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JULIET CHAMBERS-COE
University of Essex

Rudolf Laban and the seven planes of consciousness: Sensory-somatic portals to spirit

ABSTRACT

This article explores an unpublished and so far unarticulated aspect of Rudolf Laban's spiritual thinking which focuses specifically on a diagrammatic sketch drawing by Laban found in the Rudolf Laban Archive at the University of Surrey. In this sketch Laban depicts planes of consciousness and movements of the material and subtle sensory bodies as they relate to his notions of Space, Effort and consciousness, mirroring Rudolf Steiner's 'ladder' of spiritual consciousness. The article further discusses (using this sketch as a stimulus) Laban's interest in the unconscious, 'unseen' aspects of embodiment and his Rosicrucian thinking alongside Steiner's acknowledgment of the importance of the body as the site of, and portal to, spiritual knowledge and the processual nature of material and subtle existence which has movement at its heart.

KEYWORDS

Laban
Rosicrucianism
Rudolf Steiner
embodied spirituality
ghost function
subtle body
crystallisation
heart

INTRODUCTION

Rudolf Laban's insistence on attunement to and awareness of the 'bodily perspective' (1966: 83) of movement allows for us to consider his work through a somatic lens, which he states 'necessitates' an unavoidable and

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'certain spiritual emphasis' (1966: 8). In this article I will refer to a drawing by Laban in which he places emphasis on the somatic-sensory as portals to seven levels of consciousness, manifest in forms of varying spatial and effort complexities. In this drawing and in many other unpublished articles and notes, Laban discusses the importance of the interplay between the unconscious 'unseen' and conscious 'seen' aspects of human movement as likewise material and spiritual, and as vital to healthy movement function, revealing the subtle world of the mover through body movement in space. Whilst Laban is best known for taking a scientific and empirical view of movement phenomenon in his comprehensive taxonomy for understanding and describing human movement, there is an 'unseen' layer to this work through which he explores the embodied life of spirit and soul, and of 'God' which he says may be known in the movements of nature, including movements of the human body, he writes: '[t]here exists a writing of God. It is the happening in Nature […]. We can get nearer this deeper sense only through movement which is embedded in her utterances' (1984: 46). Whilst he is less explicit about spirituality in his major published works, Laban refers variously to 'the ghost function' (n.d.b: L/E/5/37), the 'dream-side of life' (1971: 3), the 'inner life' of the mover, 'life hidden beneath external appearances' (1980: 143) and 'the land of silence […] the realm of the soul' (1975: 89). He alludes to the notion of the subtle body in comments such as 'dance-like thinking and feeling brings about a consciousness of one's innermost self' whereby 'the physical self disappears' and the 'fleeting pathway of the dancer is filled with ethical spirit' (1975: 178). Furthermore, he repeatedly refers to the unconscious, 'unseen' aspects of embodied experience as being both the site of and gateway towards such spiritual faculties and suggests that it is in art, and specifically the art of dance, which illuminates subtle energy and is our 'highest representative of our capacity to dream' (1971: 6) and which 'help[s] our feeling to perceive more clearly the dynamic happening in God's writing' (1984: 46).

Investigation of the relationship between the conscious and the unconscious is precisely at the heart of what Laban attempted to interrogate in terms of embodied spiritual practice, seen in his discussion of the 'two infinities' (the *kinesphere*: form/space; and the *dynamosphere*: energy/inner life). He explores these themes further through this sketch (Laban n.d.a: L/E/7/38), where he depicts seven planes of existence extending as a continuum between the material and the spiritual. Here he seems to suggest that the two infinities as embodiments of material and spiritual existence interpenetrate and synthesize in the body and its movements.

Laban's depiction of the planes of consciousness and their relationship with spatial forms and Effort rhythms in this image are all referred to by him as aspects of 'touch' (n.d.a: L/E/7/38). This drawing alongside the many typed and handwritten notes in the Rudolf Laban Archive at the University of Surrey tells us that Laban explored the material nature of spirituality and consciousness through body movement and the embodied experience of moving with dynamic Efforts in and with Space. It tells us something about the high priority Laban gave to the senses of the body as perceived through Effort (and vice versa) which give spatial form to the body by affecting and being affected by its shaping attitude to energy and space. It tells us about the relationship Laban spent his entire career wrestling to understand – the two 'functions' of the body, 'man's total nature' (n.d.b: L/E/5/37) – the physical body which has capacity for 'action' which functions in the 'waking state'; and the subtle

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body, or soul, which he called 'the ghost function' which is active during sleep but which can 'penetrate the waking state' and 'brings messages from the far-off world of dream' (n.d.b: L/E/5/37). For Laban, both functions integrate and synthesize in movement, and perception of them is heightened and illuminated in dance.

