

# LABAN – ARISTOTLE: MOVEMENT FOR ACTORS AND IN ACTING

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## Abstract

The application of Laban's method in actor training has a long history that extends beyond his work in dance, and it is this area that this paper focuses on. Although Laban himself applied his method to the training of actors, it was mainly left to his followers to develop – often erratically, or this is what this paper suggests – Laban's insights. Practitioners such as Jean Newlove (1993), Yat Malmgren (Mirodan, 1997), Geraldine Stephenson (McCaw, 2009), Brigid Panet (2009) and others have all continued developing Laban's work by offering movement classes for actors that are based on his principles; moreover, each of these individuals has developed a specific method based on Laban's principles. It is worth noting that these methods do not differ from one another, and all of their practitioners agree in principle that the philosophical foundation of Laban's theory and practice is to be interpreted according to Platonic precepts. I will argue that this Platonic foundation underpins each of the above practitioners' own development; furthermore, notwithstanding the differences between them, it is Platonism that unifies them all under a common philosophical approach. This paper is a theoretical enquiry into the proposition that there is a strong link between Laban's movement theory and Aristotle's *Poetics*. More specifically, it proposes that Laban's analysis of human movement is inextricably linked to Aristotle's concept of *mimesis* perceived as a ζῶον (*life force*).

## Keywords

Mimesis, kinaesthetic awareness, ζῶον, indestructible dynamics, poetic science, logic, cube, effort

## Plato or Aristotle?

The Platonic interpretation of Laban's method originates in Laban's Rosicrucian period, during which he explored the directions of the human body in terms of the Platonic icosahedron.<sup>1</sup> It was an investigation that brought the art of dancing to a new era by breaking the *stability* of the

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1 In *Timaeus* Plato states that the creation of the Cosmos is based on five solids, each of them representing one of the elements of nature: cube for earth, tetrahedron for fire, octahedron for air, dodecahedron for the Cosmos as a whole, and icosahedron for water. See also Newlove and Dalby (2004), where reference is made to Laban and his *connection* to Platonic ideas.

dancer and introducing instead the concept of *lability* or *instability*. Laban replaced the three-dimensional conception of space in dance with a "Platonic" icosahedral perspective. Until then, the dancer had been located in an imaginary cube and his/her directions had been limited to front/behind, up/down, left/right. Laban's icosahedron opened up new possibilities of movement because it expanded the boundaries of the body's directions by employing the full dimensions of space, in both *stability* and *lability*. This innovation led Laban to be celebrated as the father of contemporary dance.

The Platonic influence on Laban's theory and practice was explicitly established in Curl's "Philosophical Foundations", originally written as a series of articles in 1966–1969 and published in the *Laban Art of Movement Guild Magazine*. These articles discuss the relation between Laban and his followers, and their pursuit of a philosophical foundation. Ullmann (cited in Curl, 1966, p. 7), Laban's principal collaborator during the last years of his life, explains: "serious study of this kind requires a philosophical foundation". Two other factors would dramatically influence Laban's descendants in developing movement training for actors: firstly, Laban's background in expressionist ideas and, secondly, the connection of his theory and practice to Stanislavsky's work. This paper will discuss how these factors influenced their teaching methods in ways that may be considered to be working against Laban's aims.

This paper is a theoretical and practical enquiry into the proposition that there is a strong link between Laban's movement theory and Aristotle's *Poetics* (Selioni, 2014). More specifically, it proposes that Laban's analysis of human movement is inextricably linked to Aristotle's concept of *mimesis* perceived as a *ζῶον* (*life force*). Thus far, the discussion on Laban's philosophical foundations has been limited to an assumption of Platonic influence (Curl, 1966, pp. 7–15). However, in his *Mastering Movement* (2001, p. 56), John Hodgson, perhaps for the first time, mentions the connection between Laban and Aristotle:

Laban was drawn to Greek thinking. He enjoyed Greek roots and word formations. From the classic background he devised new terms such as "choreosophie" and "choreology" and brought words like "kinetic" into more regular use and awareness. He makes passing reference to Aristotle, Pythagoras, Plato and several times refers to Lucian and his awareness of the power of dance, especially without music.

The idea that the art of dance in ancient Greece was without music is first mentioned in Aristotle's *Poetics*. It is subsequently discussed by Lucian in his *Περί Ορχήσεως* [*On Dance*], written in 2 AD. Hodgson (2001, p. 60) also points out that, although Laban refers to Plato, he "does not seem to have made any detailed or thorough study of him". It is obvious that there is a great amount of confusion concerning the philosophical foundation of Laban's work, even amongst the people who were closest to him.

I will be arguing that Laban, in his “English period” after the Second World War, undertook a shift away from Platonic philosophy, which had inspired his initial interest in dance, to the field of theatre and an engagement with Aristotle’s thinking. Valerie Preston-Dunlop (1998, p. 253), one of Laban’s students during that period, argues that Laban’s key text, *The Mastery of Movement on the Stage* (1950), is in fact written for actors rather than dancers. Moreover, Warren Lamb (interviewed in McCaw, 2006, pp. 86–87), Laban’s disciple during the same period, supports Preston-Dunlop’s suggestion of Laban’s shift of focus:

All his work in factories at this time was concentrated on Effort, without much reference to shape or space harmonies. He was teaching space harmony to dancers and teachers, but it seemed that he had made an inseparable connection of work with effort.

