

A MARTHA GRAHAM DANCE TECHNIQUE CLASS:
SYMBOLS IN THE SEMIOTIC

"We might visualize a semiotic system that depended, in the absence of the power of speech, upon the apperception by the human participants of contextually defined logical relations among themselves in space. Let us say: the relative position of each participant to another in a gathering, and to items in a fixed environment. The 'elements' of the semiotic would be stated by their existential presence and would acquire 'meaning' ('value') through the 'relations', which would themselves be apperceptible as some kind of syntax. The possible range of such separate semiotics without speech is great. Careful structuring of the bio-physical environment would be required, for the actors themselves are symbols in the semiotic..."

(Ardener, 1971:xlii-xliv)

Pressing a buzzer on the door of the Martha Graham School of Contemporary Dance at 315 East 63rd Street in New York City and leaving the noise and confusion of Second Avenue behind, one enters into a differently ordered world. Straight ahead through a short narrow hallway is the registration desk, where a young man or woman sits waiting to collect or sell class tickets and cards¹ and to supply information. Farther ahead, dancers line the hallway leading into Studio I, which is the largest and most coveted of the building's three studios. Space is extremely valuable here.

Male students proceed down the hallway and, just before reaching the doors of Studio I, enter a small dressing room to the right. Women turn right at the registration desk and ascend a flight of stairs to the second floor to change clothes. There the people walking back and forth consist of school administrators, female faculty and company members, and students; all are minimally accommodated in the tiny rooms that serve as offices and changing rooms. Students consult a schedule posted on the dressing room door to see where their class will take place and who will teach and accompany it.

The atmosphere in the dressing room is business-like, and an aura of seriousness permeates the air. Everyone seems to have a specific routine as street clothes are rapidly exchanged for leotards, tights, and leg-warmers.² Long hair is bound tightly into some shape that can lie relatively flat against the skull. Some people put on makeup or refresh the old. Dancers who know each other talk about their diets, injuries, and recent dance

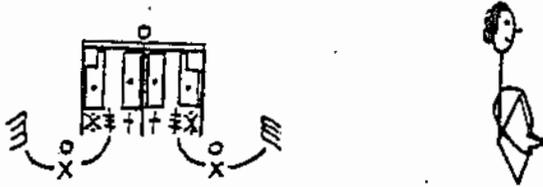
concerts they may have seen or are about to see.

Downstairs the doors to Studio I open, and a half dozen sweaty company members emerge from a rehearsal; they saunter into the company lounge by way of the kitchen, which rooms are both considered to be hallowed ground in the sense that they are used only by company members and are closed to the student population. Students pick up their 'dance bags', an essential element of the serious dancer's daily accoutrement, and enter the studio. Shoes are removed at the door out of a traditionally established respect for the floor, and all bags are placed along the rear wall.

The studio is spacious, and although the presence of thirty or more dancers fills the room, mirrors covering the south wall accentuate and seem to extend the space. Dancers move quickly to their 'spots' on the floor, which are not assigned places but are chosen by the dancers. The untutored observer is usually unaware that there is an unwritten code among students and teachers which dictates that more experienced dancers often sit in the front row, and that once a dancer chooses a spot, he or she has certain rights to it for the duration of the class. A dancer usually finds a particular spot in the studio that is suitable for an extended period of time, say a month or two, at which point another is found. Criteria for choosing a spot may include proximity to the mirrors, a good sight line to the teacher, a feeling for the right or left side of the room, distance from the mirrors or teacher, and such. A person's 'place' is regarded as property, and a dancer may even ask another to 'save' the spot while attention is paid to some last minute detail before class.

Once in their places, dancers begin to stretch their bodies, some seated and others standing. Many become introspective at this point, executing movements they have done so many times before that they form a personalized kind of routine. They anticipate the beginning of class, and hope that it will be a good one.³

The Studio door opens again; this time the teacher and accompanist enter together, walking directly to their respective places at the front of the room and at the grand piano in the left hand corner. As they enter, the class rises en masse to stand facing the mirrors with legs together in 'first position'.⁴ All talking has stopped, and the dancers continue their silent gesture of respect until the instructor says, "You may be seated." Everyone sits on the floor quickly and assumes the beginning position for a Graham class: soles of the feet touch one another, hands loosely hold the ankles, and the torso remains erect (as in Figure 1). The instructor, having checked to see that all are at attention, issues the command, "Ready, and ...".



