

# Part B: Building expressive skills for performance

## 3 Movement

### Chapter overview

This chapter helps you develop techniques to convey any internal messages externally. Laban's Theory of Movement is introduced. It explores and categorises various types of movement and should help you to extend the range of movements you can visualise and attempt. We also look at mime. Mime develops precision in movement, and it also calls upon other essential skills of the performer, such as observation skills, memory and creative imagination.

#### 3.1 Basic principles of movement

- Posture
- Breathing
- Centring
- Relaxation
- Conviction
- Control
- Building movement skills
- Applying movement skills

#### 3.2 The language of movement

- Performance and Laban
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- Types of mime
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# 3.1 Basic principles of movement

## Why are we doing this?

The performer's body shows through its actions what a character is thinking and feeling. It also shows the character's reaction to external stimulus, or to a particular situation. The body must be able to transmit any internal messages to its exterior. This unit concentrates on developing this skill, but you should bear in mind that all the performers' skills must work in combination for a performance to be effective.

Your body is three-dimensional and can therefore convey meaning from every direction. The line of your neck is as meaningful as the expression in your eyes. A way of moving, or a gesture, or any other body language can tell much about a character. Every bit of your body can be expressive. Stillness is a significant part of movement and is often used to give emphasis to the movement. For example, a body slumped in a chair and very still can make a strong statement. During a period of stillness the slightest movement is given strong focus. For example, it could be very meaningful if the person slumped in the chair lifts the head slowly and then lets it drop.

An actor requires different training for body work than a gymnast or a dancer. An actor does not need to do repetitive physical exercise to develop perfect technique. If as an actor you have to dance it will be as a particular character, of a particular age and in a particular time and place. Your first concern will be to transform your body into the character being acted. However, in order to transform into a character the actor must have an acute sense of body awareness, and well-developed movement skills. To perform the character of an anxious child, for instance, the actor must remember and imagine how such a child might sit, stand and move, and then the actor must have the movement skills to make the body move exactly as imagined.

### Key terms

**side-coaching** occurs when you perform and your teacher gives instructions. You make the adjustments suggested but do not interrupt your performance.

**centre** that part of your body between the bottom of your rib cage and the top of your hips, or between your lower back and your abdomen. The centre is the focal point of movement for an actor.

## Introductory exercises

### Exploring walking

#### Exercise 1 Walking patterns

Start walking around the room and as you walk consider the following questions. The teacher can help you here by side-coaching. The teacher will give instructions while you make adjustments, but you do not interrupt your performance. You do not need to answer the teacher either. The aim is that the teacher's comments aid your discovery.

- Which part of your body leads? Which parts follow?
- Which part of your foot contacts the floor first: the heel or the toe?
- What happens when you turn?
- What is happening in your calves? Your knees? Your pelvis? Your torso? Your shoulders? Your arms? Your neck?
- How are you holding your head?



## Exercise 2 Exaggerated walking patterns

- Now try walking on your heels. How does the rest of your body adjust to compensate?
- Exaggerate the adjustments. Take them as far as you can, overdo them. How do they make you feel?
- What sort of person do these exaggerated adjustments suggest?
- Take on an emotional characteristic that would suit that sort of person.
- How would that person speak? What kind of voice would that person have?
- Be that person and greet someone.
- Slowly return to your natural walk.
- Now repeat the activity walking on your toes. Exaggerate the walk into a character. Greet someone as that character and then return to your natural way of walking.
- Try walking on the inside of your feet and then the outside of your feet. Let the walk develop into a character. Return to your normal way of walking in between each walk.

## Exercise 3 Neutral walking

This exercise will show you a natural way to walk, which causes little strain or tension. The walk allows the body to be neutral and in a state of readiness for action.

- Start walking around the room. Then make the following adjustments. These adjustments should help you find the correct alignment of your body as you move.
- Put your heel on the ground first, then your toe.
- Your ankles should be straight, so that as you walk your feet are pointing straight ahead and are not splayed out.
- Relax your knees. Don't let them lock back as you walk.
- Relax your bottom. The muscles should not be tight.
- Keep your pelvis straight forward, not wriggling from side to side or leading from left hip to right hip.
- Keep your spine straight. Imagine each vertebra being built up on top of the other, one by one. Imagine each vertebra sitting comfortably on top of the other. Think of the spine as being lengthened and the head being light.
- Keep your shoulders relaxed. Your arms should hang, relaxed.
- Keep your gaze just above the horizon.
- Keep your head weightless, loose on top of the spine.
- Feel the natural balance of your body as your arms move gently, in opposition to your legs.
- Feel how easy it is to walk this way. Your spine should feel long and free. Your body's weight is evenly dispersed and the walk should feel as though there is a natural flow and rhythm to it.