The research of effort, Lamb continues, was based on “Laban’s assertion that Effort was an indication of the character” (ibid., p. 88). McCaw agrees with Lamb; he states: “Laban thought that an analysis of effort was the way to understand human behaviour” (ibid., p. 77). In his last book, Laban (1950, p. v) states that theatre is “the mirror of man’s physical, mental, and spiritual existence”. I shall argue here that this statement is to be understood in direct opposition to Platonic precepts, thus undermining the idea that the art of theatre is a means of mirroring the ideal world of the Forms. By contrast, it is in full agreement with Aristotle’s famous passage in the *Poetics*, which defines tragedy as the *mimesis* of human *praxis*.

Therefore, this study suggests that Laban’s concepts are more in tune with the Aristotelian concept of ζῶον, as discussed in the *Poetics*. I will use this argument to support the proposal of a new methodology for teaching movement to actors. Moreover, contrary to the conventional approaches that align Laban’s concepts with Stanislavsky’s, Laban is in fact in direct opposition to Stanislavsky, in terms of both their aesthetic/philosophical and practical approach, and their attitude towards psychological implications concerning character development. Furthermore, the critical analysis of Laban and Aristotle will serve as a supporting framework for a new series of classes based on Laban’s theory and practice.

One should bear in mind that Aristotelian mimesis is to be understood in terms of the notion of ζῶον – a *living organism*, synonymous to life, or *life force* – and only on this basis can it be used in relation to the training of the actor’s/actress’s body. Moreover, the classes will be constructed within a framework that seeks to address both theoretical and practical issues in terms of scientific methodological demands. In other words, the structure of the classes should follow a *logical order*, as Aristotle suggests when he talks about science (*first principles, middle terms* etc.); the classes should follow the methodological basis of proceeding from a first simple action to a more complex one.

My investigation, therefore, intends to establish Laban’s philosophical foundation on Aristotle’s work, mainly as this is developed in his famous treatise on theatre, the *Poetics*. This

paper will re-examine the conceptual basis of the philosophical systems they have in common in order to establish similarities between Aristotle and Laban's understanding of *human praxis* in theatre. More significantly, the paper will propose that they share a common understanding of the role of the performer's kinaesthetic experience, and that this experience is to be understood as possessing no psychological implications. The paper will then discuss how, for both Laban and Aristotle, the process of art making is one of intentionally creating a *world per se*, namely, a new poetic reality that does not exist in this world.

This idea is the foundation for understanding *mimesis* in terms of a process of *poetic science*, whose aim is for the performer to have a *constant presence* on the stage. In other words, the performer must constantly be attentive to his/her body's ever-changing rhythms in present time, and thus be able to continually experience what, based on Aristotle, we might call an *aesthetic time* and not merely a *physical sense of time* during the performance. This presupposes a well-trained body; the performer works under the condition that his/her training develops bodily awareness of both movement and voice and addresses the needs of dramatic art holistically. If the performer lacks that ability, his/her presentation stands as a schematic presence that reveals its inartistic character. Aristotle calls this constant presence on stage ζῶον (a *life force*, according to Ramfos), whereas Laban describes it as *kinaesthetic experience*. Relating these two concepts, I will be arguing that Laban's conceptual framework is very close to Aristotle's.

Moreover, by linking Aristotle to Laban, this paper provides the opportunity to develop not only a theoretical approach, but also a practical one, which establishes the art of movement as a *science*. Laban's followers have often dismissed the idea of a scientific approach in movement, since they have first and foremost emphasized the emotional and expressionistic character of this method. A movement science, on the other hand, would focus on logical elaboration and a conscious intention while training as well as while structuring a character.

### **A new reading of *Poetics*: Stelios Ramfos**

In order to suggest a new theoretical basis and a practical training method for actors, I will be incorporating Stelios Ramfos's theoretical approach to Aristotelian *mimesis* as a ζῶον (*life force*). Since *mimesis* is conceived as a ζῶον, actors should live in a state of constant presence on stage. This means that during this "aesthetic time" the beauty of ζῶον lies in the execution of the logical development of actions, which constitute the unity of a *praxis* (complete performance). Ramfos (1991, p. 201) argues:<sup>2</sup>

Time in the case of the work of art and its pleasure is to be found in the whole of its duration, from the beginning to the end, and not in some moments that require the participation of the

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2 All quotations from the original Greek text have been translated into English by the author.

spectator's soul. [...] Indeed the poetic *synkinesis* [commotion] is not produced by assembling the external parts of the work of art, but is extracted from its existential perfection, namely its function as an energetic living whole.