(Fig. 1)

Rounded torsos 'bounce' in unison; cryptic messages that the dancers evidently have no trouble understanding convey what is to be done next. Referring to the epigraph that heads this essay, we may take this situation to be an example of the kinds of 'structuring' and unspoken rules which Ardener visualizes. The technical language used to teach Graham's idiom of dancing includes what might appear to be unintelligible usages of everyday English terms: "The breathings on 2, twice, on 4, twice, finish high release on the fifth". "Turns around the back, on 3 left and right, the 6's, the opening with contraction back arms wrapped, around and back -- two times, finish open on the third". 'Breathings', 'high releases', 'turns around the back' and 'opening with contraction back' all are names of specific actions. The tendency to use a noun form instead of a verb to describe these actions will be discussed later in this essay. The phrases 'on 2' or 'on 4' and 'the 5's' refer to the meter in which the exercise is to be performed. Incomprehensible to the uninitiated, these usages of English are neither ungrammatical nor incomprehensible to dancers in the context of a Graham Technique class.

The instructor may give only the slightest indication of the movements with her own body in the intermediate and advanced classes, during the first twenty-five minutes of the class, as these vocal commands are sufficient for students to understand what is expected. However, if there is a pause for corrections, or if an unusual variation of an exercise is asked for, the instructor will accompany the request with a demonstration 'full out'. Few questions are asked, although they are not overtly discouraged. Students seem to be generally concerned with themselves and do not pay much attention to those around them during this first part of class, although they can be seen looking at their own reflections in the mirrors.

The Graham Technique class is constructed so as to develop mastery of movement in five basic categories on the up/down dimension. They are: (1) on the floor -- seated or supine, (2) on

the knees, (3) standing (both in place and moving through space, (4) in the air, and (5) 'the falls', which are taught at all vertical levels, the ultimate 'fall' (the 'standing back fall') making use of three levels (standing, seated, supine -- and back to standing). One more category, used only occasionally now, is movement 'at the barre'.⁵

Upon completing the floorwork, most of the dancers are sweating. Some are entirely soaked. This is desirable from their points of view, and class is proceeding well if they 'break sweat' early on. Unlike models in the fashion industry, to whom visible sweat represents a blemish upon one's appearance, dancers may pride themselves on the amount of sweat that is visible all over their bodies, and the speed with which it appears. To them, sweat is indicative of hard work and zealous dancing.⁶ On the other hand, both dancers and athletes appreciate the state of 'breaking sweat' as an indication of a certain readiness of the muscles to move in a vigorous and agile manner.

At this point in the class, the dancers perform various exercises for the legs and feet as well as for the torso, in preparation for the longer combinations to be done across the floor from one corner to the other. They show signs of competition with one another as they begin these longer combinations. It is this last section of class that students look forward to, for it is a chance to 'really dance', a distinction being made between 'dancing' and 'doing' the combinations that are geared more to technical mastery and routine. Ideally, the entire class is intended to be a dancing experience, but many dancers do regard the last part of class as being closer to the performance or dancing experience, while the first and larger portion of class is considered to be concerned with 'technique'. It is at the end of the class that they have a chance to demonstrate their abilities as performers.

Class ends with a series of movements called 'falls'.⁷ Dancers return to their previous places on the floor. The 'fall' is done slowly at first; then, on successive falls, counts are eliminated one by one and the movement 'telescoped', until finally the dancers fall to the floor on one count and recover to a standing position on one count. The instructor then thanks the class and the accompanist while the students offer their applause. Class is over.

Students collect their belongings and head for the dressing rooms, stopping to buy a can of juice from the machine in the hall upstairs. A few remain behind to clarify a point with the instructor, or to scrutinize themselves as they practice a stretch of movement one more time. While changing, there is discussion of the class, the teacher, the weather and 'what's new'. Drenched

tights and leotards are peeled off, bodies wiped dry or showered, and street clothes replaced.

