happens when, as with Laban works, there is no score and no dancers to refer to? In contrast to Main's processes, my work is not derived from the actual evidence of a score, it comes from limited archive remains and virtual, potential evidence facilitated by archival gaps. The lack of 'actual' or 'tangible' evidence encourages my thought processes to 'fill in' the archival voids, thereby creating virtual evidence through creative interpretation, and thoughts or visions in my mind, of what the work might be. These virtual thought processes become potential evidence through my actual creative practice of dance making, through trying out ideas in the studio with dancers and musicians. Like Main, I am aiming towards

interpretive freedom by creatively engaging with the past but not intending (or able) to bring the past back to the present in its original form. Main refers to R. G. Collingwood's idea of the 'living past' by illuminating what we think happened through present knowledge (2012, 25) and of using detective work to interpret as a creative artist (Main 2012). This implies that the translation of knowing to telling through the interpretation of evidence is a constantly evolving process, informed by newly acquired knowledge.

Franko refers to construction as opposed to reconstruction which implies the making of, or the building of structure (1993, 135). The way one builds, constructs, the interpretive choices and decision making will determine the outcome. Through bridging archival gaps and staging for contemporary audiences, my process of reimagining is not replicating a work but rather aligns with the "live re-working of past creations rather than a backward-looking exhibition of what has passed" (Pakes 2017, 2). I am not reenacting or being historic(al) with this work. Dance critic Graham Watts, as an example, refers to my work as a resuscitation of ideas rather than the resuscitation of a work (personal correspondence 2016). Mine is an established personal practice of reimagining, a methodology devised using specific Laban principles and an embodied understanding of Laban's practice. However, I battle with intuitive (known knowledge) and cerebral responses in the studio, and the ontological concerns of what 'it' was/is.

### LABAN'S INFLUENCES

The creative processes I use when reimagining, are informed by extensive research of Laban's history. I refer now to the period just before *Dancing Drumstick* was created in order to highlight the importance of knowing the context of Laban's work.

Laban moved to Munich in 1910, which at that time was a centre of artistic activity and philosophical thought. There he began to explore his ideas about the nature of bodily rhythm through the separation of movement from music. Laban's movement influences during this period also included the body-culture approaches of Bess Mensendieck (1866–1959), Rudolf Bode (1881–1970) and Emile Jaques-Dalcroze (1865–1950), all of whom were part of the physical, spiritual and expressive culture that was prominent in Munich at that time. Bradley and Preston-Dunlop write that Laban's approach was in contrast to the music-centric

theories and practices of Dalcroze's Eurhythmics work and moved beyond the unrestrained, free flowing movement that dancer Isadora Duncan performed to Chopin and Beethoven (Bradley 2009; Preston-Dunlop and Purkiss 1989). Laban, it seems, was searching for something more specific. Dalcroze based his method on his observation that the body was inclined to respond to music by moving and, in his early work, taught movement as the externalization of the form inspired by sound. Laban, however, was interested in the movement itself, its content, meaning and relationship to the human spirit. Despite what might seem to be similar philosophies regarding sensory experiences of the body (Greenhead and Habron 2015), Laban was not concerned with the embodiment of music or a particular aesthetic ideal; he preferred movement that was expressive of itself. Dalcroze's method for him, it seems, did not allow for the body's expressiveness.

In 1912, Marie Steiner proposed a new prayerful movement art, Eurythmie, in which vowel and consonant sounds are translated into a series of gestures so that poetry or biblical stories could be 'danced' as 'visible speech, visible song' (Preston-Dunlop and Purkiss 1989). For Laban, according to Preston-Dunlop, this was derivative. Following Laban's viewing of Dalcroze's production of *Orfeo and Euridice* and the accompanying published paper 'How to Revive Dance', in which Dalcroze proposed a way forward for dance through 'music visualization', Laban's view of movement for its own sake was solidified (Preston-Dunlop 1998).

Preston-Dunlop and Selma Odom write about Laban's meeting with Suzanne Perrottet in 1912. Perrottet, a trained pupil and teacher of Dalcroze's method, abandoned the 'music-bound' Dalcroze method in order to pursue more radical movement experiments with Laban. According to Odom, Perrottet reflected that after working with Dalcroze "she could not move for a long time" because she had been formed by set gestures and exercises that now seemed false to her (2002, 8). She found interesting Laban's ideas about the body in space, how the parts of the body function, how their range of motion relates to geometric form, how exploring through improvisation can lead to movement invention. Like Laban, she was fascinated with musical dissonance and percussion, areas that, at the time, did not interest Dalcroze.