## Engaging the imagination

### Exercise 1 Walking on different surfaces

Now try walking while you imagine different types of surfaces underfoot. Observe and feel the effect each imaginary surface has on your walk. Note how your contact with the floor changes. Imagine you are walking:

- on hot sand
- through mud
- through autumn leaves
- through water
- on ice
- through waves lapping your ankles and then through waves up to your knees.



## Exercise 2 Walking as a character

- Now try walking as a particular character in a particular place. After each different situation outlined below return to the neutral walk.
- Try to imagine yourself in the nominated place, to picture where you are, what you are wearing, whether it is hot or cool. Do you want to do what you are doing? Have you been here before?
- Try hard to create the walk that would work to portray the situation to an onlooker.
- What adjustments do you have to make from the neutral walk?
- Try walking as:
  - an old lady carrying a bag of shopping home
  - a young man walking in a church
  - a young woman in a shopping mall
  - a small person trying to carry something heavy and bulky.

## Exercise 3 Walking with an intention

- Now try walking with an intention. Start walking neutrally. Your teacher will then side-coach you with one or more of the following statements. Use your imagination to help you believe in the reality of the moment and adjust your walk to illustrate the given intention.

### Side-coaching cues

- 'I bet they notice my new haircut!'
- 'These new shoes feel great.'
- 'I don't care what they think!'
- 'There he is! I hope he doesn't see me!'
- 'My friend's having a party and I'm staying afterwards!'
- 'I wish I hadn't eaten all of that.'
- 'I'm getting the first prize in Drama.'
- 'I was just selected to represent the state in my favourite sport.'

### Debriefing

- What discoveries did you make as you did the last three exercises?
- Which exercises were easier to do?
- Did you enjoy doing one exercise more than the others? Why?
- Which walk was easier to commit your belief to: the character walk, walking with intention, or walking on different surfaces? Why do you think it was easier?

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## Theory: Basic principles of movement

The aim of exploring the basic principles of movement is to create a unity between the mind and the body, so that without thinking you can use all your resources to communicate an intention to the audience.

### Posture

Your spine affects the tuning of your whole body, and if you hold it tensely or stiffly coordination and fluency are disturbed. The efficiency of your body in motion, and the economy with which it functions, depends on the correct alignment of your spine. When your spine is in its natural alignment, your weight evenly balanced and your muscles relaxed you are in what is called the *neutral position*. In the neutral position the body is in a state of readiness for action.

If your lower spine is weak, your abdominal muscles help support your torso. As a result they are not free to respond quickly to the need to move, or to the needs of your breath. If the upper part of your spine is unaligned or weak, your rib muscles take responsibility for holding your rib cage in position. As a result they are unavailable for relaxed movement or for a free passage of your breath. If the vertebrae of your neck are not well aligned, the physical line of your body is distorted and tension becomes visually obvious. And since the neck is the channel through which the voice travels, poor alignment will also manifest itself in distorted vocal sounds.



## **Breathing**

Movement requires you to concentrate on your breathing. You need to work with the breath when attempting any form of movement or exercise. Your thoughts and feelings affect your breathing, and the breath is where your initial impulses for action occur. For example, you gasp when you are shocked.

Your breathing and movement need to be coordinated, so that you breathe in while relaxed and breathe out during the point of effort. In Drama it's particularly important to be able to synchronise breath and movement. Breathing in rhythm, for instance, is a handy device if you want a group to move as one at the same time. You might direct the group by saying, 'At the end of the sentence breathe in and then move.' Everyone should move at the same time. During movement sequences such as dances or fights you can synchronise actions by using breathing patterns.

## **Centring**

Your centre is located somewhere in that part of your body between the bottom of your rib cage and the top of your hips. Think of your centre as being positioned between your lower back and your abdomen. This centre is the focal point of movement for a performer. It needs to be strong but supple. A firm, supple centre will give you a stronger stomach and less fatigue in the lower back.

Your centre is where your breath goes to when you breathe. You can also think of the centre as being the place where you feel emotions. There are idioms that illustrate our awareness of this part of the body's relationship with our feelings. An attack of nerves is described as having 'butterflies in the stomach', and stress or anger are described as 'knots in the stomach'. The centre is like a storehouse of resources for the performer. An awareness of your centre will help you produce what appears to be a true reaction in your portrayal of a character.

## **Relaxation**

Your body must be relaxed if it is to respond freely. However, relaxing is not the same as collapsing. You must maintain enough tone in your muscles for them to do exactly what you want. However, all unnecessary tension needs to be released, as it is wasted energy that detracts from the task of communication.

Being relaxed or 'free' implies being ready for action—alert but not tense. Your body should be in a state of awareness so that your relaxed muscles are free to respond to impulses. Your breath should flow into your relaxed body and connect with the need to move or speak. Your body and voice can then truly express your intentions.

