
Schrifttanz Zwei

Susan Wiesner

swiesner@umd.edu

University of Maryland, United States of America

Rommie L. Stalnaker

rstalnaker81@gmail.com

Independent Scholar

Stephen Ramsay

sramsay.unl@gmail.com

University of Nebraska-Lincoln, United States of America

Brian Pytlik Zillig

bzillig1@unl.edu

University of Nebraska-Lincoln, United States of America

This proposed panel will use a phenomenological perspective as well as a production-oriented approach to the work/research on which we are collaborating ('Schrifttanz zwei'). Although digital technologies support this multi-disciplinary project that combines archival research, dance choreography, music composition, animation creation, and video projection with a goal of performance production, this panel will present our collaborative process and how we access and move through the digital and analog spaces in which we each work. The hope is that through this discussion (and performance event) attendees (and we as collaborators) will come to better understand the place of the Arts (Humanities writ large) in the Digital world.

The idea for Schrifttanz zwei began at the DH2016 conference where long-time DHers Steve Ramsay and Brian Pytlik Zillig presented their work with music and animation: 'Picture to Score: Driving Vector Animations with Music in the XML Ecosystem'. Well known for their work within the Digital Humanities arena, their presentation demonstrated that the two had crossed boundaries into the non-verbal world of the arts. Two attendees who listened to their talk quickly became interested in collaborating. But these two, Rommie Stalnaker and research colleague Susan Wiesner, hail from the other side of the fence: they are Performing Artists who choreograph, perform, and conduct DH research using Dance. Sharing their desire to work with Ramsay and Pytlik Zillig, the four became

inspired by the possibilities and began what has become an exciting collaboration challenged by three time zones, 3000 miles, and four personal processes for re-imagining a dance score created in 1927 by Irmgard Bartenieff, founder of the Laban/Bartenieff Institute for Movement Studies.

The original document from which we re-imagine the dance was discovered during the processing of an archival collection at the University of Maryland Special Collections in the Performing Arts. Bartenieff, a dancer and student of Rudolf Laban, brought Laban's theories about movement and his notation system to the USA in 1936 when she emigrated from Germany. Bartenieff began composing dances while studying with Laban in 1926-1929, yet she wasn't yet an expert in Schrifttanz, Laban's initial label for his notation system (Kinetography Laban, or Labanotation). Instead, she used her own hybrid system consisting of symbols, colour, and text to describe the dance movement and space. Better known for her work with Somatics, Laban's Effort/Shape theories, Motif writing, and Labanotation, the discovery of 4 choreographic works within Bartenieff's notebooks dated 1927-28 generated a desire to see them off the page (excerpt included here, Figure 1).

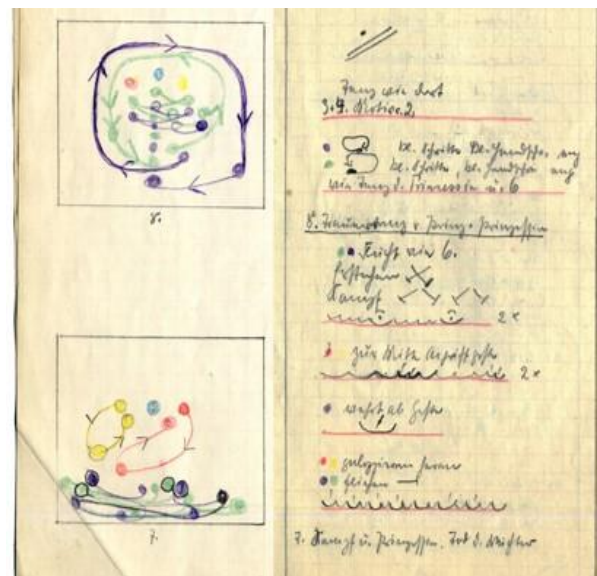


Figure 1: Excerpt from one of Bartenieff's notebooks

Because there are few particulars surrounding the work (who, what, when, where), we recognized that it is impossible to recreate it as it was without additional sources of information. Thus we decided to proceed with a re-imagining of the score to challenge our disciplinary approaches while giving voice to our individual

creativity. For example, although the score is not written using Motif writing, nor Labanotation as we know them today, Bartenieff did call upon her knowledge of Laban Movement Analysis (LMA) by including a few elements in her textual descriptions. As the choreographers and dancers are all either CMAs or students of LMA we were able to understand those concepts integral to LMA. Also, we were able to support the movement choices made during the re-imagining by referring to Rudolf Laban's theory (from his 1926 *Choregraphie*), Bartenieff's personal movement style (referred to in archival papers as "Light"), and an analysis of the movement vocabularies used by German choreographers working in the 1920s.