It could be said that Perrottet was able to convey firsthand understanding of Dalcroze's work, methods and theories and was thus instrumental in helping inspire and solidify Laban's thinking in relation to

movement, rhythm and sound. My research of archive documents including Perrottet's letters at Kunsthaus, Zurich, reveal how she used her newfound method pedagogically to challenge dancers' rhythm and develop skills, technically and creatively. These letters were crucial to my research, including one in which Laban asked Perrottet, 'what if I take music away from dance?' Through examples such as this, I was able to discern that Laban's intention at the time was primarily to experiment through improvisation, to find an alternative way to challenge rhythmic phrasing in the body, which did not rely on musical phrasing.

Perrottet joined Laban's school in Monte Verita in 1913 along with Mary Wigman, (1886–1973), giving up her post at Dalcroze's school in Hellerau where she had been a pupil. Wigman went on to establish 'Absolute Dance' (autonomous expressive dance, independent of music and codified steps) and became an acclaimed figure in German Expressionist Dance, '*Ausdruckstanz*', following her choreography of *Witch Dance* in 1914. This era included the premiere of Stravinsky's *Le Sacre du Printemps* (1913) in collaboration with Valsav Nijinsky and Nicholas Roerich, along with Dalcroze's student Marie Rambert who served as both performer and dance mistress. Laban, it seems, was affected by seeing *Le Sacre du Printemps*, which may have led to the experiments in Ascona in 1913 which included at least two choreographic works, *Dancing Drumstick* and *Ishtar's Journey into Hades*. *Dancing Drumstick* was 'the rhythm of the body made audible', 'dance as a visible language' and is Laban's attempt to shift dance away from what he referred to as the 'constraints of music' (Laban 1975, 87). The counterpoint of movement and sound proved interesting for Laban and he moved away from set codified steps to reveal its potential, exploring how rhythm and patterns of the mind and spirit manifest in movement. Laban used the term 'Free Dance' (*der Freie Tanz*), meaning free from musical constraints, from dramatic narrative and set steps, therefore the dance material was made up of freely juxtaposed rhythms and forms. His thinking in relation to the rhythmic, dynamic body was revealed in the year before, when he stated that the division of time in the natural movements of the human being "has nothing to do with metric rhythmic systems...they follow another law" (Preston-Dunlop and Purkiss 1989, 15).

Further evidence of Laban's shift away from Dalcroze is seen in 1915, in Laban's publicity material for his summer school *Tanz-Ton-Wort* (Dance-Sound-Word) which explains how his approach to movement education is through the individual finding his own movement

rhythms—through the principles of swing, tempo, beat, order, structure—and is quite different from Dalcroze’s early eurhythmics, in which the body submits to musical rhythms. “*Dance has things to say and express that cannot be said through music or acting, and in a deep way. It is the music of the limbs.*” (Laban 1926) This idea, arguably, is suggestive of movement expressivity being made visible through the body’s rhythmic phrasing and spatial articulation. Our body is in constant flux and its dynamic phrasing communicates through its own chordic system, creating harmony and discord through spatial form. Laban referred to this organization of the body as “limb correlation” or “limb organisation” (1926, 86–87), or “sequencing” (1926, 14) relating to the action of fingers playing the piano.

### LABAN’S MOVEMENT PRINCIPLES

Laban’s former career as an architect influenced his thinking in relation to space and is revealed in his work exploring geometric form and spatial scales. His principles of space harmony include the balance of opposites, a system of harmonic relationships in movement and the art of dance. How we use space as we move is expressed through spatial forms, governed by harmonic laws. The balance of opposites includes basic rules of harmony built into the human psyche and can be understood in relation to the harmonic laws of movement including body, action, space, and relationships, dynamics which are inextricably linked. Our body is structured in a particular way and movement is therefore intrinsically structured. Harmonic opposition is evident in spatial form such as the three-dimensional cross—by moving from open to closed, forward/back, up/down—and work in relation to laws of gravity. The harmonic laws of movement can be related to mathematical ratio and harmonic proportion, the Fibonacci scale, Pythagoras, Plato’s *Timaeus* and constructs in nature, art, architecture, music and cosmology. Laban used geometric forms such as spatial planes, the cube and icosahedron to establish spatial scales, (Laban 1966) which I use with dancers to help them embody and understand their relationship in and with space, intention and expressivity.<sup>8</sup>