As the students leave the building for the outside world, they carry their dancer's persona on the inside. Even disguised in 'civilian' clothes, a seasoned New Yorker may easily recognize a dancer by certain telltale signs. If hair dressing (which often remains on the street as it was for class) or dance bag do not reveal the identity, then the dancer's distinctive gait may do so: legs continue to be rotated outwards as in class, for example, effecting a kind of 'waddle' (although this is particularly accentuated among ballet dancers), but most of all the body is held erect and taut, alert and poised as if to spring into action at any moment. Some are headed towards another dance class in another studio; others will go home, or engage in some other activity. The 'return', however, is always to the dance class, and everything else is 'what happens until the next class', which for many of these people is more 'home' than home.

Commitment

The school provides the locus for learning the Graham Technique, for acquiring mastery of the idiom, which is one of the internal 'goods' which may be obtained through the kinds of commitment that professional dancers make. Other benefits associated with the practice of dancing may include spiritual development, increased good health, self-discipline and various experiential opportunities such as those which accompany paid travel to foreign countries.

By committing him or herself to the practice of dancing, the dancer also becomes associated with at least one institution of dancing. The kinds of training available in most educational dance departments (in contrast to private studios or conservatories) in the United States usually prepares a student to continue as a dance educator, therapist, historian or critic, and not as a professional dancer.⁸ The most obvious external 'good' for the university trained dance student is a degree, a credential that might, but does not always, aid in the procurement of a job. More often, it is in the professional studio or conservatory that professionally recognized standards of preparation take place. The ultimate goal, or external 'good', towards which the professional dancer strives is association with a company, where he or she enjoys a certain amount of prestige, status, power and money.⁹

Not all American modern dance companies are connected to schools that specifically transmit the technique or idiom of dance which dominates a company's repertoire. Those which are so connected consist mainly of larger well-established companies. They are usually headed by a dominant artist who choreographs many,

if not all of the works that are performed and by whose name the company is identified. The establishment of such schools requires considerable financial means, and of the several hundred companies in New York City alone, only a fraction have managed to open and maintain schools.

The school is valuable to the life of a company, for it provides a physical 'home' -- a space in which rehearsals may take place. These must be scheduled around and between class hours. The school also provides a means of supplying the company with potential company members who are trained in the idiom of body language that is practiced by the company. Although dancers are often recruited from outside of a company's school, it is preferable to hire dancers who are 'native speakers' of the particular body language.

At the Graham school, classes are attended by a wide variety of people who have many different reasons for studying Graham Technique. Professionals and professionally-minded students refer to the event as 'taking class',¹⁰ with a slightly prescriptive tone to the utterance, as in 'taking medicine'. For this category of person, 'taking class' is a daily event, with the possible exception of one day per week, since it is generally believed to be healthy for body and spirit to include an occasional, regular day of rest. Others may attend the classes more sporadically out of a desire for physical fitness or because it is regarded as a hobby or avocation; however, since the concern in this essay is with Graham Technique as a body language, we will concentrate upon the 'native speaker'; that is, upon the accomplished dancer, for whom it appears to be second nature to perform the technique -- to 'speak' or 'utter' the body language.

For the very small community of individuals who have chosen to devote their lives to professional modern dancing,¹¹ each 'taking' of a class is an act of re-commitment and an affirmation of self-identity. It is in and through the class that the student will eventually take on her (or his) dancer's persona. As with many other professions in the western world, which "... exist in almost airtight communities of specialization ..." (Ross, 1970:10), dancers identify very strongly with their professional personas. At a cocktail party, for example, one is far more likely to hear the phrase, "I am a dancer", than the simpler, but vastly different assertion, "I dance", in response to the question, "What do you do?" This tendency to identify with some 'thing', expressed vocally as nouns (a dancer) rather than with verbs (the act) is exemplified in an interesting way by the sets of names that are given to the Graham vocabulary of movements.