Apart from the well-known articulations Laban offers on the harmonic correlations between Space (Choreutics) and Effort (Eukinetics), Laban seems to suggest through this sketch that Space and Effort 'build' in their combinations towards complex structures in the seven planes of existence, and perhaps of the seven 'bodies' of the human being as understood in Rosicrucianism: a now-well documented part of Laban's history and influence on his work. It is well understood that he was a member of a masonic order and deeply interested and influenced by Rosicrucian principles (see Moore 2009; Chambers-Coe 2022; Preston-Dunlop 2008). I propose that we might understand what Laban is exploring in this sketch through an understanding of Rosicrucian ideas about the body as the site of and portal to embodied spirituality, via the work of Rudolf Steiner which offers a useful basis from which to advance our understanding of Laban's Rosicrucianism.

With Steiner and Laban's shared Austro-Hungarian roots, their base in Germany during the early-mid twentieth century, and Steiner's writings and lectures widely published and circulated, it seems unlikely that Laban would not have known them. Martin Green, author of *The Mountain of Truth*, which explores Laban's 'Ascona period', says that Steiner's '"astral" ideas about harmony and flux, crystals and circles, and colours' (1986: 104) had influenced Laban's thinking. Although there is no direct evidence of Laban and Steiner ever having met, it is clear that Laban had the opportunity to know about Steiner's work through his publications. As Valerie Preston-Dunlop remarks, Laban was 'attracted to the lectures of Rudolf Steiner, by then well known' and because Steiner 'at some point […] led the Munich Lodge that Laban frequented' (2013: 12). Laban would have also come to know Steiner's work through the bodies of the dancers he worked with. For instance, many like Suzanne Perottet (with whom Laban had a close personal and professional relationship) had worked on Dalcroze's Eurhythmics which was derived from Steiner's 'new prayerful movement art', *Eurythmie*, by which vowel and consonant sounds are translated into a series of gestures so that great poetry or biblical sources might be 'danced' (Preston-Dunlop 2013: 12). Steiner's spiritual teachings and Laban's association of movement artistry with spirituality were not merely a turn of phrase, but a reflection of the Rosicrucian belief system which saw the marriage of art and spirituality, where visual art, performance art and the moving body became the manifestation of spiritual knowledge and its expression.

STEINER, LABAN AND ROSICRUCIAN IDEAS

> Our human movement is really a magical effect, because in it something is set in motion by the spirit.
>
> (Steiner 2007: 95)

Rudolf Steiner (1861–1925) was an Austrian philosopher, social reformer, architect and esotericist. He founded the spiritual science of Anthroposophy which had Rosicrucian values at its heart, and he was one of the first spiritual

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philosophers to posit the notion of an intrinsic connection between science and religion.

Interestingly, somatics practitioner and writer Martha Eddy includes Steiner as a peripheral, yet influential figure in the early development of somatic practices. However, she refers mainly to his practice *Eurythmie*, rather than his world-view as a Rosicrucian (Eddy 2017) despite acknowledging this shared interest with Laban. Both Steiner and Laban sought a conscious awareness of the inner, unconscious senses of the body, and both speak in somatic terms. Laban, for example, insists on analysis of movement from the 'bodily perspective' which is 'important in all investigations into movement and space' (1966: 83–92). The origins of the use of somatics as a point-of-access to the subtle body and to spiritual experience can be seen in Steiner's (2000: 22–23) embodiment exercises which aimed at contacting the subtle energetic body, as well as the very real physiological senses of the body's felt perceptions which enable 'contact' with it. Steiner identifies twelve, rather than the usual five human senses (Taste, Smell, Touch, Hearing, Vision, Movement, Life, Thought, Language, Temperature/warmth, 'I'/Ego, Balance)[1] all of which incorporate kinaesthetic, exteroceptive, interoceptive and proprioceptive sense perceptions as portals to spiritual knowing.

Laban scholar Carol-Lynne Moore's (2009) own investigation of Laban's Rosicrucian style of thinking also makes this link to movement and the Rosicrucian idea of the subtle body. Rosicrucian philosophy states that man [*sic*] has seven vehicles, the most obvious being the physical body. Moore describes how 'this visible material form is enveloped sheath-like by three invisible ones: the etheric (life body), the astral and the Ego' (2009: 234). Whilst they are not 'material' (though they 'touch' the physical body), they are said to 'fill the same space and to interpenetrate one another' (Leadbeater 1987: 63). All human beings then develop four 'bodies' with a further three 'higher members' which can be attained through initiation; that is, an individual process of spiritual learning and practice, they are 'spirit self; life -spirit and spirit man' (Steiner 2000: 22–23). There are a further two bodies within these, 'consciousness soul' and 'sentient soul', making a total of the nine bodies of the human being (seven, with an extra two 'folded in'). As Moore suggests in her 2009 article that there exist seven bodies is significant when considering the Rosicrucian *Principle of Correspondence* which states that the microcosm of humankind is reflective of the macrocosm of the universe. The seven bodies of the human correspond to the seven planes of being that comprise the macrocosm. The four earthly bodies relate to the 'lower', planes of being[2] minerals, plants and animals. Humans on the fourth level occupy the middle, and the three higher planes are in the spiritual realm of existence.

Steiner's approach in his 'spiritual science'[3] is somatic in nature where his exercises for embodied practice alongside intellectual study and contemplation of these subtle forms are in his view, the key to self-development and gnosis. Steiner sought an energetic fusion of one's body, mind, spirit and soul which are not 'objects' that can be 'dissected, quantified, analysed and known in their totality' but rather, 'point to mysterious aspects and expressions of our being' (Williamson 2022: 111).