The laws of nature and geometric form also inform our perception of what is harmonic, and can be viewed in relation to principles of architecture and our built environment. The body in dynamic flux manifests in what Laban refers to as the architecture of the dynamic body with “space

as the hidden feature of movement and movement a visible aspect of space” (Laban 1966, 4). Together with F. C. Lawrence, Laban’s observation of factory workers in 1947 led to the development of his ‘Effort’ system, which identifies four motion factors—time, weight, space and flow—with polar opposites of sudden/sustained, light/strong, direct/flexible, free/bound. The embodiment of these extremes and their variations challenges dancers to broaden their dynamic range and understand the efficiency of movement according to natural affinities. Dancers become aware of their habitual preferences dynamically and can choose to adhere to or go against their affinities to extend qualitative nuance. In my work, dancers experiment with varying amounts of force, degrees of tension and release, acceleration and deceleration, rupturing affinities and creating inorganic movement choices. The motion factor of weight, which Laban identifies as light or strong, relates to the observation of factory workers and the muscular tension required to move objects efficiently. The notion of weight in Laban’s effort graph does not consider the weight of the body itself. Dancers often question how the effort graph addresses ‘heavy’. For Laban, heavy does not apply to muscular tension and release, or force, it indicates an absence of tension, leading to inertia. The potential of ‘heavy’ as an additional quality can change how we view the effort graph in relation to today’s practice, particularly with regard to release technique. This system can be used in a number of contexts, not only dance, but also in movement therapy and actor training. Variations in our embodiment of harmonic principles create meaning, expression and intention. Similarly, variations in intention and motivation result in differences of movement in time and space.

It is important to point out that these methods were not yet established by Laban in 1913. I used these methods retrospectively as I reimagined *Dancing Drumstick*, and I have developed the principles in a way that is relevant to my practice today as a contemporary dance artist. My research suggests that the established principles that Laban published in 1947 and 1966 are evident in his early works as a way of experimenting to define his thinking of space and time. I have the advantage of looking back to these early works with an in-depth understanding both theoretically and corporeally of choreutics and effort today, and have developed the theories further for the contemporary practice of reimagining. I work with dancers to facilitate an embodied understanding of spatial principles and the significance of dynamic phrasing in movement. I use affinities creatively, rupturing the order of what might be considered to be

‘organic’. Dancers work within an improvisational framework to create interpretations of the dance works originally created by Laban based on my interpretations of available sources. Responses from dancers to my improvisational tasks are influenced by my method of technical training, the warm-up activities and movement vocabulary I use when teaching technique classes. I attempt to challenge dancers with the use of rhythmic phrasing and such embodied experiences influence their responses by creating an embodied impression, an imprint which becomes evident in their practice and improvised responses.

### DANCING LABAN’S MOVEMENT IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

Dalcroze’ eurythmics and Laban’s principles of choreutics and eukinetics are associated with a number of different fields including health, well-being, therapy, arts and education. Laban’s work continues to evolve in a number of disciplines including theatre and dance practice. I have drawn from these principles to establish a practice to train contemporary dance artists in contemporary dance technique. My practice encourages dancers to embody movement corporeally, referring to the multi-sensory body rather than taught steps which are given counts. Imagery is used throughout my rehearsal process to facilitate sensory awareness, to explore, identify and establish dynamic nuance in movement and to clarify intention. Choreological practice engages with the grammar and syntax of movement, the outward manifestation of inner feeling; what Laban refers to as ‘drives’ and ‘states’ (Hackney 2002), identifying the significance of human movement in functional and expressive forms. “Movement is first and fundamental in what comes forth from a human being as an expression of his intentions and experiences.” (Laban 1975, 87) Laban refers to ‘inner attitude’ and connection with this inner sense or intention encourages expressivity.

