

REPORT ON SUMMER CONFERENCES IN ENGLAND:

Research in Movement and the International Council on Kinetography Laban.

by Juana de Laban

The week-end conference on "Research in Movement" convened August 10-12, 1973, at Nonington College, near Dover, Kent, England. Five lectures beginning with an evening session on Friday, August 10, featured the paper on "Ergonomics" by Dr. Nigel Corbett (Industrial Engineer, Birmingham University), which was read and discussed by Mr. S. Madeley. He oriented the assembled movement researchers to the fact that "measurement of motion" is of particular concern to physiologists and scientists since the World War II demanded immediate practical solutions (how to survive in a jungle, speed and weightlessness in flying, etc.). Now it is vital that the job be fitted and programmed to the worker. He cited research by Alberg (1968) on tests and models of tasks (52 experiments); by Spitzer & Hethinger (1970) on static work involving large body movement and force factors; by Laban (1950) as utilized in Britain by Paddy McMasters who analyzed filmed worktasks.

The research at Birmingham University focused on three types of actions: weight, breath, reaction-time factors for which examples were set-up each with four tasks for eight different people. The pilot studies are continuing and yielding results, corroborating that movement actions can be successfully measured.

On Saturday, August 11, the next three lectures enthralled everyone. The Principal of Nonington College, Miss Ellinor Hinks, spoke on "Educational Gymnastics". Her invention of special equipment created and designed for the exploration of total body movement techniques, conceived and housed in a unique space-gymnasium, is highly effective in training young people who concentrate and inventively achieve far more than pure motor skills. Two films of her work "Movement in the Making, I & II", demonstrated her new method. As films, they superbly illustrate the physical potentialities of movement with this new type of apparatus (the films can be rented or purchased). It may be challenging to state Miss Hinks' basic philosophy on movement education and I paraphrase:

1. Harmonious and purposeful movement in the use of the body according to each individual's possibility.

---

Juana de Laban, Lecturer at the Dallas Theatre Center and freelance consultant to dance researchers.

2. Awareness, sensitive and careful use of bodily movement in a natural and logical flow.
3. Learn to feel a movement phrase - thereby eventually acquire "advanced movement abilities".
4. Structural elements should include a rhythmic flow for apparatus work which develops and enhances freedom of movement resulting in a distinctive style of moving for the individual.
5. The teacher must search and recognize movement quality and meaning in order to aid the student in understanding movement and motion.

Dr. Alan Smith (Prof. at Leeds University) spoke on "Mechanics of Movement" (biomechanics). As an engineer, he studied physical education and was a member of the expedition to the Indian Himalayas (1969). His concern is to "track" the exterior body action independent of internal complexities (rather than overlooking them, he is focusing on the exterior body action in his research).

For instance the electromyograph (EMG record) records measures such as the walking strides of a person following an operation which indicates different rates of speed, force, velocity, etc. Dr. Smith illustrated a jump on to a specially built-in floor panel (to start his movement he hung limply from an overhead bar. He argued that no 'assist' for action was involved). Several other examples stressed 'force against speed' which can be measured in his research fairly accurately. Computer print-outs aid in the process of measuring multiple experiments with diverse subjects.

The fourth speaker, Mrs. Patricia Hutchinson McKenzie, is director of The Place a prominent ballet studio as well as the Martha Graham School in London. Her topic, "Style and Dynamics in Dance Movement", surveyed dance in the theatre as it is now. Her main emphasis was the image of the dancer when performing, and how the 'myth' a dancer creates shapes his public image. Style and dynamics in ballet are part of the sense of a dancers inner geometry since his line is so intrinsic to style - creating a beautiful line in space. The styles of diverse choreographers were briefly reviewed: Les Noces by Jerome Robbins; Seraphic Dialogues by Martha Graham; Summerspace by Merce Cunningham; Tent by Alwin Nikolais; and The House by Meredith Monk. The final question Mrs. McKenzie posed centered on the Martha Graham style and work to which The Place is committed. She felt that Graham's floor technique should be modified. On the subject of choreography and marked style elements of Graham, she raised a critical point: will her work ever produce a ranking and significant choreographer for theatrical dance?

After each lecture and in the ensuing panel discussion with all speakers and audience-scholar members present, the serious concern for movement education, the dance in the theatre, and the professional dancer's future were examined carefully.

The last speaker on Sunday, August 12, provided a climax and bridge to the week-long notation conference to follow. Mrs. Ivor Guest's (Ann Hutchinson) inquiry, "Looking at Human Movement" centered on the analysis and problems of recording human movement. She elicited and challenged the listeners to reflect and consider the implications of the previous talks for the notation conference.

The bi-annual meeting of the "International Council on Kinetography Laban" (ICKL) was scheduled for August 12 through 18, 1973 at Nonington College, near Dover, Kent. The chairman, Mrs. Guest, initiated the discussion and presented varying notation problems which notators encountered since the last conference. Illustrative papers were distributed by Maria Szentpal of Hungary for "Standing", "Kneeling", "Sitting", and "Lying Down". These notation papers covered questions that other notators also had encountered. Muriel Topaz from the Dance Notation Bureau in New York; The Swiss notator Sigurd Leeder; the German Albrecht Knust (president of ICKL) and the English group of notators engaged in a lively interchange of demonstration and execution of dance positions and movement sequences. Frequently other notation exponents and Fellows of ICKL (establ. 1959) actively proposed possible solutions for the most satisfactory writing style. After lengthy and involved experimentation the suggested "new signs" were accepted on a "trial" basis for the next two years. Following this provisional period it is hoped the signs will be adapted for international use. The conference invited several 'Observers' who because of their commitment to notation were selected as 'Associates' of ICKL. This reporter slaved from 9 AM to 10 PM (with breaks for meals) and concluded that the 'refresher course' was vital to her own appreciation of the developments of notation since first studying with Mr. Knust many years ago.