The relationship between features of a spoken language and patterns of thought, which may be peculiar to a particular society,

has been of increasing interest to modern social and cultural anthropologists. In their studies among the Navajo, Worth and Adair have pointed out a similar, yet opposite, tendency to that of Graham dancers with regard to the general prevalence of nouns or verbs in the spoken language. There is thus a correspondence between Navajo usage of the camera to make motion pictures and the Navajo language: the Navajo's concern is with "... not what will happen, but how it happens" (1972:207). Worth and Adair refer to this orientation towards motion rather than stillness as "eventing" (1972:199-207).

Studies of such general dispositions, if taken to a greater depth than can be achieved here, would doubtless yield valuable insights into cultural thought and value systems. For example, in the case of Graham's idiom of body language, there exists an apparent contradiction in that movement principles have names which are nouns, perhaps more appropriate for the description of static positions, rather than verbs (or present participles) more appropriate to the description of actions.¹² However, one could justify the rather puzzling linguistic connection if matters are seen in another light, taking into account that the technique itself is based upon sets of oppositions, one of which is motion/stillness.¹³

Regular attendance at classes is imperative for at least the following three reasons: (a) it is here where the student actually learns the idiom of body language, its rule-structures and basic vocabulary. This process is at least as difficult and time-consuming as learning a spoken or signed language as a second language, and anything less than daily attendance at classes greatly impairs the speed with which learning the idiom of dancing may be accomplished; (b) as is the case when one learns a spoken language as a second language, in the early stages of learning Graham Technique it is often easier to understand the idiom, its rules and how one is meant to produce it than it is actually to produce it properly. Daily practice is necessary at first to instill, and later, to improve and reinforce 'muscular memory';¹⁴ (c) after a certain level of competence is reached, if daily practice routine is interrupted for longer than three or four days, the body instrument begins to lose a significant degree of its tone and fine-tuning. Muscles constrict and begin to feel 'rusty', and if more than a week elapses during which the dancer does not attend classes, it can take as much as twice that length of time to regain former flexibility and ease of movement. If this seems to be an excessive routine, one need only think of those maintained by professional athletes (say, Olympic gymnasts) or of those intellectual rigors maintained by professionals in academic fields for that matter, to realize that the professional dancer's situation is comparable, in the sense that constant and consistent efforts are necessary in order to maintain excellence.

The serious dance student has made a commitment which must be renewed each day, which pertains in one sense to the profession as a whole. In another sense, as with the learning of any other skill, this student makes numerous commitments throughout each class. All of the information learned in the technique class is gradually committed to subsidiary awareness until only that which is necessary to the act of performing remains at the center of his or her focal attention (cf. Polanyi, 1958:59-62). By the time an aspiring dancer can finally execute a 'standing back fall',¹⁵ so many rules and movement principles have been committed to subsidiary awareness that an explanation of how to execute the action is a far more arduous task than performing it.

At the beginning of a Graham dancer's training, the internalization of rules takes place through the repetition of movement utterances which are prescribed not only by the instructor, but by the idiom itself. These beginning dancers do not make up their own sequences of action signs in the classroom. However, as the dancer passes from the state of novice to that of professional, a greater freedom is allowed in that the dancer may begin to interpret a phrase differently from the interpretation offered by the instructor, or by other dancers in the class. Such interpretations are accomplished by means of "... a process of active construction ..." (Chomsky, 1980:203). Professional Graham dancers may also contribute their own creativity, producing new utterances in the idiom, within the context of an improvisation for Graham in a rehearsal for a new dance (see Puri and Hart, 1982:81-2).

Both in the cases of first language acquisition and learning Graham Technique, there are several features of the process involved which are distinctively human (in contrast to non-human, but sensate, species of creatures), the most distinguishable of which is seen here to be the "reflective application of a criterion" (Winch, citing Oakeshott, 1958:58-60). The habits that animals may form (i.e. various alleged 'dances' of bees, and other creatures, altered by stimuli that are introduced by human agents) are thus seen to be distinct from human activities, such as danced idioms, which require knowledge of a right and wrong way to perform something. As Winch has said,

There is a sense in which to acquire a habit is to acquire a propensity to go on doing the same kind of thing; there is another sense in which this is true of learning a rule. These senses are different and a great deal hangs on the difference (1958:59-60).