Insofar as it accomplishes this, the body experiences time as a constant *vuv* (*now*), thus transforming abstract *physical time* into the *indestructible time of living presence*. Actually, the *now* has been transformed into an aesthetic time free from "the everyday world of our sufferances and gaieties" (Laban, 1950, p. 6). Laban recognizes that a body on stage experiences its effort rhythms in a constant "now", in a specific space and within a specific duration, by interrupting physical time and replacing it with the experience and fullness of its somatic energy. Thus, being on stage consists in turning physical time into a moment of *catharsis*. The actor/actress sets external reality aside and experiences the pleasure of his/her existence through his/her movement, i.e. s/he experiences time as s/he embodies it. This paper will establish links between *indestructible time* and Laban's approach to movement as a kinaesthetic experience in his *effort theory*. One issue that it aims to address is how this framework can propose a new way of applying Laban's movement concepts to movement training for actors; namely, it establishes that Laban proposes a way of "living on stage" not only in *indestructible time*, but through *effort* as well.

Aristotle provides an ontological theory for the text and its plot as an organic whole. It is important to acknowledge that, in Aristotle's time, the semiotics of speech was understood in terms of rhythms that were capable of transferring emotions; this is why Aristotle offers the principles of dramatic art in terms of text and speech. However, on a second level, he implies that the body's movement is related to his notion of *ζῶον*. Having lived in a different time, where words were symbols that meant nothing specific when viewed on their own, Laban realized that body movement on stage is more capable of conveying meaning and can thus present vast nuances. Laban (*ibid.*, pp. 132–133) wrote:

The oldest rhythms of which we have knowledge are those of ancient Greece and these in the main are related to poetry. [...] These rhythms, called measures, were arranged in verses, strophes and poems. The Greeks considered rhythm to be the active principle of vitality [...], it is reported that the arrangement of the rhythm was the first step in creating poetic and dramatic art.

Laban replaces language rhythms with the body's movement rhythms (including voice) and, like Aristotle, steers dramatic art away from all psychological implications during the training of actors. In short, when developing kinaesthetic awareness, actors do not need to identify with any character nor do they need to experience emotions. The exercises proposed in his book focus on actions and their effort qualities, thus promoting interaction between body and mind.

On this basis, Laban offers a mode of training that could function as a support to every acting method, since he establishes a practical guide for a new *poetic science*: the Art (and its

Mastery) of Movement on the Stage. In 1950, Laban (ibid., p. 130) stated that “the elements of movement when arranged in sequences constitute *rhythms*”. From this point on he developed *Eukinetics*, the study of movement dynamics. Laban calls “effort rhythms” the visible movements of the human body, which are the result of its inner attitude. His effort analysis “enables us to define our attitudes towards the factors of movement (weight, space, time, flow) on the background of the general flux of movement in proportional arrangements” (Lange, 1970, p. 5). Finally, this paper can be seen as offering a practical explanation of the manner in which the Aristotelian ζῶον moves, thereby contributing a practical training guide for the actor’s kinaesthetic experience to Aristotle’s ontological and poetic theory.

### **The roots of the problem and the case for new knowledge**

In 1966, Lisa Ullmann (cited in Curl, 1966, p. 7) argued for the necessity of establishing Laban’s philosophical foundations as a means to understand his legacy:

At a time increasing demands are made on us for study in depth, it is indeed fortunate that through Laban’s investigation, through his defining and propounding the area of movement, we have an enormous treasure of material and knowledge, upon which to base these studies. But it must not be forgotten that serious study of this kind requires a philosophical foundation.

Curl’s “Philosophical Foundations” (1966–1969) and Foster (1977) can be seen as a first attempt at proposing links between Laban’s concepts and some key aspects of Platonic and Pythagorean philosophy. Curl connects Laban to “Plato and mystic metaphysics” (Foster, 1977, p. 166) and, through that connection, he establishes Laban’s Platonic philosophical foundation. Foster locates the influences behind Laban’s concepts and undertakes an investigation into the possible connection not only to Plato and the Pythagoreans, which Curl has already suggested, but to other philosophers as well, such as Fichte, Nietzsche, Rousseau, Fröbel, Aristotle, Heidegger, Kierkegaard, Hegel, Dewey, and Russell. Foster (ibid., pp. 39–69) concludes that the link between Laban and Plato (and the Pythagoreans) does not exist; yet he does not suggest a specific philosophical approach, although he concedes that it is very clear from Laban’s words that there is in fact a connection to ancient Greek philosophy.

Despite Foster’s findings, Laban’s descendants persisted in pursuing the idea that Laban’s philosophical foundation was to be found in Platonic philosophy. For instance, after Laban’s death, his close collaborators and students, Ullmann, Newlove and Stephenson, linked Laban to Platonic philosophy, based on Laban’s research on the Platonic icosahedron as a perspective for the individual’s personal space, or *kinesphere*, as Laban called it during his Rosicrucian period.<sup>3</sup>

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3 Laban became a member of the Rosicrucian Brethren at the beginning of the 20th century while studying at the École des Beaux Arts in Paris. The Rosicrucians studied Hermes, Plato, Gurdjieff, the ancient Egyptian religions of Amon and Osiris, agnostic writings, Christian and Muslim texts (Preston-Dunlop, 1998, p. 12).

