

Gigi Berardi

Laban/Bartenieff Movement Studies: Contemporary Applications

Colleen Wahl

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Colleen Wahl is a Laban/Bartenieff movement analyst certified through Integrated Movement Studies at the University of Utah. In this book she offers a timely and relevant approach to the integration of Laban/Bartenieff studies into many movement styles. The book includes incorporation of contributions from other certified Laban movement analysts.

Laban/Bartenieff Movement Studies is divided into three parts: Part I: Foundations of Laban Bartenieff Studies (overview and historical perspective); Part II: The Lens of Laban/Bartenieff Movement Studies (presenting the body, effort, shape, space, and phrasing elements of the framework); and Part III: Integrating and Applying BESS (i.e., the elements mentioned above).

The first two chapters (“Overview of Laban/Bartenieff Movement Analysis” and “Guiding Concepts and Organizing Themes”) that comprise Part I offer a big picture look at Laban/Bartenieff movement studies, carefully explaining how such studies provide both a framework and language for observing, understanding, and describing human movement. These chapters contain a history of the studies, beginning with those of Rudolf von Laban and his student and colleague, Irmgard Bartenieff. Wahl explains guiding concepts of the work with discussions of “polarities,” “the relational nature of movement,” “personal uniqueness,” and organizing themes of inner (sensations)-outer (physical) movement, and the body as a whole and as parts.

The chapters in Part II each examine a different category of the Laban/Bartenieff movement framework: body, effort, shape, space, and phrasing. Wahl’s discussion is excellent, with its very clear explanation of terms, for example in Chapter 3 “Body”: “gesture,” “body attitude,” and “patterns of total body connectivity.” Ideas such as core-distal

patterning and body-half patterning are key concepts that Wahl explains fully and clearly (aided by illustrations).

The remaining chapters in Part II are similarly detailed and well written. Chapter 4, “Effort,” includes a good discussion of flow, weight, time, and space factors; effort qualities that have been associated with psychosomatic experience; fluctuation and change in effort in a particular movement or series of movements; and then, applications: effort “in life,” effort “in dance,” and effort in athletics or theater.

Chapter 5, “Shape,” describes shape qualities, modes of shape change, and shape forms. Chapter 6, “Space,” discusses ways of engaging with space; general space and personal space, or the “kinesphere”; as well as the body in space and in everyday life. Terms such as “space harmony,” “spatial matrix,” and “reach space” are described—all through the lens of Laban/Bartenieff fundamentals. Chapter 7, “Phrasing,” presents many aspects of phrases: phrase length, phrase patterning, effort phrasing, phrase emphasis, and sequences of movement within the body.

The final section, Part III, integrates and applies body, effort, shape, and space concepts into everyday life, as well as into dance movement. Chapter 8, “Using Laban/Bartenieff Movement Analysis in Your Life,” looks at the observation process and interpreting meaning in movement, but also sharing insights using evocative and analytical language and metaphor. A welcome section on “Writing about movement” is included. Chapter 9, “Laban/Bartenieff Movement Analysis in Action,” offers further integration of approaches to understanding dance movement and other artistic and psychosocial endeavors.

One key feature of the book is personal, professional narratives—for example, by Michelle Gay (a self-defense

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seminar instructor) and Elizabeth Stitch (an aerialist), or Susan Barnard (dancer and choreographer), who uses movement analysis to explain “how spatial intent and kinesphere size can significantly impact the emotional tone of a piece.” These artists recount how particular elements of the Laban/Bartenieff movement framework are useful in opening channels of expressiveness and contribute to embodied awareness. Contributions include Aida Curtis’s “Laban/Bartenieff Movement Analysis and Yoga: Meaning-Making in a Personal Practice”; Keely Song Glenn’s “Personal Journey of Rehabilitation and Hip-Hop”; Hilary Bryan’s “Laban/Bartenieff Movement Studies at Work: An Integrated Approach to Ergonomics”; Sarah Donohue’s “The Physicality of Humor: A Laban Perspective on Incongruent

Movement Patterns”; and Kevin Williamson’s “Making Dances with Laban/Bartenieff Movement Analysis.”

Two ancillary teaching aids are available (www.HumanKinetics.com/LabanBartenieffMovementStudies) with the book: a presentation package that includes over 200 slides that highlight key chapter points and an image bank of all the chapter figures and tables. These images—schematics of moving dancers, notations, illustrations of even the most abstract concepts, and skeletal diagrams—are valuable. Exercises and activities, a glossary, and an index increase the utility of the text. *Laban/Bartenieff Movement Studies* will be useful for both students and career movement professionals.