For the ancient Greeks, for example, the subtle body incorporates both the body and the mind, or the *bodymind* and *soul* which 'is a radiant body of light' (Fraleigh 2015: xx) and is intrinsically interconnected to the body or what we might more accurately refer to in the study of movement experience as

1. For a full exposition of Steiner's twelve senses and their significance, see 'Embodied gnosis: Sensory somatic routes in Rosicrucian thinking' (Chambers-Coe 2023).
2. Such hierarchical tones are antithetical to both the overarching aims of Rosicrucianism, which enacts a democratic care for all life, and in a contemporary context, which demands a more horizontal understanding of our relationship to non-humans. Rather, I suggest that Steiner's attempt here is to illustrate the immanent nature of spirituality as existing within all planes of consciousness, but which finds cohesive expression in the moving human body.
3. Steiner outlines 'six steps in self-development' (2010) which are somatic approaches to living a spiritually conscious life.

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'soma'. Through somatic-spiritual movement practices we perceive ourselves not only to be a bodymind, but as possessing a soul and a spirit within our lived body. Through movement practice we become aware of the interconnectedness of body–mind–spirit–soul where so often these aspects of self have become disassociated and fragmented in our everyday lives, held beneath the threshold of conscious awareness.

Steiner is explicit in his reference to the subtle body and its qualities and functions. In his matrix, the subtle body consists of 'ether, astral and "ego"' bodies (Steiner 2000: 22–23). Laban on the other hand is less explicit but nevertheless repeatedly refers to the unconscious as significant. He notes that '[w]hen the mover enters their unconscious in dancing, they have a "radiant quality"' (Laban 1971: 9). Furthermore, his geometric depictions of the '[t]he shapes of the unconscious' (n.d.c: L/E/4/50) further provide us with evidence that Laban was grappling with how the invisible, unseen qualities of human movement might have particular spatial and dynamic tensions and can therefore be 'seen' through the moving body in space.

Both Laban and Steiner aimed to reach into the life of the subtle body through embodied practices in movement and voice. Their practices aimed to stir and sift the unconscious, so that subtle energy might be awakened, enlivening the individual in their 'soul' life which illuminates and gives meaning to physical movement. Through conscious awareness in movement the mover integrates multiple aspects of their *being*. The subtle and the material merge consciously and the mover may achieve a sense of integrated wholeness. The subtle becomes embodied.

Steiner explicitly aimed for contact with and an understanding of the subtle body in material forms. His 'spiritual science', Anthroposophy, was an altered or 'evolved' version of Theosophy 'a system of truths fundamental to all religions of the world' and is a 'combination of philosophy, science and religion' (Doerr 2008: 69). He explains the difference between them by drawing on anthropology which concerns only the study of the human being and their functions as an animal in the world. From Steiner's perspective, the science of anthropology 'takes its view from a point beneath human capacities. It is chained to the ground; it fails to employ all the faculties at the disposal of man, and for this reason it cannot solve the riddles of existence' (Steiner 1909: 2). Theosophy, on the other hand, is an 'air-castle' (1909: 2) where the ascent of the human soul takes prime position on the highest uppermost rung of the ladder – the peak of spiritual evolution. Here, Steiner paints a picture of two poles – one of earthly engagement at the bottom rung of spiritual evolution and activity and the other lofty, heavenly top rungs of spiritual knowledge. But Steiner is not satisfied with this picture and asks, 'what becomes of theosophy when it wants to reach the top but is not in a position to do so with the right means?' (1909: 2). Without the foundational support of the bottom rungs of the ladder, ascent is impossible. Equally, whilst being in such a lofty and high state of spiritual ascent one must also be able to see below, else it is like 'climbing a mountain for the purpose of observation and forgetting to bring your field glasses; you can distinguish nothing whatever down below' (1909: 2). Steiner therefore advocates for Anthroposophy, which sits at the middle rung where:

> the peak attained by theosophy lies above man, ordinary human knowledge below, and what lies half-way between, that is the human being himself: between nature and the spiritual world. What is above reaches

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> down to him; he is permeated by spirit above. At the same time, he sees what is nature beneath him; it reaches into him from below.
>
> (1909: 2)

This conception of the body constituting the 'half-way' point between nature and spirit also speaks to the hermetic aphorism, 'as above, so below' which in Rosicrucian philosophy translates into *The Principle of Correspondence* which states that 'what is true of matter is true of energy and of mind' (Incognito 2010: 115). The Rosicrucian 'makes a practical application of this universal principle, in the direction of studying the unknown by means of the known' (2010: 115). In Laban's case, this involved studying the known phenomena of movement and its scientific/mathematical foundations to access, describe and know about its elusive and ephemeral nature.