The most recent work attempting to locate Laban's philosophical foundation is by Carol-Lynn Moore (2009). Moore examines Laban's drawings and, through her analysis, tries to develop a hypothesis about the way in which the idea of *harmony* appears in his work. Moreover, she tries to connect Laban with Bergson's philosophy of movement in images (ibid., p. 81) and the artistic trends of Art Nouveau and Modernism (ibid., p. 90).

As mentioned above, Hodgson also attempted to define Laban's philosophical foundation, yet without reaching a definite conclusion. However, he writes that "[Laban] makes passing reference to Aristotle" (Hodgson, 2001, p. 56). The crucial point to be made here is that Hodgson refers to Laban's connection to Aristotle for the first time, albeit without providing any further information. An idea that this paper will attempt to discuss is the possibility of such a connection between Aristotle and Laban, especially in terms of the latter's engagement with the art of acting. However, what is even more important in this context is Laban's statement in his *Choreutics* that he was interested in ancient Greek philosophy, namely in Plato and his contemporary disciples, making an indirect reference to Plato's most renowned disciple, Aristotle, and his philosophy as the framework for researching scientific knowledge. Laban (1966, p. vii) states:

"Choreosophia" – an ancient Greek word, from *choros*, meaning circle, and *sophia*, meaning knowledge or wisdom – is the nearest term I have discovered with which to express the essential ideas of this book. These ideas concern the wisdom to be found through the study of all phenomena of circles existing in nature and in life. The term was used in Plato's time by the disciples and followers of Pythagoras. [...] Plato, in his *Timaeus*, and other contemporaries and disciples of the great philosopher give us a more exhaustive picture of the knowledge [...].

Moreover, the fact that Laban was considered to be a representative of expressionist dance in Germany led more researchers to base their practical teaching methods on expressionist movement (Evans, 2009, p. 33).<sup>4</sup> Gordon (1975, pp. 35–39) describes the expressionist movement as having: "muscular posturing", "intensity", "huge and pathetic gestures", "grotesque gestures", "pauses", "primitive expressiveness" and "overwhelming pressure in movement". Furthermore, while applying Laban's analysis to the field of actor training, his concepts were also connected to Stanislavsky's acting method (Newlove, Stephenson, Malmgren, Panet, Adrian), although Laban himself, according to Hodgson (2001, p. 226), "watched Stanislavsky rehearsing once in Berlin" and, in his own words, "found the experience rather boring". The connection between Laban and Stanislavsky started with Yat Malmgren and Jean Newlove, and was continued by the new generation of their descendants, such as Barbara Adrian, Brigid Panet, etc. Laban, on the other

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4 When referring to "expressionist movement", I am using the term to describe the expressionist aesthetic that has historically existed in theatre and dance, as discussed in such texts as Gordon (1975).

hand, went on to develop and propose “his own theory and practice” (ibid.) of acting in the period after his arrival in England, as I will be explaining later on.

Some key questions arise here: firstly, why is Laban’s theory and practice for actors connected to Platonic philosophy? For Plato, art is a mirroring of the *ideal world*, while Laban, in the preface of *The Mastery of Movement on the Stage* (1950), argues that the stage is a mirror of man’s physical, mental and spiritual existence. Secondly, why did Laban, in his last two books (Laban, 1948 and 1950), exclude the icosahedral perception of space and replace it with cube-based directions, making no reference to his early research? Dick McCaw (2006, p. 77) affirms that “Laban thought that an analysis of Effort was the way to understand human behaviour”, as opposed to the analysis of space as an icosahedron. Moreover, Warren Lamb (ibid., p. 95), one of Laban’s students between 1947–1950, explains:

Laban never talked about specific points in the icosahedron. He thought more in terms of planes or lines which divided the sphere, for example into what is called “above” from what you’d call “below”.

Is there not, in these omissions, a strong indication that Laban has moved away – during his English period after the Second World War – from his former Platonic influence concerning the analysis of space in terms of Platonic geometrical solids? As far as his *Choreutics* is concerned, it is interesting to note that he mainly refers to an analysis of space based on an icosahedral perspective; however, this is the work that has provided evidence of Laban’s connection to Plato. Laban (cited in Ullmann’s preface in Laban, 1966, p. ix) specifies that he is interested in ancient Greek philosophy and specifically in Plato, his disciples and the Pythagoreans.

It is essential to mention that Ullmann herself published *Choreutics* in 1966, eight years after Laban’s death, naming Laban as its author. In the book’s preface, Ullmann explains that the first part consists of Laban’s manuscripts, whereas the second part comprises his students’ manuscripts of notes from Laban’s classes during his German period. A third question that arises is the following: if Laban’s philosophical foundation rests on Platonic philosophy, why do his descendants teach his method under expressionism while Plato is generally considered to be a formalist? Finally, there is the question concerning Laban’s connection to Stanislavsky’s acting method: how can Platonic philosophy be connected to Stanislavsky, given that a Platonic approach would appear to be antithetical to any psychological implication in theatre?

