

Amanda Zawisza

Melanie King McGray

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Movement Analysis Honors Option

Throughout the course of the semester in Movement Analysis, we have been introduced to a number of methods in which to analyze movement as well as many dance science concepts. This paper, as it is for Honors credit and is outside of the work otherwise required by the class, will apply some of these concepts to three extremely different performance works. The first of will be To Sangana's performance, "Listen" which consisted of Central African Congolese dancing, then looking at Brooke Viselli's "My Girl, Detroit" comparing the original – live – version to the video version presented as her Capstone, and finally by comparing this to movement found in *Legally Blonde*.

To Sangana's performance entitled "Listen" was their final showcase of the company for the semester. Directed and choreographed primarily by Karen Prall, the showcase consisted of several different works falling under the repertoire of the company. Primarily the show featured Central African, Congolese style movement, however there were several other styles and genres that were brought in – jit and contemporary to name a few. For the purposes of this analysis, I will be focusing on my observation of the West Congolese movement. African dancing presents an interesting perspective and challenge on analysis, specifically Laban Movement Analysis. When looking at Flow, I would say that for the most part, the movement is Free Flow. Although

the movement is sharp and fast – I will touch on these Effort factors later – the overall feeling of the movement is “outpouring... uncontrollable, can’t be stopped, open-hearted, fluid, etc.”. Flow is defined being “about continuity, ongoingness, progression, emotions, and involvement”.

Based on this definition and the definition of Free Flow, I draw my conclusion that To Sangana’s performance was largely Free Flow. The emotions and energy were kept up throughout every piece, and the movement was constant. The only pauses in movement were really at the end of the piece, and throughout each work, their bodies never stopped moving. The energy stems from each dancer’s core and remains constant throughout the entirety of the performance. The only elements of bound flow that are present is the sharpness and precision of the movement. Some of the movement is quite controlled and rigid, however, the lines of energy never truly stop nor are they held. Moving off of this, the Timing of the show can definitely be described as Sudden or Quick. The movement often accelerated throughout pieces and completely manipulated the elements and the resulting impact of the performance. The movement was percussive and matched the drums and chanting that accompanied the dancing. It was “staccato, quick, hurried... spark-like”. In reflection of the timing of the choreography and movement, the Active Weight was extremely Strong. In order to execute the movements to their fullest potential and their intent within the choreography, one must be very powerful. There was nothing Light or delicate about the dancer’s use of weight. Along with this, there was truly no use of Passive Weight. The dancers were upright for the majority of the pieces, and remained extremely strong. The lower portions of their body were grounded and supportive, and the upper half of the body was mobile but engaged and weighted.

Shifting slightly to address Bartenieff Fundamentals, there was a strong correlation between the Core and Distal ends. All six limbs were constantly engaged throughout this

performance and the energy seemed to radiate truly from the core of each dancer. Based on personal experience working with the choreographer, Karen Prall and experience with the style, I know this factor to be definitely true. In preparation of movement and throughout the time spent moving while dancing, this connection is highly encouraged. The beat of the music and the pulse of energy must flow from the center of one's chest. This helps not only with timing but with the proper execution of the style and the dance form. The connection between the Upper-Lower was utilized in an extremely traditional sense, as the feet remained planted on the ground in a support while the upper half was allowed to be mobile and interact. From here, Body-Half and Cross-Lateral movement were accessed throughout the pieces and utilized in strong fashion, especially with the rotation of the body, chanting, and community building that occurred. The Head-Tail connection was in much more demand, than other dance styles, as the spine as constantly moving, either in isolation or in conjunction with the music and the movement.

The detail and dynamicism of the work required the dancers to also utilize Weight Sensing in different areas of the body based solely on the choreography of that particular move. For the most part it was on the stronger end, but some movements asked the dancers to release and send energy out into the universe. With all of this in mind, the dancers used a largely Indirect sense of Space. African dance is used as a community builder, created by the community and danced for the community. This asks the dancers to engage both the other performers as well as the audience in their focus, attention, and perception.

Comparing this performance to Brooke Viselli's "My Girl, Detroit" is quite the contrast. I had previously seen this work performed live in Dance Workshop's showcase and for this performance it was entitled "Let's Dance!". The piece was set to an upbeat combination of

songs, with the dancers dressed in sparkley black shirts and black leggings. The lighting was rainbow and bright. For her senior BFA Capstone, she elected to change the piece conceptually, manipulating the movement and how the movement was shown by producing a dance on film.

Transforming a dance for film production provides an interesting analysis of the movement. Firstly, the movement is forever trapped in time as that, unaffected by the environment and any other factors that may occur in live performance. Secondly, it fully changes the way in which the audience engages with the work not only in how they view it but in how they interpret the movement. Lastly, it, combined with the change of song manipulated the choreographic choices, providing brand new movement for analysis and comparison. Originally when presented with this paper, I had intended on looking at another piece, as there were several pieces that were live and not on film. However, I had seen this piece once before and it stuck out as being extremely significant in my head as far as the movement qualities go. When I heard that Brooke was transforming the piece for film and for a whole new song, I was intrigued. Witnessing this transformation in movement style both in reflection of it being for film and then the change based on the song presented an interesting challenge for analyzing the movement.