## **Conviction**

To have conviction you must have empathy, which involves thinking, feeling and moving from another point of view. If you are empathetic you are able to imagine yourself as possessing and embodying another point of view. As a performer you need to be able to sustain belief and reproduce any sensation at will. If you really believe you are walking on hot sand your conviction will make your body react in a certain way. Your mind controls your body to a large extent. If you believe in what you are doing and your body can project your belief, the audience will believe you. You must also concentrate on every aspect of your movement, being aware of what all the parts of your body are doing. The position and movement of every part of your body is interrelated and important. Concentrating on the whole body at the same time as it performs complicated movements is a skill you must develop, and this requires conviction.



## Control

Movement on stage should be performed with precision. You need to learn to isolate muscles to work independently. You should have a sense of your movements being fluid, that is, smooth and evenly flowing, and lengthening out from a strong centre. Even when you are required to move in a rapid and jerky way you should be sure to work from your centre and maintain a relaxed control.

Absolute concentration is needed to produce control of every aspect of your body. You must learn not only to control the large movements of your limbs, but also movements as small as the flicker of an eyelid.

### Questions

- 1 Why is posture so important to an actor?
- 2 When making a movement, when should you breathe in and when should you breathe out?
- 3 What is the definition of an actor's centre?
- 4 What is the importance of the centre to an actor?
- 5 Why is relaxation important to an actor?
- 6 How is relaxing different to collapsing?
- 7 Why is concentration so important to an actor?
- 8 How is control related to an actor's technique?
- 9 Why is empathy important to an actor?
- 10 What is fluid movement?

### Workshop

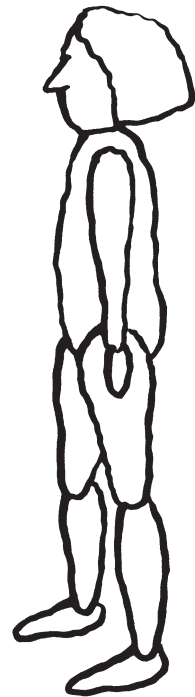
## Building movement skills

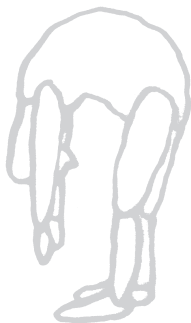
Here are some practical ways of building up your movement skills. You can try the following exercises with your teacher, but you will also benefit from practising them on your own.

### Exercise 1 The neutral position

This exercise will establish the neutral position, or what is correct posture for a performer. It will require you to concentrate so you can control and isolate separate muscles.

- Stand with your feet parallel, fifteen to twenty centimetres apart. Your weight should be balanced equally between your toes and your heels. Relax and centre yourself.
- Imagine you can feel your shin bones growing out of your ankle joints. Make sure your knees are not locked back.
- Picture your thighs growing up from your knee joints to your hip joints.
- Tilt your pelvis slightly forward, so you can imagine the spine growing straight. Make sure the small of your back is straight.
- Picture your spine travelling up between your shoulder blades, with your rib cage floating around it, and your shoulders resting on top.
- Let your arms hang light and free from your shoulders.
- Imagine lengthening your neck vertebrae, until they connect with the skull, which is like a balloon floating from the top of your spine.
- Imagine your body is a skeleton, with all your muscles floating free and relaxed. It is as if your skull has a thread connecting it to the ceiling, and your body is a series of connections, all aligned and each part balanced and sharing responsibility for its body's support.
- Feel a sense of weightless readiness. This position is the neutral position.





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## Exercise 2 Releases

This exercise will improve your posture by releasing any tension in the upper spine and aligning your upper vertebrae. You will need to centre your breathing to create the desired level of relaxation.

- Sit cross-legged on the floor and feel your spine extending out of your pelvic girdle, like a long rod, with your head resting on top.
- Observe your breath, without manipulating it. Where is the breath travelling to in your body?
- Now allow the breath to travel down into your centre. Allow it to float in and out.
- On an outward breath release your head forward. Let your head float easily down. Resist the temptation to let it slump. Feel its weight.
- On the inward breath let your head float easily back to its resting place at the top of your neck.
- Repeat the breathing and head movements and accept the weight of the head hanging down on the chest. You have now created a lengthening of the muscles at the back of the neck.
- On an inward breath lift the shoulders so that they are scrunched up around your head.
- Then, on the start of an outward breath release your head forward so that you are quite hunched up.
- On the end of the outward breath release your shoulders down.
- Repeat this and you should feel a gradual releasing of the tension in the neck.
- Check that you are working with the breath, and that your spine has remained long and straight.
- Finally, start very slowly shaking your head from side to side, as if it were floating on the top of your spine. The movement should be gentle, slow, almost graceful, and free of tension. Slow it down to a stop and check your posture.
- Observe your breathing.

## Exercise 3 The spinal release

This exercise is excellent for lengthening the spine. It releases tension and allows for focus on posture and centring. It is worthwhile to repeat this exercise often.

Stand in the neutral position.