Referring to Steiner's 'ladder', we might consider the unconscious as being in the realm of the highest rungs where unconscious spiritualities exist somehow beyond the corporeal domain and the conscious part of the psyche as being earthly and materially centred in nature. Steiner's third way on the middle rung of the ladder, where the human body is situated, is the meeting point between spirit and matter and is therefore where the unconscious and conscious 'meet', i.e. *in the body*. Interestingly, this hierarchy, which places humankind as 'above' the natural world of plants and animals, is anomalous to Rosicrucian philosophy which has respect for all life at its heart and in a contemporary understanding of and desire to achieve a flattening of hierarchies which aims to reassert the rights and consciousness of non-humans. Steiner's attempt to visually depict the Anthroposophical 'ladder' was his metaphor to explain how nature and spirit intersect within the human form. That is, nature is not separate from humanity but is a constituent part of humankind, and humans are equally *part of* the natural world, all of which are 'God's writing in Nature' (Laban 1984: 46). Likewise, spirituality (from 'above') inheres in all life, on all planes of consciousness.

LABAN'S SEVEN PLANES OF CONSCIOUSNESS

This image of Laban's that I will now discuss in more depth depicts such a 'ladder', albeit in Laban's own style. Laban has drawn the seven planes of consciousness (Figure 1) that Steiner refers to and, in alignment with Steiner, depicts the human body at the centre, occupying level four.

Reading the diagram vertically, Laban positions the 'zero' plane as 'In-conscious' (which we may understand as inner consciousness); 'one' as 'Existent' with a corresponding single line of spatial representation. On plane 'two', Laban writes 'At-tracting' (attracting) on the left and 'Re-pulsing' (repulsing) on the right which, in *The Mastery of Movement*, Laban identifies as 'fundamental urges' (1980: 85). This level has a corresponding '//' two lines denoting spatial complexity. On plane 'three' Laban invokes thought, feeling and will as entering consciousness with a corresponding triangle of three equal sides denoting spatial form. At level 'four', the 'bodies' of the human being take form with 'solid, fluid, airy, etheric' qualities and a square with its four sides signals expanding form and in sacred geometry, the four elements – Earth, Air, Fire, Water. At level 'five' Laban includes the body's senses all of which are 'Touchable' – 'tasting, smelling, feeling, audibly, visually' (n.d.a: L/E/7/38), which he also reflects in *Choreutics* where he writes '[a]ll changes in space which we see, hear, smell or taste are literally tactile impressions' (1966: 29).

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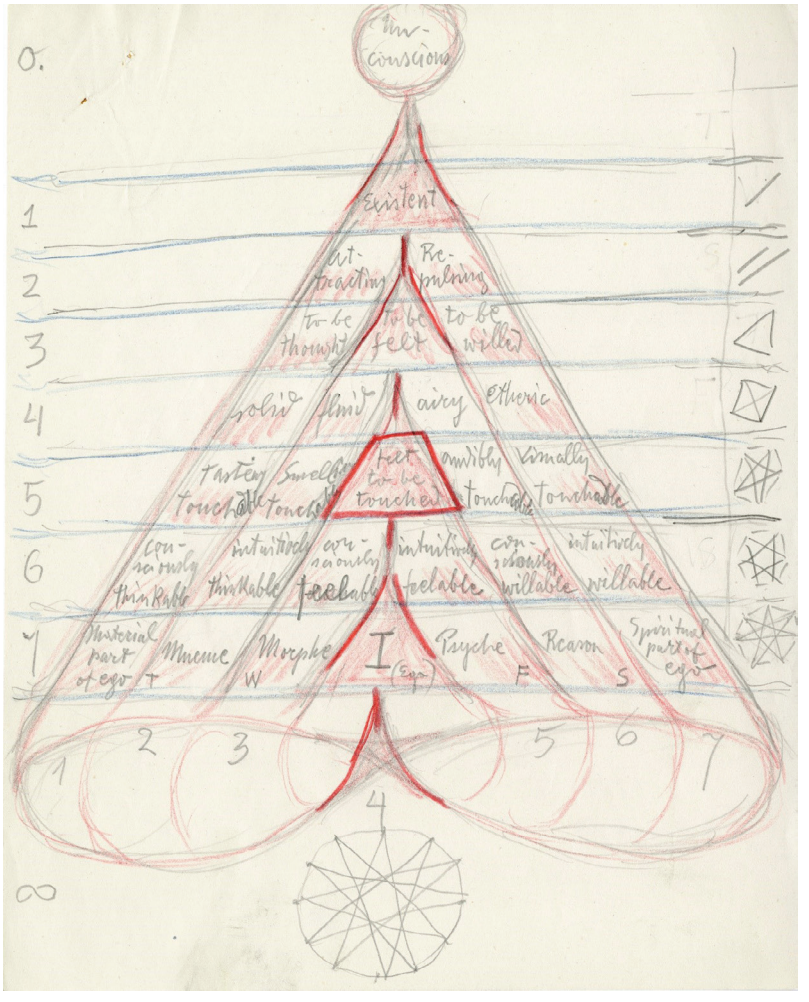

Figure 1: 'Choreology [effort]: Explanation of movement experience – Seven planes of consciousness depicting increasing spatial, dynamic, sensory complexity' (ref. no.: L/E/7/38). Courtesy of the Rudolf Laban Archive, *University of Surrey. Do not re-use without permission.*