In fact, the research undertaken here takes its initiative from Laban’s own words in his last original book (Laban, 1950). In its preface, Laban states that the logical explanation of movement is not to be found in a mechanistic approach. On the contrary, it is the understanding of the order of “ever-flowing change” of movement (ibid., p. v) that is the result of the inner life of human existence. According to Laban, “man moves in order to satisfy a need” (ibid., p. 1) and the body’s movement is an analogue to one’s inner life. It is precisely the principles underlying

this analogy that allow the deep understanding of human movement and its application on the stage. For Laban, the stage is “the mirror of man’s physical, mental, and spiritual life” (ibid., p. v) and “has nothing to do with the world of ideas” (ibid., p. vi). This statement places Laban firmly on Aristotelian ground, and not on Platonic territory. One may recall here the “great quarrel” between Aristotle and Plato about dramatic art: Plato believed that drama is a “mirror” – however badly reflective – of the *ideal world*, whereas Aristotle believed that drama is a “mirror of human praxis”.

Laban (ibid., p. vi) makes a very interesting statement at the end of his book’s preface. He mentions and acknowledges the contribution of his friends and pupils during his research, yet he also takes a curious distance from them:

This book embodies the practical studies and experience of a lifetime, but I could not have written it without close exchange of opinions with my friends and pupils. [...] My thanks are therefore due to all those who have shared my work on the stage and my researches into the art of movement. [...] But all my coadjutors were present with me in thought as I wrote, and so I gratefully dedicate what I have written to all of them. In this guide to stage (and incidentally to factory) practice I have been obliged to work to my own special pattern. Why this was necessary, study of the text will disclose.

My suggestion is that, with this statement, Laban clearly dissociates himself from what his collaborators and students believe about his theory and practice. This argument is also supported by Warren Lamb (McCaw, 2006, p. 101), who states that Laban “did have the character of reserving to himself some element of his method”. Lamb (ibid., p. 101) goes on to say that Laban had a different approach from his students in a way that “if ever he got angry, he would say that your knowledge was very elementary and he conveyed that he understood far, far more than you were ever going to understand”.

However, Hodgson (2001, p. xi) provides another explanation for the misunderstandings and conflicts between Laban and his students and collaborators:

The fact that he lived in so many countries, conversed in so many languages, worked under so many political regimes and became involved in so many areas of human endeavour, have made it a long and difficult task to identify patterns, recognize recurring themes and interpret basic principles.

Another important issue is that, in the original edition of Laban (1950), no reference is made to the icosahedral perspective of space in Laban’s research. Instead, his analysis of space is restricted to Aristotle’s approach regarding the issue of *personal space*, which will be discussed later on. Moreover, the same conception of space can also be found in Laban (1948), in which

Laban only included the graph of a cube and a dynamosphere when referring to space. In the present context, this strongly indicates that during his English period Laban shifted towards a different approach.

### **Poetic science – Logic in movement training for actors and in acting**

The problem becomes more complicated when Laban's method is linked to Stanislavsky and his acting method. This connection started when Laban's collaborator William Carpenter, who was interested in psychology, suggested researching the links between the four motion factors of effort – *space, weight, time* and *flow* – and Jung's ideas about the psychological functions of *thinking, sensing, intuiting* and *feeling*. Laban continued this research with Yat Malmgren after Carpenter's death. However, his collaboration with Malmgren only lasted for a short period of time. In fact, it was Malmgren who connected Laban analysis to the Stanislavsky acting method. Laban himself never mentions anything about psychological implications in acting in his last book. On the contrary, Laban (1950, p. 109) states:

All this has little to do with psychology as generally understood. The study of human striving reaches beyond psychological analysis. Performance in movement is a synthesis, culminating in the understanding of personality caught up in the ever-changing flow of movement.

Actually, it is Ullmann who adds, in the revised edition of *The Mastery of Movement on the Stage* (1980, p. 115), Stanislavsky's questions *where, when, what* and *how* to Laban's *space, time, weight* and *flow*. It is notable that Laban starts his analysis by posing four different questions and answering them. He writes:

It is possible to determine and to describe any bodily action by answering four questions: (1) Which part of the body moves? (2) How much time does the movement require? (3) What degree of muscular energy is spent on the movement? (4) In which direction of space is the movement exerted? (Laban, 1950, p. 25)

Subsequently, he gives an example in reply to the above questions: it "is the right leg", "the movement is quick", "strong" and "is directing forward". What is to be understood from these questions and answers is that Laban is more interested in the functional approach to the body's experience and less so in analyzing character in the manner advocated by Stanislavsky. Ullmann retains the paragraph in which Laban himself (ibid. p. 97) excludes Stanislavsky's main concept of the "Magic If" by stating:

To perform movements "as if" chopping wood, or "as if" embracing or threatening someone, has little to do with the real symbolism of movement. Such imitations of everyday acts may be significant, but they are not symbolic.