- Imagine your spine is a series of cotton reels stacked gently one on top of the other. Picture the seven smaller reels which make up the neck lengthening out, and imagine your head is a ball balanced on the top.
  - Imagine there is an invisible thread leading from the top of your skull to the ceiling. Your head is gently suspended from this thread.
  - Create a feeling of weightlessness.
  - Slowly allow your head to come forward, as if the thread has been released slightly, and on each outward breath release the vertebrae of your neck slowly, one by one, so your chin eventually rests on your chest.
  - Allow the weight of your head to release the vertebrae in your upper back. Remember to move only on the outward breath, and keep alive the image of the cotton reels so that you feel each vertebra moving separately.
  - Release your arms forward, while ensuring that the neck stays released and your head is hanging free.
  - Check that your knees are not locked back.
  - Continue releasing your arms, until you are hanging over your feet and your spine is completely relaxed from the hips.
  - Slowly and gently swing from side to side, making sure you are relaxed.
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- Release your head into a gentle bounce up and down, making sure it is relaxed.
  - Then slowly, bit by bit, build your spine up again. Only move on the outward breath.
  - Try to isolate each part of your spine as you move.
  - As you work your way through the upper back be particularly careful that your arms are hanging off your shoulder girdle.
  - Ensure you pay particular attention to the small bones in your neck, so that your head feels weightless again.
  - Imagine the invisible thread connecting you to the ceiling again.
  - Find a focus out in the distance just above your natural eyeline, or the horizon, and check your posture.
  - Make any necessary adjustments so that your body is in the neutral position.
  - In your own time repeat the exercise several times.

#### Exercise 4 Circle warm-up

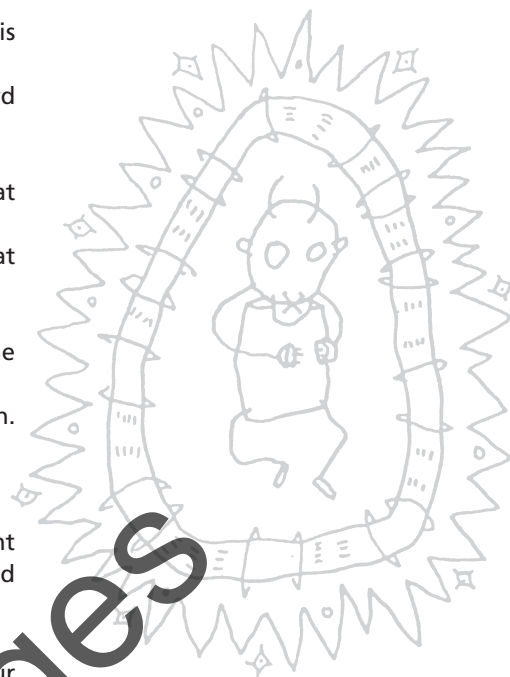
This is an easy warm-up to remember and it is good for isolating different parts of the body. It requires a fair degree of concentration, and you also need to maintain good posture throughout.

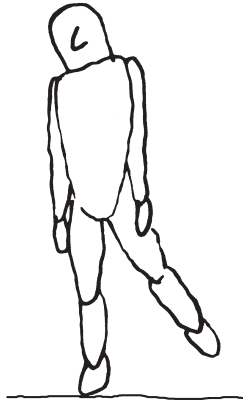
- Stand in the neutral position.
- Lift your foot while breathing in and rotate it from the ankle outlining four circles to the left. Isolate the muscles, so that only those that are involved in the movement have any tension.
- On the outward breath turn your foot the other way for four circles.
- Repeat the exercise with your right foot.
- Maintain your balance by pulling up from your centre.
- Lift your left leg out from the hip and, controlling it from your centre, draw the circles: four on the inward breath and four on the outward breath. Then change to your right leg and repeat.
- Keeping your knees unlocked, lift your arms from the shoulders straight out to your sides and circle your pelvis four times in each direction, while working with the breath. Make sure that the movement is isolated to the hips and that there is no movement in the upper torso.
- Now isolate your chest and circle that, without involving the pelvis. Remember to maintain a lifted feeling.
- Repeat the circles with your hands, and then with the lower portion of your arms, hanging from the elbows, and then with your whole arm.
- Now repeat the circles with each shoulder.
- Then with a feeling of weightlessness circle your head in both directions, but do not drop it. You should feel as if the head is floating up and away.

#### Exercise 5 Balance using the central axis

In this exercise you need to be conscious of maintaining a strong centre and good posture. The main principle of movement being developed here is control, so you will need a great deal of concentration.

- Stand in the neutral position.
- Concentrate on your feet and feel their connection to the floor.
- Shift your weight onto the heels without lifting your toes from the floor. Feel how the rest of your body compensates.
- Shift your weight back to find the central balance again with the weight slightly forward on the balls of your feet.
- Now move the weight over your toes, without your heels losing contact with the floor. Feel your body adjust, then return to the central balance point.
- Shift the weight to the outside of your feet, then return to the central balance point.