My approach to technique is physically demanding. Training is a tool, to sculpt dance artistry, to encounter and embody the discipline of muscular strength and to experience the full spectrum of dynamic variation. The process is not only about what I teach, but how. My method of constructing classes and rehearsals allows me to create a conduit, to transfer a physical dialogue and understanding of corporeality and artistry through a choreological lens. My work involves the embodiment of Laban’s theories of Space Harmony. Exploring dancers’ relationships in and with space—the potential of spatial scales and rings, kinesphere,

lability, superzone and harmonic opposition—enhances dancers’ spatial awareness and understanding of choreutic form. Complex rhythmic choices encourage a wide dynamic range and use of effort qualities. Because there is no ‘codified’ ‘Laban technique’, I established a mode of training to teach movement principles for professional training to challenge the dancers. My approach also includes choreological perspectives and contemporary developments of Laban’s principles in practice. I developed a movement base using ‘swings’ in the vertical, horizontal and sagittal planes, working with and from ‘center’, “concern with the centre of energy resonates with the Rosicrucian practice of locating and sensitising centres both within and outside the body” (Preston-Dunlop 1998, 11), use of the lemniscate, the ‘A’ Scale, three-dimensional cross and icosahedron. The technical base consists of intense commitment to the movement, deeply felt performance, a high level of group sensitivity and adaptability, labile forms, isolations and gestures. Unusual dynamic/spatial form combinations are deliberately included.

The embodiment of choreutics, not just as designs and shapes in space, but how it is to feel spatial form is important in my practice.<sup>9</sup> I draw attention to ‘back space’, so that dancers are more aware of their sensorial three-dimensional body, and to the resonance of stillness and how dancers engage physically and emotionally, projecting energy to keep stillness active. William Forsythe, for example, has developed an approach to encourage acute understanding of spatial articulation through his investigations of Laban’s A Scale and specific locations in space. Forsythe’s rupturing of Laban’s choreutic laws, in ‘superzoning’ (first mentioned in Laban’s *Choreutics* 1966), by crossing over the center line of the body, and questioning where ‘center’ is, or using multiple ‘centers’, has created a new living architecture (Forsythe 1994, 2009). Forsythe’s experimentation and questioning of Laban’s structures, and his use of algorithms and software to transform modalities, highlight the possibilities for an artist to adhere to or to rupture the traditions he/she inherits. I inherited Laban’s themes and had to decide what I would adhere to and what I would rupture, giving the dancers and myself the responsibility of contributing to the process and thereby changing the form. Laban’s way of working embraced this; if the process is a true reflection of his approach, then the form will change with each mounting.

I avoid the use of the mirror in rehearsal so that dancers become mindful of bodily sensation and feel the movement first, before it is given

shape or form. Group cohesion is practiced through proprioception; raised consciousness and sensorial awareness of the ensemble, moving together with organic solidarity in shared space, facilitating a collective consciousness, so that unison work is felt and sensed corporeally, rather than seen objectively from the outside or by adding counts. When dancers engage in decision making—‘where shall we go next in the space, who’s leading?’—or they begin counting, movement becomes mechanical rather than organic, and cerebral rather than corporeal.