This is resonant with Steiner's concept of the material senses of the human body as all being forms of touch and which bring the mover into 'an interaction with the outer world' because when one 'assimilates physical matter […] [one] perceives it' (Steiner 1909: 4). From this perspective, '[i]n the senses, the external world extends like gulfs into the organisms' own existence […] the soul encompasses what takes place in the senses […] in the extension of the outer events into the organism' (Steiner 2010: 14). In other words, the macrocosm enters the microcosm through the porous physical senses of the body. From this activity in the senses at plane five, the spatial form extends into a pentagon with its 'internal' pentagram, or star, denoting inner complexities, with rhythmic exchanges from point-to-point. The pentagon encompasses the pentagram as a circle. At level 'six', thinking, feeling and willing come into

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play 'consciously' and 'intuitively' (Laban n.d.a: L/E/7/38), and the hexagon and its six-pointed star denote the form these combinations assume. The hexagram in esoteric symbology denotes patterns of unity and is where, in Laban's diagram, bodily senses entwine with conscious and intuitive thinking, feeling and willing. The 'thinking' sense is understood by Steiner to be a sense belonging to the astral body, able to 'penetrate the spiritual world' whereby the 'astral senses lead us deeper into the fundamentals of external objects' (Steiner 1909: 45). That Laban combines 'feeling' and 'willing' at this level speaks to his insistence on the roles that emotion and bodily action play in such spiritual activity as 'thinking' which Laban refers to as 'a kineto-dynamic process' (Laban 1966: 124), for him, thinking is a *bodily* activity. Laban does not separate thinking from the perceptions of the moving and sensing body. For Laban, movement thinking 'does not, as thinking in words does, serve orientation in the external world, but rather it perfects man's orientation in his inner world in which impulses continually surge and seek an outlet in doing, acting and dancing' (1980: 15).

Level 'seven' is apparently the most complex plane. Here the 'material part of ego' and the 'spiritual part of ego' flank 'Mneme T' which denotes Time Effort and memory. This perhaps refers to Laban's (1966: 87) understanding of time as progressing in a phrase of movement in which past, present and future unfold in the start, end and continuous flow of movement in an endless cycle of change. 'Morphe W' perhaps denotes the processual physical change of the body's form in space (the morphogenesis we see in the body's shape-change, in relationship to environmental factors surrounding it) and which is sensed through Weight Effort. Further along this continuum are 'Psyche F' as Flow Effort and 'Reason S' which we may deduce stands for Space and its correlative function in thinking and reasoning via Laban's adoption of Carl Jung's 'Functions of consciousness'.[4] The spatial form at level seven is a heptagram. The heptagram has a deeply esoteric significance. The seven points are symbolic of perfection, of God in some Christian religions, and denote the seven planes of existence and the seven material and subtle bodies of the human being.

The number seven has a spiritual significance across a number of religious philosophies, such as in Hinduism, an even more ancient spiritual tradition than Christianity. Here, the number seven is important, particularly in its now well-known image of the chakra system, a symbolic representation of the relationship between the human body and the planes of human consciousness. In the Hindu tradition there are seven chakras, or centres of force which lie along the nave or axis of the spine and which represent the development of the material life of the body towards spiritual transformation with the crown (uppermost) chakra containing 'counterparts of all of the seven major chakras' and where 'man has an image of God, which shines there without pause' (Meister Eckhart cited in Tansley 1977: 27). It is well documented, including by key Theosophist Helena Blavatsky in her seminal work *The Secret Doctrine: The Synthesis of Science, Religion and Philosophy* (1984), that the Hindu spiritual wisdom tradition was the basis of much of Theosophy from which Steiner developed Anthroposophy. Furthermore, the Kabbalists believe that there are 'seven gates of the soul of man' (Tansley 1977: 27) and Jung commented that 'the chakras were the gateways of consciousness in man, receptive points for the inflow of energies from the cosmos and the spirit and the soul of man' (1977: 27). Jung, from whom Laban borrowed the work on Functions of Consciousness as a means to explore the psychological elements of Effort,

4. Laban correlates Jung's functions of consciousness – thinking, feeling, sensing and intuiting (Jung 1971: 11) with the Efforts Space, Flow, Weight and Time, respectively (Laban 1980: 115).

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was strongly influenced by this Hindu representation of the seven subtle body centres and the development of human spirituality as he described in his book *The Psychology of Kundalini Yoga* (1999). It is likely that this influence informed Laban's own thinking about the relationships between energy (Effort), psychology and spirituality. Contemporary practices in yoga, somatic movement therapies and other creative movement modalities often include the chakra system as a key aspect of practice in their aims to integrate body–mind–spirit, acknowledging quite openly an awareness of and conscious working with subtle body ideas.