Another factor in this project is the acknowledgment that researchers who attempt to use Laban theory and Notation in Computer Recognition and HCI continue to encounter what are often perceived as insurmountable issues. With the inclusion of LMA into *Schrifttanz zwei* (analyzing the performative product) we will not only use Bartenieff's work to inspire, but also to move closer to solving some of the issues faced by researchers using movement-based data. Thus, previous work on the ARTeFACT project (Wiesner and Stalnaker), which has long strived toward the use of Motif writing and LMA to enable automated tagging and retrieval of movement-based data, supports *Schrifttanz zwei* as yet another piece of the puzzle toward these goals.

So, too, does *Schrifttanz zwei* enable all team members to acknowledge our creative practices within a research framework. We each must interpret the verbal instructions and visualizations on some level through sound, visuals, and physical movement, i.e. the choreographic process must find a mutuality with Ramsay's musical composition and Brian's SVG videos inspired by Bartenieff's choreographic notes, graphics, and descriptions. Ramsay and Pytlik Zillig's recent artistic work uses Indigo, a program developed by Brian L. Pytlik Zillig for performing command-line stop-motion animation using Scalable Vector Graphics (SVG). Indigo produces thirty SVG files for each second of film, rasterizes them into JPEG images, and assembles them into H.264 high-definition video. Indigo animations can be quite simple or very complex. They may include text, shapes, colors, paths, layers, masks, and patterns. Indigo may be used to construct elaborate jointed characters that walk, talk, dance, or fly. Animations are modeled in XSLT and SVG, and can be programmatically synchronized with pre-existing audio using MusicXML metadata.

Schrifttanz zwei is admittedly an interdisciplinary

artistic collaboration, but we would argue that the production of a work of art does not preclude the use of the digital; and indeed, *Schrifttanz zwei* includes born-digital elements (music and animation) intertwined with the born-human components and written/archived texts. Also, this collaboration is possible because of the prior work of the collaborators as it reflects the early phases of ARTeFACT and Ramsay and Pytlik Zillig's work with animation produced from digitized musical scores (Indigo). The proposed panel will address our collective and individual experiences in our art forms, as well as experiences using text and movement-based approaches in our DH research. Further this project is intended to create a Whole, where all voices and art forms share equal value with the supporting technologies, without privileging any one element. To accomplish this, we must negotiate within Digital Humanities AND the Arts. In fact, through this collaboration we have been made even more aware of the conversations surrounding definitions of the Digital Humanities, a topic we keep returning to during our collaboration. To wit: what is the place of the Arts in the Digital Humanities and what is required of a project to be aligned with the Digital Humanities? As DH artists as well as producers and users of digital technologies (e.g. Indigo, ARTeFACT, IDMove, etc.), we hope this panel/performance will provoke discussion and perhaps inspire others to find ways to access other 'outlier' disciplines through collaborative activities. Finally, as this collaboration constantly reminds us: "As technology and machines consume more and more of life, perhaps theater [read: dance] can help us remember what it means to act like a human." (Moore, 2016)

As an added component -- although the non-verbal is not included as an official ADHO language -- we plan to consider it as a communication method by allowing attendees to access their embodied knowledge through a brief non-verbal experience during the panel, including a request that some questions be asked and answered non-verbally.

Bibliography

- Coartney, J. and Wiesner, S. (2009), 'Performance as Digital Text: capturing signals and secret messages in the media rich experience' in *Literary and Linguistic Computing* Special Edition, 24:2, June 2009.

Irmgard Bartenieff Papers, Special Collections in the Performing Arts, University of Maryland Libraries.

Laban, R. (1926), *Choregraphie* Jena: Eugen Diederichs Verlag.

Moore, Tracey. (2016) "Why Theater Majors Are Vital in the Digital Age". The Chronicle of Higher Education. 3 April. Web. <http://www.chronicle.com/article/Why-Theater-Majors-Are-Vital/235925?cid=cp79>

Simpson, T., Wiesner, S., and Bennett, B. (2014). 'Dance Recognition System Using Lower Body Movement' in *Journal of Applied Biomechanics* 30:1, February 2014.

Wiesner, S., Bennett, B., and Stalnaker, R. (2011). 'AR-TeFACT Movement Thesaurus', White Paper, NEH Office of Digital Humanities.

Wiesner, S. and Stalnaker, R. (2016). 'Representing Conflict through Dance: using quantitative methods to study choreographic time, stage space, and the body in motion,' in *With(out) Trace: inter-disciplinary investigations into time, space and the body*, Dwyer, S., R. Franks and R. Green (Eds). e-book, Inter-Disciplinary Press, Oxford: United Kingdom.

Wiesner, S., Stalnaker, R. and Austin, A. (2016). 'Training the Machine: Movement and Metaphor' in *Embodied Performance: Design, Process and Narrative*, Oxford: Inter-Disciplinary Press.