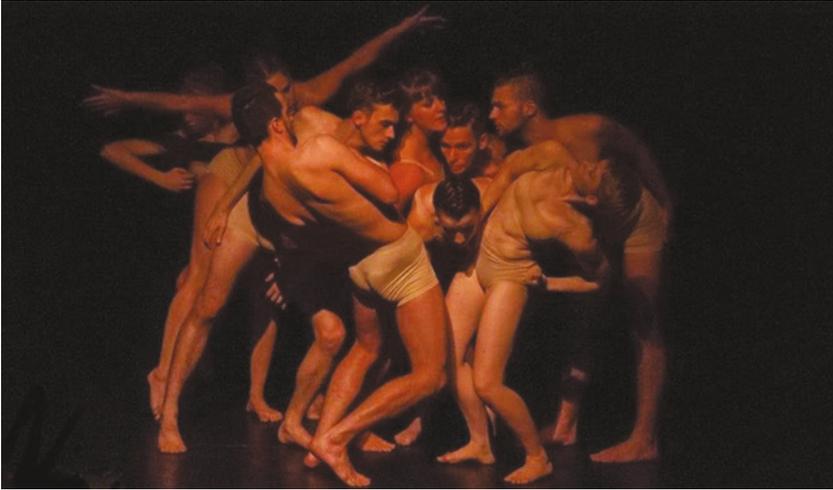
### ENVISIONING THE FUTURE: PRACTICE AND PROCESS

An important aspect of my process was contextual research of the era of *Dancing Drumstick*. It informed my view and perception of the reimagined work, which I entitled *Drumstick*.<sup>10</sup> The title differentiates the work from the original but refers directly to it, acknowledging that it has acquired a new form in the present. Main refers to how the arrival of a new work affects existing work (2012, 26). In my case, there is no other form, only an absence of existing work, until now. My reimagined *Drumstick* is an attempt to show Laban’s shift to arbitrary rhythm—a materialization of extreme and subtle dynamic changes in which dancers establish their own felt rhythms and work together in unity without sound and make stillness resonate. Musicians accompany the dancers, playing in response to what they see as opposed to dancers responding to what they hear. This is not radical today, but it was in Europe in 1913! This work was a radical departure at the time, and I believe, was a direct result of the rebellion against the established method of Jacques Dalcroze, his music visualization and music-inspired movement at the time.

My reimagined *Drumstick*, similarly, rejects the Dalcroze method of music visualization by replacing the reliance on music, meter and sound cues for the dancers with sensed group rhythmic changes in the body and general space. Composers and musicians James Keane and Oli Newman follow the dancers with sections of live improvisation in performance, responding to the dancers’ movement in real time. During the reimagining process, I challenged dancers and musicians with complex non-metric, arbitrary rhythmic phrases, which are sensed and not counted, encouraging group cohesion through acute sensory awareness and phenomenological responses. Dancers improvise with different rhythms and actively sense when to initiate the movement together. An

impulse, for example, creates an accent suddenly somewhere in the body; it starts strongly, becomes lighter and decelerates. Where the initiation begins in the body and whether the pathway of deceleration is direct or flexible is spontaneous and not fixed and varies for each performer. The duration of each movement is also not fixed therefore dancers need to be highly attuned with each other to generate the rhythmic impulse and to determine its duration together. Inner sensation of the qualitative content manifests in a different outward form each time for each individual dancer and creates variations in geometric group form, which I term *morphing*. This is not a cerebral decision-making process, it is a sensory felt experience in the lived moment. Experiencing the resonance of the movement's sensation results in what I call *active stillness*. The duration of the stillness varies each time the dancers perform the work, keeping a sense of aliveness through using what I have termed, *kinesthetic listening*.

Dancers' embodied knowing of dynamic rhythmic phrasing and effort qualities requires in-depth training. To encourage this understanding, I refrain from using counts in rehearsals and when setting technical warm-up exercises, so that the dancers did not rely on numbers, experiencing the movement phrasing corporeally instead. Dancers use breath and vocals to create a cacophony of sound, juxtaposing with the dynamic resonance of the body to create inorganic forms. Musicians work with poly-rhythms as a way of contrasting what they see with what the performers and audience hear. This internal recognition and awareness of sensation is important to me, and my work requires outward expression of these experiences. Laban refers to the movement's impression which allows for expression and proposes that we understand movement through "continuous creation of spatial impressions through the experience of movement" (Laban 1966, 4). In my work, dancers feel the movement and the resulting shape and form manifest because of the felt experience rather than them creating shapes. "Space is a hidden feature of movement and movement is a visible aspect of space" (ibid., 4). The contribution of the dancers is central to the investigative process, so realizing and appreciating the training practices of current dance artists and the notion of habitus in generating material for the work are essential. Dancers establish dynamic and spatial skills through embodied knowing and movement literacy—a shared choreological language, a common terminology for movement principles introduced through my approach to technical training which is transferred to the studio, then ultimately the theatre, for further choreographic and performance investigation (Fig. 2.1).



**Fig. 2.1** Summit Dance Theatre in *Drumstick*, Teatro Del Gatta, Switzerland, 2015. Choreography by Alison Curtis-Jones. Photograph by Paolo Tosi, Tosi photography