- Try to shift the weight to the inside of your feet, again without lifting your feet from the floor. Then find the central balance point once more.
- Move your weight around from the toes to one side of your feet, to your heels and to the other side of your feet. Keep your feet in contact with the floor. Your body will move in a small circle as the weight is exchanged. Keep the movement small and controlled, so that you maintain your balance.
- Feel your body's central axis as you stay lengthened and pulled up from your centre.
- Now try maintaining that sense of length, while you shift all your weight onto your right leg, keeping both feet on the ground.
- Then, slowly lift your left leg slightly to one side, no more than fifteen centimetres from the floor, while keeping your body balanced and aligned, as it tilts slightly to the right to compensate.
- Check that your knees remain unlocked and your arms are relaxed at your side.
- Pull up from your spine and maintain your balance. If you begin to shake, return to the central point and try again.
- Lower your left leg and shift your weight onto it. Now lift your right leg.
- Return to the neutral position.

### Exercise 6 Isolation swings

This exercise is good for isolating different parts of the body. It requires a good level of concentration and you also need to maintain correct posture throughout. Practising the exercise for several minutes at a time will help build stamina while working with fluid movement.

- Stand in the neutral position.
- Isolate your left leg and allow it to swing freely back and forth. Your arms should compensate to help you keep balance: they swing across your body to the left as the leg moves back, and across your body to the right as the leg swings forward. As your leg swings forward your arms swing to the right.
- To keep your balance, pull up through your supporting leg, but remember not to lock your knees. The swing has a momentum of its own and once your posture is correct, with the sense of lifting up from your centre, it should become easier.
- When your supporting leg gets tired, return to the neutral position and repeat the exercise with your other leg. Remember, when swinging your right leg the position of the arms is opposite to the position when swinging the left leg. When swinging the right leg the arms should move to the right when the leg is back, and to the left when it is forward.



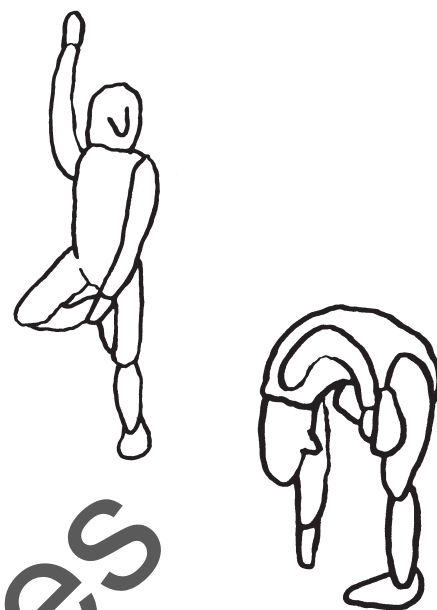
### Exercise 7 Balances

This is a difficult exercise that relies on correct posture and a strong centre if you are to complete all the stages of it. Your breathing should be relaxed and all of the movements controlled and fluid. Repeating this exercise regularly will also help develop your concentration and stamina. You may choose to attempt only parts of the exercise as you develop your skills.

- Stand in the neutral position.
- Shift your weight forward onto your toes and then back onto your heels, so that you are gently rocking.
- Then shift the weight from the outside of your foot to the inside.
- Find the central balance point, which is with your weight slightly over the toes.
- Put your weight on your left foot, and with an outward breath lift the right foot and place it on top of the left foot.



- Let yourself adjust. An external focus, such as a spot on the wall, will help you. Maintain your strength in your centre.
- Feel your breath flowing gently in and out.
- On an outward breath raise your foot slowly to your knee. Take time to adjust. Slowly feel the new balance point becoming as stable as when both feet were on the ground.
- Now lift your foot to your inner thigh and take hold of it with your left hand. Remember, all movements are done on an outward breath.
- Pull up from your centre and allow the spine to feel long.
- Slowly raise your right arm to the ceiling. Make the adjustments that are required by staying focused and centred.
- Slowly start to bend down over your knees. Give yourself time and maintain the strength in the centre. Keep your supporting leg straight, but your knee unlocked. Go as low as you can comfortably manage.
- Rest there and when you are ready come up slowly.
- Find your central point and maintain focus as you lower the leg and arm.
- Repeat the exercise swapping legs.



## Applying movement skills

In this part of the workshop the focus is on using and observing movement in a dramatic context. You will need to engage your imagination and illustrate dramatic intention through the use of movement, stillness, gesture, body language and posture.

### Exercise 1 Entrances

- Take on a character with an intention. Choose one of the sample situations below or invent your own. In character you will open a door, come into a room and close the door. The aim is to show the audience where you came from and where you have arrived.
- Before you make your entrance ask yourself the following questions.
  - Who are you?
  - How do you feel?
  - How do you walk?
  - What do you want?
  - Why have you come into the room?