Moreover, Laban continues referring to that kind of acting as “borrowing naturalism”; this creates an “imitation of life” since it is the description of a single movement that conveys the “mood” and feelings in a superficial manner. According to Laban, *symbolic actions* are not mere “imitations” or “representations” of everyday life actions but are “silent living movements” in which actions are not the description of what we consider real life. The observation of a man’s movements in everyday life reveals that there is a poetic meaning in everyday actions “pregnant with emotions”, which he calls *movement sentences* or *movement sequences*; this is what renders them significant. *Movement sentences* have a specific order, are structured by an “unusual combination of movements” and convey a “coherent flow of movement” (ibid., pp. 97–104). Laban (ibid., p. 98) continues:

The question now arises whether any comprehensive order can be found in this emanation of silent world, and if so, whether this knowledge of orderly principles would be of advantage to the actor-dancer, and the general standard of dynamic art on the stage.

Taking into consideration Laban’s own words and statements, this paper not only re-evaluates Laban’s philosophical foundation on Aristotle’s philosophy, but also shifts his theory and practice away from Stanislavsky’s acting method in an attempt to establish the art of movement as an autonomous discipline. The method proposed aims to be both teachable and capable of providing a supporting study for all theatrical approaches and forms of acting, including acting on screen.

In order to provide a new methodology for movement training in contemporary acting, my research also takes Evans (2009) into consideration. Evans (ibid., p. 145) observes that actors resist the scientific understanding of the body, a tendency that is not a commonplace attitude among dancers and sports people. The acquisitions of complex movement skills, which tend to be based on an instrumental or mechanistic approach to the body, are seen to work in tension with the actors’ desire to retain a certain degree of mystery and magic in their craft:

The body as instrument or machine (even on a temporary basis) removes it as a site for physical pleasure, mystery, magic and delight. Somehow actors seem to require that some aspect of their art remains ineffable, beyond the reach of conscious rational intellect. This begs the question: What is lost if the transformative process of the actor is made conscious, rational or formulaic? (ibid., p. 145)

By offering a response to Evans, this paper adopts an Aristotelian perspective to propose that knowledge, which is the main issue in both *episteme* (*science*) and art, is gained through training and therefore requires a conscious and rational approach. It is interesting to note that, for Ramfos (2008), “Aristotelian knowledge is a complete existing fact, not only an intellectual activity”; in other words, it is always a dynamic enquiry and not a *stasis* (*fixed point*).

Knowledge is linked to *memory* and is always in constant development. Consequently, Ramfos (ibid.) states that Aristotle's explanation of time as a *continuous* now is connected to the *nous* (*mind*) and its ability of storing, analyzing and combining the information received:

Knowledge is the ability of man to produce [the] future. The idea of producing [the] future is the idea of rejecting instinct. For instinct is the persistent return to the past.

Thus, for Ramfos, creativity in art is an intellectual activity that requires a rational process. This idea of producing art through knowledge is a crucial point; it forces us to consider what we mean by "knowledge" or "theory" in art and its relation to how we practice it. This paper attempts to bridge the gap between theory and practice according to Laban and Aristotle's definition of art as a *science*; to do so, it offers a re-evaluation of Laban's analysis and practice, which provides a means to overcome the actors' argument that rational explanation of movement leads to a static and formulaic outcome. Laban (1950, p. v) is aware of that and begins his book by explaining the difference:

The reader may be acquainted with the famous Chinese story of the centipede which, becoming immobilized, died of starvation because it was ordered always to move first with its seventy-eighth foot, and then to use its other legs in a particular numerical order. This story is often quoted as a warning against the presumption of attempting a rational explanation of movement. But, clearly, the unfortunate animal was the victim of purely mechanical regulations, and that has little to do with the free-flowing art of movement.

Additionally, this paper argues that the notion of science (*episteme*) in theatre should be seen according to Aristotle's definition: *poetic episteme* is a know-how of the productive capacity of the art of theatre.<sup>5</sup> Laban's *The Mastery of Movement on the Stage* (1950) coincides with this epistemological imperative in both its title and its resounding invitation for the actor/actress to engage in a complex understanding of the body in motion as a way of acquiring essential movement skills. In order for *poetic episteme* to evolve, a logical elaboration and the establishment of a specific order are necessary. Ramfos (2008) explains: "Logic is not a rational process, but a mechanism of transformation"; but its *order* is not a technical process that moves in a certain direction. On the contrary, logic moves in all directions and with multivalent, expansive combinations. Each possible combination is structured according to a specific order. These words echo Laban's attitude that exhorts practitioners to adopt a rational approach to movement training as a productive capacity: "a movement makes sense

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5 *Episteme* (ἐπιστήμη/science) comes from the ancient Greek verb ἐπίσταμαι, which means: "to have a deep understanding of something; to master it".

only if it progresses organically, and this means that phases which follow each other in a natural succession must be chosen" (Laban, 1966, p. 4). This is what Laban means by the story of the centipede cited above.

Evans (2009, p. 85) questions the efficacy of approaching the body's "spontaneity" and "play" without training the "physical resources":

[...] a function of movement training [for actors] is, through the efficient alignment of the actor's physical resources, to enable and release the imagination and assist in the integration of their faculties.