### INSIGHT: HOW PERCEPTION AND IMAGINATION INFORMED *DRUMSTICK*

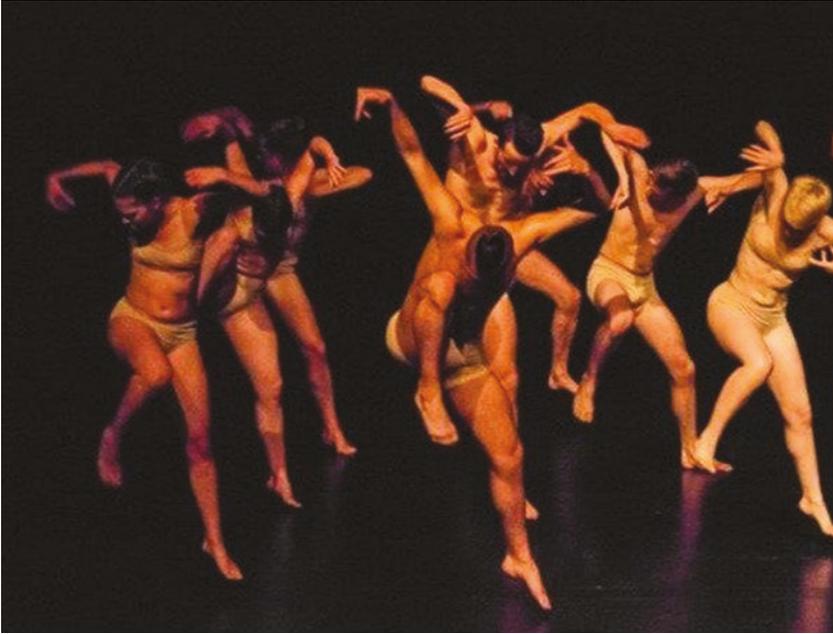
As part of the research process, I looked closely at photographic images of dancers in Monte Verita and Hamburg in the early 1900s, which informed my perspective of the physicality of the movement. Many images showed men and women jumping outdoors. To me, they appeared to be jumping high. The images are snapshots of a moment in time and it is impossible to know what movements came immediately before and after, but they were inspiring nonetheless, and allowed me to imagine, envisage and create. I wanted to capture what I perceived to be the spirit of abandon and liberation in the images and Laban's experiments to free the body from the restraints of sound and clothing. The still photographic images produced thoughts of virtual movement in my mind which I communicated to the dancers. I also shared the images with the dancers. The transmission process allowed them to express the visual stimuli, my perceptions, and subsequently their perceptions, through movement. A photograph of men outdoors in Hamburg

in 1920 influenced my experiments with strength. The image was not directly related to the work but was interesting, along with other images from the era showing semi-naked, or in some cases, naked images of the dynamic body in motion. This particular photograph shows men pulling a rope in a ‘tug of war’. The muscularity of the body is visible. In rehearsal, I worked with alternations of tension and release and variations of strength with the dancers, contrasting extreme and subtle dynamic changes in rhythmic phrasing. To help dancers embody the strength evident in the photograph, we used a rope in rehearsal and divided into two teams to pull. The degree of strength needed to sustain the tension in the rope and to hold one’s ground was revealing. The strength was not only located in the centre of the body, it came from every sinew, from the feet into the ground, through the legs, gut, back, chest, arms, hands. Muscular tension was also reflected in the grimacing of the face. Interestingly, most dancers held their breath as they pulled. It appears the degree of muscular tension and force interfered with their ‘natural’ breath rhythm. We worked with this level of power in rehearsal to generate challenging levels of strength in movement. The ‘tug of war’ diagonal line appears in my reimagined *Drumstick* without the rope. Dancers find the power from their embodied knowing of the felt experience of a counter-tension pull, their focus projected on a direct pathway to illustrate the virtual spatial tension between them (Fig. 2.2).

I also saw photographs of dancers in different spatial formations, reaching downward, outward, upward, relating to Laban’s explorations of low, medium, high; the earth, the horizon and the sky, and groups in spatial formation. The more I studied these photographs, the connection with the outdoors, the concern for freedom of movement, the more I connected with Laban’s fear of the loss of the soul:

I saw with growing clarity how man will come under domination of the machine. The soul-less steel oz, the locomotive is only the beginning. Thrilling as the power of conquest over air and sea may be, man will surely have to pay dearly for it. The whirring and clanking of thousands of wheels and chains is infectious: soon man himself will become a whirring of wheels and chains; soon he will see in life, in the whole of nature, and in himself nothing but the machine, and the soul will be forgotten. (Laban 1975, 48)

My concern with the multi-sensory body in *Drumstick* is especially relevant in today’s digital world and our culture of technological connection



