

Articulations for the Articulate Artist

written by Sarah Day

- articulate-** 1. endowed with the power of speech
- articulation-** 1. to pronounce distinctly and carefully; to enunciate
2. the coherent expression of thoughts, ideas, or feelings
3. the connection of different parts by joints; to be jointed or segmented

Any artist, in any discipline, is at an expressive advantage the more they understand their medium. The art form of dance may best be defined by the expressive faculties of the dancer, taking into account not only technical prowess but also emotive eloquence as evoked by the body in a series of physical choices. As dancers, it is to our greatest benefit in training to temper our creativity with applied anatomical knowledge in order to attain the most effectual and malleable state of our body instrument. By this, in turn, we may best serve the impulses of our poetic desires.

Let us first acknowledge the myriad possibilities for movement in space and time that are already inherent in the structural design of our bodies, before even initiating movement. All of the elements that we study in the Axis Syllabus, the anatomy, biomechanics, physics, structural integrity- each aspect moves us deeper into the educated body form. Not just any body, but with great respect for one's own, in all of its particularities, strengths, and limitations. This is our point of departure and the place we return to, our center zone from which all further embarkations radiate.

There is a great expressive freedom in understanding the capability of ones own body and the elements that comprise the body's unique language. The dancer is the body author. The more words within one's grasp, the more complex ideas we can convey in myriad shades of meaning.

Organization of physical form/ organization of thought-form, hand in hand they travel towards manifesting a particular creative expression.

Dynamic Conceptions of Alignment

If we consider alignment as a state of maintaining structural integrity while navigating transitions, our ideology of the term becomes more active than commonly assumed verticality or straight lines. The simple paradigm shift away from alignment as a linear concept can in itself dramatically re-orient our perspectives of the body's range of possibility. With these changed points of reference the body can begin to employ more dynamic directionality, finding greatly expanded variables in the orientation of our primary motion centers.

Within this expanded frame of alignment we can then also play with varying degrees of tensegrity (tensional integrity) and tonicity in the body as we move. The potentials can be used effectively for the creation of particular physical states to induce a certain timbre

through the body. With conscious articulation, this distinguished timbre may be extended to the viewer.

Technicality and Aesthetics

We can seek refinement of the body through enhanced physical articulation, activating cognizance and sensorial intelligence, towards the refinement of our creative endeavors. Dedication to learning the mechanisms of movement opens innumerable doors for greater aesthetic choice. Choice is power. The desire to expand the articulation of creative ideas leads to the desire to understand the effects of varying choices in movement. Each decision produces a different physical outcome, and these in turn will convey unique aesthetic or emotive impacts. Towards this goal, parallel means come into play: the need to fine tune (proprioception, reflex, physical control, coordination), and the significance of experimentation.

On reflex: We can instill motion parameters that ensure the contractile potential, and thereby reflex potential, of our muscles. This is important not only for the purpose of safety in high dynamic situations, but also makes certain that we have access to all reflex choices, and thereby aesthetic choices while dancing. In the processes of creating new dance material, improvisational performance, or dancing with others, reflex as an aesthetic tool for articulation becomes readily apparent. It assists us responding in meaningful ways to the elements around us, expressing precisely what we want in the just-right moment.

Decreasing Inertial Resistance and Organizing with Momentum

As we approach higher velocities in our dancing, the ability to change directions quickly is a desirable skill. Physics will tell us that it is easier to alter the course of many small portions than that of one large mass. Taking into account the conception of space as curved and multi-dimensional (vs. flat/ planar), and also repetition in the body of spiraling architectures (from DNA to bone formation), encourages motion based on these fractals of the body. We can then access greater variables in movement sequencing for decisive action. Change-ability.

The skill of sequentially deploying our many small parts allows us to embrace what physics has to offer while attaining an artful coherence of movement. In the case of momentum, having an applied understanding of the architecture and physics in the moving body allows us to wield these forces in service to our artistic taste. Without this integration of control and choice, we are set loose in a flailing form caught up by its own trajectory, and relatively at the mercy of these forces.

That said, this aspect of abandon can certainly be useful in exploration, a way of locating and expanding our boundaries (and can be fun!). However, it is best employed with some knowledge of how to organize ourselves efficiently within, and in relation to, these various forces to maintain structural integrity.

Support/ Oscillation/ Undulation

In our intimate relationship with gravity, we must find support in order to expand. In much the same way that a shifted notion of alignment broadens our physical vocabulary, the idea of support as a non-static form enlivens our moving expressivity.

As an example, we can harness the potential of an extended limb of the body (such as the dancer's leg in arabesque) by allowing the source of the extension to have movement, to fluctuate, in relation to the extension. In the realm of creative enunciation, we allow an amplified form, a breathing changing shape alive with many potential stories. On the anatomical level, blocking such movement results in a loss of kinetic availability, and may also result in some harm to the body such as a “jamming” of the joint structure from which the extension occurs, or a joint pulled beyond beneficial parameters. This is not to say that static shapes should not be employed in the creative process, they too can speak volumes in their concentrated energy. Rather, the desire is to enhance the availability of all of our physical options when organizing our creative constructs.

In this vein, maintenance of all spinal curves and informed articulation of all motion segments in the spine ensures adequate distribution of energy between the proximal motion centers and the extremities. The lack of this integration may tend towards a lessened sense of vitality, quite literally a loss of energy, in the extremities when executing a movement. As performers, we strive towards an activated form, presence in all action.

Blocking the minute fluctuations in our dynamically structured spine may also impede the easeful transfer of the central weight mass from one primary support to the next, resulting in gaps along the line of communication as undulation travels through the body. At the least, this dampens the potential kinetic energy generated and the visual fluency of motion, if not also throwing us into the ungovernable territories of no sufficient support structure.

It is in part the delicate fluctuations throughout all portions of the body that imbue the dancer with an air of power, intricacy of expression, and the sought after resonance with the viewer. In so choosing the path of “dancer,” what is our responsibility: as artists, body-speakers, as translators of both external and internal worlds? Perhaps it is to become as articulate as possible. To continue learning this multi-faceted language of the articulating body in order to speak it eloquently, and thereby invite communication and greater understanding.

A poetic addendum to commend the courage of those who dance, and all artists in turn:

What recklessness we invite, to name ourselves Artiste and stand bare-skinned waiting for whatever animal would inhabit us of this particular hour. The small patient body of an artist, the vulnerability, the bravery of asking to be filled, consumed, a conduit for an unknown blaze. We are courageous in our conviction to stand so naked, ultimately alone, and wait for spark. No armor, no shield, no front lines, no lions. To stand in the empty-space, we are an invitation. To name oneself Artiste is to ask forces greater than to

take hold of our minds, to wreak beautiful havoc on our so-small-limbs, knowing that we will stand alone at the end, and wait again.