#### Situations

- You've been outside and it's raining. Now, thank goodness, you are home.
- You are sneaking home from a party. You don't want anyone to see or hear you.
- You are walking into the manager's office. You know you are in trouble.
- You think someone is following you up the path to your front door.
- You enter the change rooms exhausted and discouraged, because your team just lost the final.

### Exercise 2 Animals

This exercise will use all of your movement skills but the main aim is to engage your imagination. You will need to create an animal and sustain belief in it.

- Choose an animal that you wish to re-create.
- Lie on your back with your eyes closed and imagine the animal. What is it like?
- Imagine that it is asleep and you are able to move around it without any fear of waking it up. See it clearly in your mind's eye.

### Debriefing

Could the audience read the performer's intentions?  
 Did the audience get a sense of character?  
 How did the performer show the intentions physically?  
 Did you make any discoveries while watching others perform?  
 When you performed, were you able to do it as you planned? Explain what happened. Were you pleased with what happened? Why?

## Debriefing

Were you able to sustain your belief in what you were doing? How did you do this?

What discoveries did you make?

Was the exercise easier with your eyes closed? Why or why not?

- Observe how it breathes and start to breathe in rhythm with it.
- Imagine your skin becoming the animal's skin and then slowly take on the sleeping animal's posture. Keep your eyes closed.
- Imagine that the animal is dreaming of its food. What does it normally eat? Does it forage or hunt for food? How does it eat? Does it need to protect its food from other animals?
- Slowly imagine that you are the animal waking up, but keep your eyes shut. Does the animal stretch?
- Imagine the animal has left some food near where it went to sleep. Eat the food in the manner of the animal. Still with your eyes shut begin to move about slowly so that you do not need to move out of the space that you were lying in. Explore how the animal moves.
- After eating, your animal feels like a nap so slowly put your animal back to sleep.

## Exercise 3 Discovery

This is a solo piece of work in which you respond to music. The aim is to create a sense of discovery in your movement as a human being. It is most important that you believe in what you are doing and stay committed to it.

- Lie on the floor. Imagine you are an animal waking from a long sleep, or a butterfly or moth hatching from a chrysalis.
- Start by gently moving a part of your body in isolation from the rest of your body. It is as if you are finding out this part can move. Explore the full range of movement and experiment with different rates of movement.
- Move on to explore how other parts of your body can move.
- Then start to explore how movement in one part of the body affects other parts.
- Discover your sense of touch. Feel the surfaces around you, and discover yourself in space.

## Exercise 4 Discovery in pairs

The purpose of this exercise is to explore the range of your body's movement and to relate and respond to another person's movement. The aim is to affect another person and be affected by them.

- You can replay the music, but this time you will work with a partner.
- Wake up separately, then slowly become aware of your partner. When you feel ready begin to relate to each other.
- Join in an activity together out of which arises a conflict, perhaps over food or territory, that must be resolved.
- The key phrases of this piece are: discovery, activity, conflict and resolution.

## Debriefing

What did you imagine yourself to be?

What discoveries did you make?

Did the music help you concentrate?

How?

Did you prefer working alone or with a partner? Explain.

## Workbook

- 1 Over the next few days, observe other people closely—at home, on the bus, in the shopping centre. Notice how they hold or move the different parts of their bodies as they walk.
- 2 Try to imitate the walk of one of the people you have observed. Recount your discoveries. Be prepared to bring your impression of your chosen person to class to work on and talk about.

## 3.2 The language of movement

### Why are we doing this?

Exploring and categorising various types of movement will extend the range of movements you can imagine. Therefore you will be better able to find the right expressive movement for a character's behaviour in a particular situation.

The language of movement provides terms to describe moves. It is a common language that all performers can use.

### Introductory exercise

- Respond physically to each of the following words. Discover for yourself. Resist the desire to copy others. Use your whole body to personify the word.
  - stretch
  - contract
  - flit
  - crush
  - skim
  - warp
  - slice
  - probe

### Debriefing

What did you notice about your own response?

What was effective, or what worked, for you? Why?

How did your body change to illustrate these different words?

### Theory: The language of movement

#### Performance and Laban

There are many ways of approaching movement in the theatre. Performers can explore dance, yoga, Tai chi, the Alexander technique, Feldenkrais and many other forms of movement. All of these disciplines focus on the body, but not on its ability to express meaning. For the theatre, the art of movement requires an understanding of the inner impulse as well as the external action. Laban's work classifies movement into Eight Basic Efforts, which each describe the inner impulse in terms of muscular energy. To explain it another way, each Effort describes a way of moving that is the result of an inner urge. Laban's work focuses on how an action is carried out. He is therefore a most useful movement theorist to explore when developing performance skills.