Evans (ibid., pp. 14–16) highlights the need to develop the efficiency of the body in order to meet the standards that contemporary theatre places upon the actor. He suggests (ibid., p. 69):

Thus the actor understandably desires a body ready for work, able to generate varied, multiple and fluid meanings; in effect a body which, within the parameters of theatrical taste at any particular time, can perform as "natural" and able to engage in an uninhibited manner with their environment [neutral body] so as to create the illusion of "naturalness".

This paper demonstrates that Laban's concepts allow for the possibility of the body to be *neutral* by "enriching" its effort ability, and *natural* by choosing the right order of actions and the right effort qualities, which are similar to those of everyday life. Likewise, Aristotle provides the constituent parts of what he calls *mimesis*, which is a *likeness* to everyday life. Moreover, the main issue with regard to the natural/neutral body is that of *indestructible time*, which Ramfos raises when he discusses *presence* on stage as "life force". Laban provides exercises aimed at training the kinaesthetic experience of the performing body's *here and now*, a notion which was first introduced, as ζῶον, by Aristotle. Laban and Aristotle agree that what the actor experiences on stage is his *indestructible dynamics, here and now*. Namely, he experiences his existential energy, outside the context of the mundane, with every essence of his being. The emphasis is placed on experiencing the present through *praxis*, from both the actor's and the audience's perspective. It is a moment of catharsis since there is the possibility of experiencing existence in full in an aesthetic time; and this produces pleasant emotions. This is what Aristotle calls *ἡδονή* (*pleasure*), a state that Laban identified as important to his work but was unable to concretise. Laban (cited in Curl 1967, p. 16) says:

What does one describe as the view of the dancer? Above all his infinite reverence of all dancing and the dedication to the core of all being, the well-ordered movement, the dance. This dedication is so exclusive that everything else fades away.

According to Foster (1977, pp. 47–50), this view of Laban's – also expressed in phrases such as "dance is a divine power" – led Curl (1967) to argue for an intimate connection between

Laban and Plato (and the Pythagoreans), suggesting that there is a kind of mysticism in Laban's work. In contrast to this point of view, I would argue that Laban's work, understood in Aristotelian terms – and specifically in light of Ramfos's suggestions about *mimesis* in synthesis and performance –, provides not a mystical but a logical rationale that scientifically validates his approach to presence on stage.

As DiLeo (2007) explains:

Aristotle's general description of time and his references to issues related to it in reference to living things provide a backdrop for an understanding of human happiness and governance that exhorts us to attend seriously to the events, people and things that we encounter in all their particularity because our deliberations and choices do make a difference.

By rejecting mysticism, this line of thought will allow us to reposition Laban in accordance with Aristotle's philosophy, which provides Laban's movement analysis with scientific validity and a philosophical foundation.<sup>6</sup>

Both Aristotle and Laban place particular emphasis on another characteristic: synthesis in art. They insist that there must exist a very specific *τάξις* (*order*) in speech and movement, just like in the art of dance. This *τάξις* (*order*) is necessary so that a specific meaning can be communicable to the audience, since any change in *order* affects the final meaning: "the most natural is the best organised" (Ramfos, 2008). As such, *λογική τάξις* (*logical order*) leads to a synthesis which Aristotle defines as *πράξις* (*praxis*) and which is perfect and important (Ramfos, 1991, p. 151). According to Ramfos, the character's actions will eventually reveal his character. Ramfos indicates Theophrastus's<sup>7</sup> book *Characters* in order to give an example of what Aristotle means by *πράξις* (*praxis*). He describes how one's character is revealed through one's own actions. One of his examples is that of the "flatterer" (Theophrastus, 1902):

He will remove a morsel of wool from his patron's coat; or, if a speck of chaff has been laid on the other's hair by the wind, he will pick it off; he will take the cushions from the slave in the theatre, and spread them on the seat with his own hands.

This coincides with Laban's idea that inner life is revealed through actions and their effort qualities, which are structured in a specific way in order to be transformed into *symbolic actions* that create a significant human *praxis*. The main goal of *praxis* is *περιπέτεια* (*απατροπή, reversal*). Therefore, for Aristotle, a *praxis* is not informed by *necessity* (*αναγκάιον*), which would make

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6 The very word *metaphysics* came from Aristotle, although he did not characterize his work as "metaphysical". Regardless, Aristotle's name has been associated with metaphysics for over 2,000 years!

7 Theophrastus was one of Aristotle's disciples and his successor as head of the Lyceum.

it determined, but by *probability* (*εικός*), thus suggesting some measure of unexpectedness and contingency in both speech and movement. Similarly, Laban gives the example of playing the role of Eve when she picks the apple, and he implies that there are a lot of ways to execute this action. In terms of *necessity* (*αναγκαίον*), the action is that she picks the apple; in terms of *probability* (*εικός*), this action must be embodied in a way to be chosen from among a spectrum of different ways of picking the fruit in order to reveal a certain character. In reality, there are numerous combinations of picking an apple. The selection of actions does not consist in a “fact-finding device”; it is an artistic activity: the character’s creator must find the best combination of actions in order to convey the meaning s/he has in mind.