In Rosicrucian philosophy the number seven also appears as significant, whereby 'the soul controls the dense physical body by way of the blood' (Tansley 1977: 14) via the seven endocrine glands. Rosicrucian teaching refers to the seven endocrine glands of the body as the '"invisible guardians", recognising that they are the controllers and guardians of life who determine equilibrium of the spiritual and more physical forces in man' (1977: 16). Steiner himself spoke of the blood as 'containing a record of the life of the individual, registering every thought and emotion, life being transmitted from the ethers through breath to the lungs and there making its impression on the blood' (1977: 14). The seven roses on the Rosy Cross of the Rosicrucian Order represent these centres of force and 'through them the spirit of man finally gains control and dominion of the more physical aspects of his nature' once again affirming the Rosicrucian belief that a spiritual life must be manifest in material, bodily form if it is to be fully realized, because 'spiritual wisdom must not stream only into the head, nor only into the heart, but also into the hand, into our manual skills, into our daily actions' (Steiner 2000: 8).

In this sketch, each 'star' which builds from level five to the heptagram at level seven denotes a single line – heptagram combines a numeral prefix, hepta-, with the Greek suffix -gram. The -gram suffix derives from the Greek γραμμῆς (grammēs) meaning a line – a continuous unbroken circle punctuated with rhythmic intervals which create new shapes and forms, but which remains fundamentally and topologically a circle, which we know is fundamental to Laban's philosophy – *choreosophy*.

Finally, the central point of the diagram refers to 'I Ego' (Laban n.d.a: L/E/7/38) which in the Rosicrucian framework is the aspect which 'brings about transformation' whereby '[t]he "I" lights up in the soul and then the work on the bodies begin' (Steiner 2010: 22–23). In Laban's conception here, the 'I' occupies the central point of the lemniscate at 'level four', where the 'bodies' of the human (physical and subtle) take form and is the meeting point between the material and the spiritual. Reading vertically upwards from 'I Ego', Laban highlights in heavy red pencil (perhaps reflecting the colour of blood) a direct connection to 'felt to be touched; To be felt; Existent; In Conscious' (n.d.a: L/E/7/38). In making these correlations from 'level four' upwards through touch, feeling, existence and consciousness, he points to the bodily nature of spiritual existence and inner consciousness: that spirituality is embodied, 'touchable', 'felt' and that these elements comprise existence and consciousness. Lastly, turning the diagram 180 degrees, we can clearly see the image of a heart.

In *Choreutics*, Laban describes the heartbeat as 'a contraction of a part of the body' (1966: 29) which is ultimately a 'crystallisation' (1966: 29) mirroring body movement where 'the outer parts move towards a centre, as in crystallisation' (1966: 29). From this we might consider the heart at the centre of the processes of dynamic crystallography in body movement. The contractions

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and expansions of the heartbeat produce energetic formations of the movement of the blood and the internal rhythms of body's functions which are outwardly expressed in the body.

Throughout the ages the heart has been rich in symbolism and in much esoteric symbology represents one of two 'life-threads'. The first thread is consciousness 'anchored in the head, at the pineal gland. The second is anchored at the heart at the sino-auricular node, which is a specialised mass of tissue that governs the heartbeat' (Tansley 1977: 12). The vibration resulting from the heartbeat then generates an 'electromagnetic field' which 'envelops the entire body and extends out in all directions into the space around us' (Childre and Martin cited in Williamson 2022: 151) constituting an element of our subtle body, perceived as an 'aura' or characteristic energy of the individual. Whether or not this was Laban's intention to illustrate this we will never know, but to contemplate this possibility allows us to explore the potential for heart-centred movement where the 'unseen' characteristics of feelings, biological rhythms and the 'life-thread' of the heart might be creatively explored in movement and offers us a way-in to further contemplate how inner (unseen) dynamics create outward (seen) forms in all life.

This diagram is significant in our understanding of Laban's spiritual thinking. Unlike in any of his published works, Laban explicitly depicts aspects of body movement in relation to 'layers' or stages of existence from the material to the spiritual and incorporates theosophical terminology such as the word 'etheric', an aspect of the subtle body in theosophical and Rosicrucian philosophies. Here the seven 'planes' of existence run vertically on the image and the seven bodies of humankind run horizontally, with number four occupying the twist in the lemniscate loop along the bottom of the graph. By situating man [*sic*] at the central twist of the lemniscate band, Laban further indicates the processual nature and ongoing interrelationship of the 'inner'/unseen and 'outer'/seen aspects of being. The lemniscate expresses a continuum of experience between the spiritual and the material (and vice versa), not 'from' or 'to', but immanent and indivisible, without a break, pause or interruption matter and spirit are ineluctably entwined in an endless process of embodied becoming.

'THE GHOST FUNCTION'

In an unpublished typed and pencilled document in the archive, titled 'A fairy tale of our time: The background of the art of movement' (Laban n.d.b: L/E/5/37), Laban writes about the spiritual and material aspects of embodied consciousness, he says, 'I am a believer in the messages of the body, my senses and of ordinary action, and I am sure that logical thought and exact meanings must be able to penetrate everything and so also the ghost function' (n.d.b: L/E/5/37). He does not separate 'thought' as an activity of 'mind', but as able to exist and function in all aspects of the body, including the subtle body, and soul or 'ghost function'. He discusses these characteristics in terms of the effort and recuperation of the mover giving high value and significance to the 'ghost function' and to its integration in body movement:

> The art of movement can be considered as a lead given by the ghost function, cheerfully followed, or reluctantly accompanied by the body action […]. The best thing for man [*sic*] is to get the two, body action and ghost function to unite in common wholeness and this can be

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> excellently achieved in dancing. The brain will gain from dancing a great insight into the veracity of the dream world, even if not in the form of scientifically supported conviction about measurable facts. It looks as if the world of the ghost function is and remains a domain altogether unsuitable for cerebral exploration.
>
> (n.d.b: L/E/5/37)

Here, Laban refers directly to the two infinities (the *kinesphere*/form/space; and the *dynamosphere*/energy/inner life) in reference to the planes of existence from the material to the spiritual and their interpenetration and synthesis. We might consider from the diagram and Laban's writing here that he is suggesting that the 'ghost function' – the soul, active in the subtle body – becomes known in body action through the senses in the ways that he has depicted in this diagram sketch. Through the fundamental sense of touch (where all senses are forms of touch) in body movement our 'dreamlife' (unconscious, subtle energies) communicates to us. We are listening and aware of its voice. We return it to movement, newly expressive, the initial impression sifted and translated through the sensory-soma-psyche.

Writing in 1955, Laban referred to a 'purely emotional outbreak of a new and passionate desire to free movement from the fetters of convention' where the 'revolution in the attitude towards the art of movement coincided with man's courageous advance into the dark recesses of the unconscious sources of his general behaviour' and where 'dance more than any other art is in some way operating on the threshold of the dream-world in which this other reality resides' (1955: 13). He believed that penetration into the unconscious and deeper landscapes of existence happens through dance and the moving body and is vital to living a 'good' life, mirroring the Rosicrucian ideal of 'doing good' and the value of social cooperation, since '[h]ealthy thinking, feeling, willing, and wishing about the social organism can only develop when people are aware – even if only instinctively – that this social organism must be structured […] just as the human organism is' (Steiner 1999: 40). Laban's method for stimulating this connection was dance. He wrote: 'there is in the art of movement the body, which has to be carried to and fro over the threshold between consciousness and the unconscious' (Laban 1955: 13). Lisa Ullmann seems to concur, as she reflected on her classes with Laban which included classes in 'the other side of the art of movement' (1979: 22). She described how these involved a

> listening inward, the becoming aware of one's heartbeat and breathing […] a kind of oriental prayer […] a rhythmical interchange […] movement with its inward and outward streaming between poles of meditation, contemplation and concentration at one end and at the other, action, efficiency and practical achievement,
>
> (1979: 22)

illuminating a historical practice which used Laban's work with its spiritual context and aims somewhat intact.

Equally, Steiner's insistence on the importance of breathing for transformation to *atma* (a Sanskrit word for inner self/spirit/soul) reveals a deeply somatic viewpoint and the potential for spiritual transformation. For Steiner, the transformation of the physical body begins with the transformation of the breathing process, for atma is breath. The transformation causes

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changes in the constitution of the blood which works upon the physical body (Steiner 2000: 21).

Attention to breathing is essential to almost all soma-spiritual practices. 'Breath-as-Spirit' or 'atma' allows us to consider that our spiritual life is not something outside of us, or beyond the body. Rather, it is an aspect of our aliveness that we have separated out as an 'essence apart from corporeal life [...] when actually, spirituality derives from the Latin *spiritus*, [or] breath, from *spirare*, to blow, to breathe … [and] breath is [so] undeniably fundamental to the act of being. [It is a] force that awakens in matter a feeling of aliveness' (Schwartz 2014: 321).

Commonly, somatic movement practices position breath as the bridge between mind, body and spirit underpinning the experience of nonduality and presence. Laban was also concerned with the use of breath as a transformative aspect of movement and as creating access to the unconscious, where bodymind integration induced by breathing could lead to an awareness of one's (often unconscious) inner life, and vice versa, '[b]reathing can be influenced by startling impressions' aroused by 'inner attitudes' (Laban 1980: 107).

PROCESS, CHANGE, MOBILITY AND CRYSTALLIZATION

The combinations of pairings of spatial form and Effort dynamics in Laban's sketch in Figure 1 come together in the body not only as a 'path' towards embodied spirituality but practically create the shape or form the body takes in relation to the environment, objects or other movers. The alchemy of Effort–Space in the body generates a shape or form denoting an attitude of the mover in relationship to their environment, not as some 'higher' or disembodied form of spiritual life, but as immanently, and irresistibly entwined with the realities of material existence. In this way Effort–Space structures generate multiple, complex and highly individualized body movements which Laban viewed as a form of crystallization, which for him had a spiritual significance, which he explores in another unpublished, archived set of notes:

> The True Crystal (why not represent God as a work-man?)
> If all things and happenings are nothing other than ideas of God – which we are able to observe and in which we collaborate – we have no ground to suppose that the great producer works either by idle esthetical pleasure or with some moral or practical aim in parallel or together with our own life. We could rather suppose that he [*sic*] works simultaneously in both fashions or in an alternating rhythm, in maintaining and manifesting in this way, his own existence in time–space. In any case his work time and leisure time is filled with one great process – crystallisation. Crystallisation is his tool and his material. All things and happenings derive from it.
>
> (n.d.d: L/E/24/56)