Rudolf von Laban was a German, born in Bratislavia in 1879. He played a significant role in the evolution of dance in Germany during the first half of the twentieth century. During this period dance became less classical and developed into a much freer form known as Northern European Expressionism. Laban's invention of a new approach to movement was instrumental in bringing about the changes in dance at this time. His approach extended beyond dance into other forms of movement and also into Drama. Laban liberated the study of movement from many formal constraints. He emancipated it from Music, Drama and any conventional notion of steps. In the 1930s dance

#### Key terms

**space** one of Laban's four essential components of movement. Space can be flexible and unrestricted through to direct or bound.

**time** another of the four essential components of movement. Time includes the elements of rhythm and pace.

**weight** another of the four essential components of movement. Weight can be heavy or strong movements to light and gentle. ▶

### Key terms continued

**flow** another of the four essential components of movement. Flow can be continuous or simultaneous through to disjointed or sudden.

**rhythm** rhythm can be irregular or, at the other extreme, regular

**pace** pace moves from fast or sudden to slow and steady

**physical levels** heights from the ground. Different physical levels are involved when you lie on your back, sit on your backside, kneel or stand.

schools that had developed new forms of dance based on Laban's teachings spread throughout the world. Laban invented kinetography, a method of writing choreography. Using Laban's method, a movement sequence could be recorded on paper, just like a piece of music. Laban's ideas about movement, his language of movement, and the method of kinetography are still important and are the basis of many movement courses in Drama schools today.

### A language of movement

Laban's approach to movement involves locating the essential components of any movement, that is, the space, time, weight and flow of a movement.

Laban redefined notions of *space* and its relationship to movement. He talked of movement through space: through a volume of planes and in multiple directions. Space became a mobile partner to the dancer, moving at the same time as the dancer. Laban was interested in the bodies in a space and the use of different levels. He encouraged artists to explore the space around them. Movement was seen in terms of depth, or three dimensions, rather than just height and width. Space encompasses both the bodies in the space and bodies moving through space.

Laban considered the second essential component of movement to be *time*: the rhythm and pace of a movement, the rate of a movement and the regularity of a movement. The time of movement was no longer defined in terms of the movement's relationship to music. Even when it was not accompanied by music, movement could still be described in terms of time. The metre of a poem or silence alone was enough to inspire movement.

Laban then worked on *weight*, the next essential component of movement. He saw the weight of a movement as indicative of whether the movement was with or against gravity. While the classical dancer tried to escape the downward pull of gravity through balance and lift, Laban made use of weight. He analysed the dynamics of movement and was interested in the continual swing between balance and imbalance. He realised that for every muscular contraction, there was a release.

*Flow* was also an important component of movement for Laban. Laban saw natural movement as having a 'flowing on' quality. Flow is an element of continuous and uninterrupted movements, but jerky, interrupted movements also have a flow. Smoothness and jerkiness are the two opposite extremes of flow. Movements of the whole body can be described in terms of flow, as can isolated movements of parts of the body.

The four components of movement are space, time (which is both rhythm and pace), weight and flow. Each exists on a continuum ranging from one extreme of freedom in movement to the other extreme of confinement in movement, or restriction. A movement can be positioned at any point along the continuum.

		CONTINUUMS	
		Free	Restricted
<b>SPACE</b>		flexible ←	→ direct
<b>TIME</b>			
	Rhythm	irregular ←	→ regular
	Pace	fast ←	→ slow
<b>WEIGHT</b>		light ←	→ heavy
<b>FLOW</b>		continous ←	→ disjointed

At the free end of the space continuum is flexible, unrestricted movement, and at the confined end is direct or bound movement. Dancing in a nightclub could be an example of flexible movement, while marching in a straight line is an example of direct movement.

Time includes the elements of rhythm and pace. Rhythm can be seen as ranging from the irregular, which is movement without any pattern, to the other extreme, which is regular, or movement with a pattern. Pace ranges from fast or sudden, to slow and steady. A person marching is following a regular pattern in rhythm, while a person browsing around a supermarket is following a more irregular rhythm. Both of these movements can occur at either a fast or slow pace.

Weight is defined by the force of gravity. At one extreme of the continuum are light and gentle movements, at the other end are heavy and strong movements. A person tiptoeing into a house is using light, weak movement. A person stamping around a house is engaged in heavy, strong movement.

A movement at the free end of the flow continuum will be continuous and simultaneous. At the other extreme of the flow continuum is disjointed, jerky movement. An example of continuous flow would be the movement of an excellent swimmer gliding through water. At the other extreme an example of disjointed flow would be the jerky thrashing of a person unable to swim, panicking in the water.

### Laban's Eight Basic Efforts

Using different combinations of the four qualities Laban defined Eight Basic Efforts, which can be used to analyse all movement. The table below outlines the characteristics of each of the Eight Efforts in terms of flow, space, time and weight.