**Fig. 2.2** Summit Dance Theatre in *Drumstick*, Teatro Del Gatta, Switzerland, 2015. Choreography by Alison Curtis-Jones. Photograph by Paolo Tosi, Tosi photography

mediated through a screen. In *Drumstick* the dancers have to be connected actually, not virtually. I used live sound, of dancers' breath, feet and drums. Laban refers to "the spiritual character of primitive music and especially of rhythm" (1975, 87). Initially, I chose not to use technology in the work, not even to amplify the sound; I wanted the work to be raw and visceral to reflect the soul. In my reimagined *Drumstick* I stripped back everything to reveal the body, including the costumes, inspired by Laban's references to 'primitive' (1975, 87) and photographs of the time. To experience the sensory responses of the body outdoors, we danced on the same ground in Monte Verita that Laban began his experiments. It had rained the day before we arrived and it was slightly chilly on that October day in Monte Verita, but we removed our shoes and outer layers of clothing. Feeling our feet in the earth, cold, soft but firm, the height of the trees around us, the fresh air,

the cool temperature gave us an immediate shift in our relationship to space/place. The scale, the openness, the power of nature—it felt like sacred ground—the power in the earth as we jumped and ran, changed orientation, the environment transformed our experience of the movement. We did these movements repetitively to find a common rhythm, to communicate, referring directly to Laban’s idea of our bodies as “morse-code apparatus” (1975, 87), and more importantly to experience the sensation of the dynamic body in space. Laban’s interest in engaging with the body’s resident sensations as sensory perception and experiential rather than cognitive is suggested here: “To primitive man the language of the drum seems nothing other than the rhythm of his body made audible. Therefore, as long as the European tries to investigate it with his intellect it will always remain a mystery to him” (1975, 87). This experience of dancing outside in Monte Verita was fundamental in capturing the *spirit* of the work then and now.

The dancer of our cultural era...possesses the same sensitivity to the meaning of visible and audible body movements. For this reason, he understands rhythms and sounds as a kind of audible gesture and dance as a visible language. (Laban 1975, 87)

### HOW REIMAGINING CONTRIBUTES NEW ARCHIVAL EVIDENCE THROUGH PERFORMANCE EPHEMERA

These ‘new’ works become fragments of performance ephemera which, in turn, create new archival traces in the bodies of the dancers and in the minds of the viewer. Actual evidence, that is, tangible material, remains available in archives and its subsequent translation through interpretation leads to the provision of new images of the work, creating associations with Laban’s work that potentially, along with seeing the live works, add ‘being’ to Laban. By sharing photographic images of my reimagining(s) of *Green Clowns*, *Nacht*, *Drumstick* and *Ishtar’s Journey into Hades*, I am providing new images which are associated with the original work, thereby establishing a particular perspective of the work in the mind of the viewer. Can seeing reimagined Laban works live in performance also potentially change perceptions of existing archive materials and perceptions of Laban’s work as an artist?

This work therefore, does not simply aim to restore Laban’s choreography but to engage with finding his intention and meaning of the

works through reimagining his work as contemporary dance practice. Reimagining past dances with embodied corporeal knowledge in practice provides a different insight to the work for dancers and audiences in a way that studying materials alone cannot provide. Using the body-as-archive (Lepecki 2010), dancers become the work, they provide a ‘place’ for it, the work lives in their continuing state of transformation as beings. Working with dancers and collaborators to actualize my (and their) interpretations, reimagining is not about the past that was, which is impossible to retrieve, it is about the present that is.

## NOTES

1. The commission from the Swiss Federal Office was awarded following performances by Summit Dance Theatre, of my reimagined *Nacht* and *Suite’24*, at Teatro San Materno as part of The Laban Event International Conference, 2013.
2. Summit Dance Theatre is made up of professional dancers Robert Keates, Charlotte Pook, Claire Victoria Lambert, Ellen Jeffrey, James Kay, Andrew Race, Fred Gehrig, Ingvild Olsen, Verena Schneider, taught through my method of technical training at Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance. Composers Oli Newman and James Keane play live. Costumes designed by Mary Fisher of The Royal Opera House, London. Producer and curator of Laban Event, Nunzia Tirelli, Switzerland. Filmmaker Giona Beltrametti and dance artist Nunzia Tirelli have supported this work from archive to production.
3. Nunzia Tirelli and Giona Beltrametti were also present at this meeting in the Kunsthhaus, Zurich.
4. Laban’s *Schwingende Tempel* (1923) has incomplete sections of notation. *Titan* is notated by Knust after the 1928/9 performances directed by him. The premiere was 1927, before Laban’s notation system was published. The CNN Paris has details of scores written by Knust.
5. The word ‘effort’ was used by Laban to reflect the war effort. It is interesting to note the significance of the cultural context of the time. Following two World Wars when industrialization was needed to restore and to manufacture, Laban and Lawrence’s observations of production line workers such as the female factory workers in Pilkinton Tile Factory resulted in their publication of the Effort Graph. This was to encourage movement efficiency and resulted in 8 basic ‘effort actions’. Preston-Dunlop states that Laban observed how women would use flow to do men’s work. Women would swing heavy objects whereas men would carry. Laban later considered the word ‘exertion’. Both words