For this transformation in particular – from viewing this performance live to the dance on film version – I changed some of my initial interpretation. Initially in reference to use of Space, I would have said that there was an Indirect focus. The dance was very upbeat and engaging, both for the dancers on the stage and for the audience members. In order to fully engage the audience members, there was a strong performance to them, thus creating an Indirect focus within the dancers to establish a sense of community and multi-focus on the bodies living and breathing in the space. In contrast, the dancers changed this focus for sections of the video version. For the group and phrase work, the focus became Direct. It was more “single-focused” and “channeled”

to a specific point or direction in space. However, Brooke added in more improvisational solo moments featuring her dancers in different moments, doing their own movement. In these moments, a more Indirect focus was present. In reference to time, the live version of the piece was for the most part Sudden or Quick, pulsating and moving with the bass of the music. In the video, the timing shifted to blend with the music more. Brooke used editing features of Adobe Premiere to transform the work into a different sense of time, Sustaining at moments or speeding it up more in reflection of the feeling she was trying to send across for the video.

One thing that could not be manipulated by the editing software was the Weight and Flow of the movement that was shown. Between live and video performances, these Factors stayed relatively the same. If I had to classify Brooke's movement, I would say it was a contemporary jazz. It found influences of a number of styles, demanding the dancers to engage in their technique, challenge themselves with tricks, and movement that was unique to Brooke and what she wanted the end product to be. For the most part, the dancing was Free Flow, constantly moving and going. At some moments, the choreography accessed Bound Flow. This was more evident in the larger group sections with the pulsating of gestures and the tricks that occurred in these sections. With this Bound Flow, the movement was more contained to the dancer's spot and body, but the energy was very direct and flowing out, demonstrating a simultaneous Free and Bound Flow. This allowed for clear and controlled movement and demonstration of line and relationship between the dancers. Keeping this in mind as we move to talk about the Weight factor, the dancers were constantly and actively Weight Sensing. There was no real engagement with the sense of Passive Weight, only Active and often Strong. Brooke's movement, while Free Flow, demanded the dancers to access a lot of power and engagement with their entire bodies to successfully carry out her choreography to it's fullest

potential. The dancers were never truly delicate, but stayed relatively lifted as their technique was fully accessed in the demands of the movement. However, there was moments of Weight Sensing in that certain parts of the body would slow down and shift in to a Lighter spectrum to provide dynamic within the body. This was especially evident in the video version of this piece, specifically in the sections featuring soloist or smaller groups of dancers in which the dancers moved in their own style, accessing un-choreographed Flow, Weight, and Space relationships.

Completely changing gears with my final analysis of performance, I had originally intended on going to see Ballet BC and analyzing that professional company's movement. This would have provided an interesting comparison to the movement I have seen at the collegiate level as well as the choreography of this extremely ballet-based company with the movement that is done in a college setting. However, they cancelled their performance in Detroit, so I was not able to see them.

In light of this, I decided to use Wayne State University's performance of *Legally Blonde*. I was in majority of the dance numbers, however I was not in one of the largest numbers, "Gay or European". This scene is a huge contrast to the rest of the pieces I have analyzed. This dance revolved entirely around movement created while sitting/staged in court benches. Looking at this through the lens of Laban Movement Analysis Effort Factors, it provides a fascinating contrast to the rest of the pieces I have previously analyzed. Looking at Flow, the movement is extremely Bound, involving a lot of rigid, sharp movement that holds and pauses for dramatic effect and clarity. This is emphasized by the dancers staying in their location on the stage and in relationship to one another. Weight is extremely Strong and Active, never accessing any Passive

qualities, even when seated. The number is quite precise and clear, emphasizing the court members “standing [their] ground” and standing at attention to remain engaged with the court case and the procession of events, thus never entering the Passive or Weight Sensing areas of Weight expression. The movement, much like the song is very Sudden and Quick in regards to Time. This scene is all about discovering vital information to the case and the banter that comes with wondering the outcome of these events. This is shown by the *accelerando* throughout the entire piece, and this is emphasized by the staccato nature of the lyrics as well as the movement. It is hurried, instantaneous, and “spark-like”, building the emotion of the court room at such a vital point in the case. In reflection of this feeling, the Space and focus is Direct. It is very specific and “channeled” in on one thing. The sharpness of the standing up and sitting down as well as the movement of the arms, head, and poses hit throughout the number makes for the piece to be very unique in its consistency. These factors are present throughout the entire work and never really change.

The only contrast present on the stage is the character in question, Nikos Architacos. He plays the witness that is the center subject of the song and as a result moves against the crowd. He is extremely relaxed, so in regards to Time he is Sustained, luxuriating all of his movement and leisurely moving. His weight is Light but still Active, not really accessing the Passive nor Weight Sensing categories. He flows his movement Freely, but they are Bound in the sense that they do end and have a stopping point in a pose or a specific emphasis on the music. His use and engagement with the Space is largely Indirect except when there are certain lines requiring him to interact with a specific character – i.e. flirting with the judge or the bailiff. In this way, this character provides a direct contrast to the corps of dancers, truly setting him apart and making him the center of attention.

Overall, this assignment asked me to access the skills I have learned throughout the semester and apply them to ways of moving and aspects of dance that were not considered in class. Among these were African style of dance, dance on stage versus dance on film, and theatrical dancing. Applying these concepts to these forms of dance rather than our familiar way of moving in a college setting completely changed the way in which I look at both these styles and these concepts. This allowed me to access a much deeper level of understanding, as well as challenged me to look at these forms of dance in a completely different way.

Reference:

Konie, Robin. "A Brief Overview of Laban Movement Analysis." 2011. *Movement Has Meaning*. 17 April 2017.