Laban studied movements in nature and saw that every movement had a sense of flow and could be seen in terms of its use of space, its rhythm and pace, and its weight. Imagine a fish moving through water. It obviously has flow as its body moves through the water. Its movement in space is direct, because it is travelling through the space, not staying in one place like a piece of seaweed, which moves around and is flexible, but does not go anywhere. The fish's rhythm is probably regular and its pace quick. Its weight is light. So in Laban's terms the Effort that describes the fish's movement is gliding.

Laban's work can be used to classify any movement. Imagine leaves falling from trees, waves breaking on a shore, a seagull swooping or a bee hovering. Try to describe each of these movements in terms of flow, space, time and weight. In doing this you will be analysing each movement by its external image. This will make you more familiar with Laban's concepts. However, Laban's work is most useful for you as an actor because it explores the relationship between the external image of movement and the inner urge. This will be made clearer when you experience the Eight Basic Efforts in a practical way in the workshop.

Effort	Flow	Space	Time <i>Rhythm/Pace</i>	Weight
<b>Pressing</b>	Continuous	Direct	Regular/Slow	Heavy
<b>Wringing</b>	Continuous	Flexible	Irregular/Slow	Heavy
<b>Slashing</b>	Disjointed	Flexible	Irregular/Fast	Heavy
<b>Punching</b>	Disjointed	Direct	Regular/Fast	Heavy
<b>Flicking</b>	Disjointed	Flexible	Irregular/Fast	Light
<b>Dabbing</b>	Disjointed	Direct	Regular/Fast	Light
<b>Gliding</b>	Continuous	Direct	Regular/Slow	Light
<b>Floating</b>	Continuous	Flexible	Irregular/Slow	Light

## Questions

- 1 Why is it important and useful for an actor to study Laban's work on movement?
- 2 What did Laban decide were the essential components of movement?
- 3 How was Laban's approach to weight different to that of classical dance?
- 4 What is kinetography?
- 5 In Laban's language of movement, what are the extremes on the continuum of flow?
- 6 What two elements make up time in the language of movement?
- 7 How do you explain the term 'rhythm' in Laban's language of movement? Give some examples of your own.
- 8 How do you explain the term 'pace' in Laban's language of movement?
- 9 What are the extremes on the continuum of weight in Laban's system? Give some examples of movement at the two extremes.
- 10 What are the Eight Basic Efforts?

## Workshop

### Exercise 1 Laban's Eight Basic Efforts

The purpose of this exercise is to explore the Eight Basic Efforts through isolating and controlling various parts of your body. The essence of the Effort should then be easy to personify with your whole body.

- Pressing is described as a continuous, direct, regular, rhythmic, slow-paced, heavy movement. First try pressing by using parts of your body in isolation. Try pressing with just a finger or just your nose. Then try pressing with your feet, ankles, shins, knees, thighs, whole legs, hips, abdomen, back, chest, shoulders, elbows, wrists, fingers, whole arms and head.
- As you press explore the space around you. Move backwards, forwards and on the diagonals. Use different physical levels, that is, different heights from the ground: for example, lie on your back, sit on your bottom, kneel or stand.
- Now that you have isolated different parts of the body, try personifying the Effort of pressing with your whole body.
- As you move, illustrate pressing with sound as well.
- Imagine what a voice driven by the Effort of pressing would sound like. Standing still, speak the line 'What do you want?' in a voice which illustrates your understanding of the physical Effort of pressing.
- Repeat this exploration for each of the other Efforts: wringing, slashing, punching, flicking, dabbing, gliding and floating.
- Explore each Effort with isolated movements, then with your whole body, then with sound, and then speaking the line 'What do you want?'

### Exercise 2 Character work using Laban's Efforts

This exercise illustrates how Laban's Basic Efforts can be used as a way to approach character work.

- Try to personify one of Laban's Efforts using movement and voice. Then create a character based on the Effort. Ensure that everything you do is driven by the particular Effort you have chosen. Let it affect:
  - what you say
  - how you say it

## Debriefing

Were some Efforts easier for you to personify than others? Why? Did you find the isolation exercises easier than using the whole body? Explain. How did Laban's Efforts translate into the vocal work?

- 
- how you move
  - how you think
  - what you think.
- Work with a partner to explore how characters based on different Efforts relate to each other in specific situations. Here are some suggestions for characters and situations:
- a wringing mother and a slash child preparing for a dentist appointment
  - a press guy and a flick girl on a date
  - a gliding student and a punch boss at a part-time job interview
  - a float diner ordering a meal from a dabbing waitress.
- 

### Debriefing

Was it easier to explore the voice when you had a physical connection to it? Why or why not?  
What intentions were apparent in the different deliveries of the line 'What do you want'?  
What sort of personality and character was suggested by the movement and sound?

### Workbook

- 1 Do you know someone whose personality seems to be driven by one of the Basic Efforts? Recount an experience you may have had with that person.
- 2 Reflect on what you enjoyed in other people's performance work.
- 3 Write a dialogue between characters, each of whom embodies a different Effort.

Sample pages