Following this line of thought, *πράξις* (*praxis*) must be structured in contradistinction to the conventional approach to acting, which until recently has called for “natural” action. What I mean by “natural” action is the action that stems from *αναγκαίον* (*necessity*) and not *εικός* (*probability*). Usually, this sort of action is produced not as a carefully chosen action, but as the spontaneous reaction of the actor/actress to given circumstances. Aristotle stands opposed to this type of “naturalism” for three reasons: firstly, because it is produced spontaneously and, therefore, relies on a non-artistic capacity; secondly, it relies on psychological implication; and thirdly, it does not produce a new reality. What Aristotle proposes as an alternative is that the structure of an action be logical instead of spontaneous; understanding the logic of action is the main requirement for the character’s creator. It is important to note that the standard translation of *πράξις* as “action” does not allow for such a refined understanding of the concept.

## Conclusion

What this paper proposes is a new way of approaching movement training for actors in the 21st century, based on Aristotle and Laban; a way that significantly avoids psychological implications and regards the art of acting as similar to the art of dancing – namely, requiring strict precision and clarity of performance.

The argument rests on the suggestion that, by better understanding the meaning of action as a logical form, we can grasp what is at stake for Laban. What is essential to this proposition is that the idea of creating action by *probability* – that is to say, according to a logical process – has to be considered within movement training for classical acting. As a result, the actor’s/actress’s preparation abandons the question: “What if I lived in the ascribed circumstances?” The question now becomes: “What if I can execute a choreographed character in specific circumstances?” For Laban, the structure of the character is choreographed by the director before the execution and is not invented by the actors through improvisations during the rehearsals. It constitutes the logical structure synthesized by the creator. In other words, the logical structure of a synthesis proceeds from the development and application of the principles of a *poetic science*.

This paper also responds to Evans’s (2009, p. 85) assertion that movement training must

“enable and release the *imagination*”. This statement requires a careful consideration of the concept of *imagination* because, as Evans himself points out, actors are reluctant to rationalize their approach to movement. Plato and Aristotle attribute a double sense to *imagination*. First, imagination is something that has metaphysical connotations. Plato believes that the soul exists in the upper world and that in the process of birth man represses the *memories* (*μνήμαι*) of this upper world. We can recall those memories through knowledge and, therefore, attain what he calls *αναμνήσεις* (*recollections*). This recollection is *φαντασία*, roughly translated as imagination. Aristotle, on the other hand, suggests that *μνήμαι* (*memories*) are only stored depictions from our experiences in this world. Laban’s approach to imagination is similar to Aristotle’s. According to Ramfos (2008), “*φαντασία* (*imagination*) is an intellectual activity because if it were a psychic phenomenon it would be a delirium”; and this *φαντασία* has “infinite consequences”. Thus, what precisely do we mean when we say that an actor/actress must train his/her *imagination*? What elements does this process consist of? How is it connected to the text? What kind of *imagination* can be developed and how? Therefore, are we referring to *φαντασία* in the way that Aristotle suggests? Or are we interpreting it as *imagination* like most 19th-century philosophers did?

Another issue that Evans (2009, p. 34) raises in his critique of Laban’s work is that of “expressive movement”:

Though Laban perceived the value of an integrated and holistic approach to posture and movement, he preferred to focus his energies and attentions on the expressive functions of movement rather than on developing a vision of the interaction between mind and body, which might allow for the successful re-education of inefficient body use.

Of course, this statement has some validity. It stems from a misreading of Platonic philosophy, and from the fact that the heritage of Laban studies has been tainted with overly expressionist overtones, which is completely contradictory to Laban’s practice. Laban’s work has been neglected in contemporary theatre practice in acting and is seen as outdated, partly because of what Evans sees as a lack of “vision of the interaction between mind and body”. Evans, however, seems to be unaware of Laban’s (1948, p. 22) own statement which suggests that the latter was in fact well aware of the problem:

It is the happy combination of mind and body developing alongside each other, without inhibition of the one or over-development of the other, for which the teacher should work.

In Selioni (2014) I proposed a methodology that explicitly addresses Evans’s (2009, p. 34) statement regarding the need to review Laban’s work and demonstrate the manner in which it can lead to the interaction “between body and mind” and, consequently, to the “successful education of inefficient body use”. I argued in favour of a re-evaluation of Laban’s theory and

practice through the lenses of Aristotle by taking into consideration the fact that Laban offered a concrete training method for actors based on fundamental theoretical and practical principles (Laban, 1950). I suggested a movement training method for actors in terms of structuring, rehearsing and performing, which is applicable to multiple theatrical approaches (classical drama, performance, musical theatre, devised theatre) based on logic, as discussed above. The research thus fills a theoretical gap by providing a systematic method of movement training that treats the body as an entity with all its aspects (emotional, physical, logical, sexual, etc.) and aims at meeting the demands of the industry.

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