are unsatisfactory in describing the qualitative nuance of movement and human expression, whether movement is consciously controlled for performance or emerges subconsciously in behavior. Words are inadequate when attempting to capture the dynamics of the body.

6. *Die Nacht* (1927) is a political satire, exposing the underbelly of the Weimar Period—a tumultuous period in history. Laban refers to his distaste for “dollars, deceit and depravity” (Laban 1975). My reimagined *Nacht* is a response to one original photograph, drawings of costumes by Hans Blank, and Laban’s choreographic notes. I write about my influences, including contextual sources such as the Fritz Lang’s film *Metropolis* (1927) and George Grotz’s artwork *Arbeiter*, cabaret song lyrics and Berthold Brecht’s perceptions of Berlin, in *Rudolf Laban: Man of Theatre*, Preston-Dunlop, V. (2014) Dance Books, London. My reimagined *Nacht* was performed at The Bonnie Bird Theatre, London in 2010, 2011 and 2014 with Trinity Laban Dancers, with Summit Dance Theatre in Teatro San Materno, Ascona, Switzerland 2014 and The Ivy Theatre, Surrey 2017. My reimagined *Nacht* has four sections and examines the superficialities of social etiquette in Smart Set, the greed of Stockbrokers, the way Tanz Bars were used for political propaganda, and the Monotony of work and labour. I collaborated with composer Oli Newman who plays live.
7. *Die Grunen Clowns* (1928) is Laban’s anti-war piece dealing with the dehumanization of the body through repetitive work and industrial machine-like imagery, the horrors of war, the fragility of relationships, the humor and mindlessness of following political leaders. This work was the precursor to Kurt Jooss’ *Green Table* (1932). My re-creations of this work are based on research by Preston-Dunlop. A draft of practical ideas were in place, based on Preston-Dunlop’s practical experiments in the 1980s. Following Preston-Dunlop’s research, I developed these ideas and mounted the work in its entirety using my methodology for the first time in 2008 with Trinity Laban dancers and again in 2009 in The Bonnie Bird Theatre, London. I recreated *Green Clowns* with Transitions Dance Company in 2008 for performances in Manchester and Dartington to commemorate 50 years since Laban’s death. I was commissioned in 2014 to recreate *Green Clowns* with Centre of Advanced Training students to commemorate the centenary of World War I and in 2015 with Trinity Laban dancers for the Brighton Festival. The BBC filmed a section of my recreation of *Green Clowns* for a documentary program on modern dance, ‘Dance Rebels’ screened in the UK, 2015.
8. My research with Preston-Dunlop spans 15 years and is ongoing. I refer to Preston-Dunlop as a ‘living archive’. Personal recollections of working with Laban, his approaches and ideas, from her perspective, have been

invaluable in my research. Preston-Dunlop's in-depth research of Laban's history and her writings are significant resources.

9. See Jeffrey Scott Longstaff's work. *Reevaluating Rudolf Laban's Choreutics. Perceptual and Motor Skills*, 2000, 191–210. Laban Centre London, City University London.
10. I propose that *Dancing Drumstick* (1913) is a significant historic work and *Drumstick* pays tribute to Laban's extensive experiments with the dynamic body in motion. *Drumstick* was performed by Summit Dance Theatre in Teatra del Gatta, Ascona 2015, and outside in Monte Verita. The work was filmed by the German TV company ARTE on the site where Laban's early dance experiments took place. The Swiss film company RSI captured the process and performance of *Drumstick* and *Ishtar's Journey into Hades* in 2015. A documentary film is available.

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