Crystals express both process and form. In Laban's thinking form is not a static representation of movement and life, but is a dynamic expression of life itself since life is processual and unfixed, as he expresses here:

> existentialism tried to reduce, or arrest, our ideas to the formalistic approach to the phenomena of life and world in general […] fixation of or into form is death. No living being or experience has ever a clearly

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> discernible or characteristic form. What is important is the individual and transient expression or happening which never occurs again.
>
> (n.d.e: L/E/23/9)

Thus, if Space and Effort are understood as the components and structuring form of the whole, as in dynamic crystallography, then the body's ability to change shape is the transient and ever changing crystallized form and manifestation of the clustering and processual nature of Effort–Space combinations in movement. The embodied manifestation of inner life can be perceived as the process of change, not a fixed-point, form or destination, but a process of change and placement of the mover's body in space in relationship to their material and subtle worlds. Movement is then simultaneously the crystallization of the inner world of the mover and a reflection of the mover's relationship to others and the wider cosmos – movement is the dynamic media of life itself.

CONCLUSION

Acknowledging a somatic awareness of the unconscious and spiritual aspects of the moving body does not mean a raid on it to rationalize or explain it, but rather to bring it to sense-perception and therefore into contact with the mover's body and their conscious awareness. Laban provides us with an analytic taxonomy to explore, describe, experience and analyse movement, but which also opens pathways leading to the inner landscapes of the unconscious, ineffable and mysterious experiences of the subtle energetic body. In this way, exploring the unconscious and spiritual dimension of bodily movement represents a radical approach to contemporary practice of 'Laban studies'. Through practice we might aim to recuperate the ineffable and mysterious in Laban's work despite it being so well known for its rational, scientific and empirical approach to movement studies and by so doing bring it into our daily lives. As such, movers who utilize Laban's taxonomy for movement practice may come to see their body not as mere 'material' to be shaped and trained as an expressive 'tool' but as a possessing a subtle spirituality through which creativity finds its expression in body movement. Laban's poetic musing in *The Mastery of Movement* somewhat reveals this:

> the materialist is inclined to consider his own existence as well as his efforts and movement as of little account in the whirling starry universe. The materialist is wrong […]. Man's material body is like an anvil on which the blows of life incessantly beat. An unknown blacksmith seems to be busy forging an as yet unrecognisable masterpiece. In this mysterious operation, the means of character formation, tears and laughter fly like sparks, their flashes illuminating the dim light of the smithy. Man sees then the vague outline of a being whom he can recognise as the Smith and has a vague intimation of the masterpiece he is yet to be.
>
> (1980: 141)

By bringing somatic, artistic awareness and sensibility into everyday life, the mover occupies a third space in their awareness of the planes of consciousness. This place, the 'dream side of life' (Laban 1971: 3–4) which is just beneath the threshold of conscious awareness, is generative, creative and whole and

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'leads to […] a united and balanced process of living' (1971: 4). Laban was explicit about the importance of the unconscious, or 'dream side of life' as vital to artistic practice and living well, he writes:

> [it] is assumed that the human capacity of becoming conscious of the dream side of our life inevitably leads to some irrational mysticism, which cannot be really mastered and controlled. Exactly the opposite is, however, the case. Our so-called rational behaviour, and the cleverness acquired and upheld with such enormous effort and superstitious lopsidedness, becomes helpless and hopeless, if its counterpart – the dream life of man – is neglected and almost dreaded […] [a] bold approaching of the dream life is what the artist really does.
>
> (1971: 3–4)

Reintegrating the spiritual dimension of Laban's thinking to the well-known and loved analytic aspect of his work requires a 'bold approaching', because it is through movement we become aware of the spiritual, often-invisible forces which shape our lives and through which we acknowledge ourselves as beings-in-process. By acknowledging the processual nature of movement and its inherent spirituality we might mirror the same processual constitution of creativity, somatic practice and movement thinking as ways of being open to all the possibilities within us and only ever momentarily arriving at what we are 'yet to be'.

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CONTRIBUTOR DETAILS

Dr Juliet Chambers-Coe is a GL-certified movement analyst and a lecturer in movement at E15 Acting School at the University of Essex. Her research focuses on Rudolf Laban's philosophy of movement and its spiritual foundations, with a particular focus on training actors. Since 2005 she has worked extensively as a movement educator across the United Kingdom in acting conservatoire training schools and in the United States and China. Juliet is proud to be a board member of The Association for Somatic Movement Dance Therapies: UK & Republic of Ireland and is associate artistic director of The Makings of the Actor International Practice-Research Centre. She is also the founder and creator of the Labanarium: Resource and Network Centre (www.labanarium.com for the International Movement Community, a project that supports the sharing and development of movement and dance research and scholarship in the tradition of Rudolf Laban which aims to reach across institutional and geographic boundaries. Juliet lives in Southend-on-Sea with her husband and their three children.

Contact: East 15 Acting School, University of Essex, Loughton Campus, Rectory Lane, Loughton IG10 3RY, UK.
E-mail: jlcham@essex.ac.uk

https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4959-7226

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