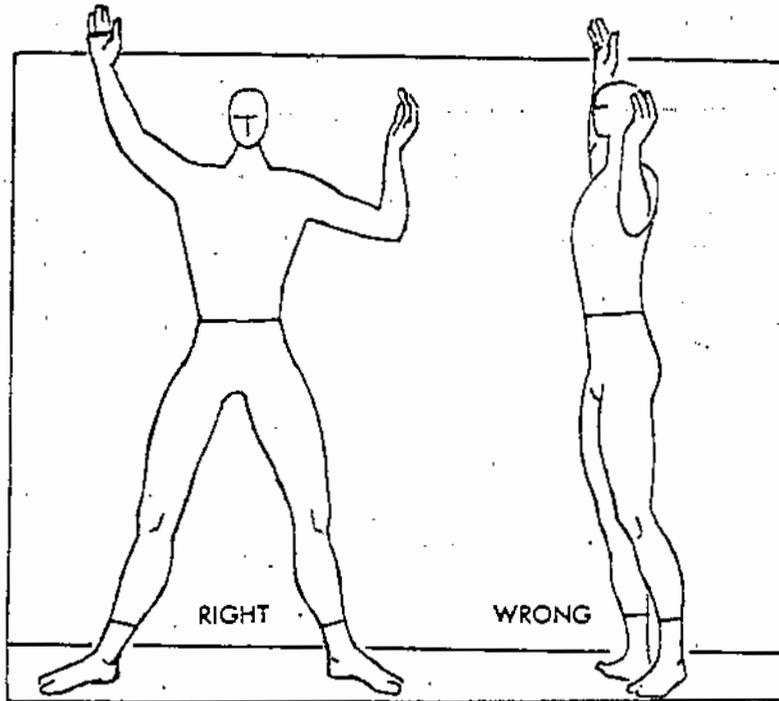
Suffice it to say that some of the first rules that one learns in a Graham Technique class (apart from those which pertain to the spatially ritualized and customary inter-personal aspects of the

classes) are concerned with specific structured usages of time/space. These can be perceived through the recognition that complete order exists in the classroom from beginning to end, and many of the rules for maintaining this order are unspoken. Such rules are acquired quickly during the first classes that are attended; they are transmitted by the teacher and other students who are already familiar with them. By the time a dancer can claim the title of 'professional', such rules are completely taken for granted -- they have become a 'mode' or 'form-of-life'.

Earlier on (see p. 1-2, supra) the notion that dancers come to 'possess' a particular small area of the classroom space before the class begins was introduced. This process takes place on a first-come-first-served basis, so that those dancers to whom placement in the room matters a great deal tend to arrive earlier than others in order to stake their claims. This can be done in several ways: a dancer may simply occupy the chosen spot and remain there until class begins, doing warm-up exercises or chatting with other dancers. An alternative strategy is for the dancer to leave an outer article of clothing (leg-warmers or sweat-shirt) in the desired place rather than to occupy it physically, thus indicating that the spot is 'taken'. A dancer may also ask someone else to make sure that nobody comes to sit in that place while he or she is momentarily absent.

Once the class begins, each dancer maintains a separate relationship to the total classroom space, which is dependent upon his or her placement in the room. The classroom is regarded as a 'stage', the mirrored wall representing the audience, or what is called 'front'. Many exercises at the beginning of the class are performed such that the frontal plane of the body is directly parallel to this 'front'. There are positive values attached to exposing the anterior, rather than the posterior planes of the body to other people. It is seen in the danced context to represent such qualities as 'vulnerability' and one's 'insides'. There is a tendency, too, in American modern dance in general, to identify the frontal plane of the dancer's body as the most important part of the dancer to be seen by an audience. Humphrey speaks for many American dance artists when she states that

The lines of the body can be all but obliterated by improper choices of direction, and a great deal of effort can be wasted when the movement does not clearly address itself to the one open side of the stage. For instance, a dancer, facing off stage and standing in second position, with his arms to the side, is throwing away about half his body. Just as it is absolutely elementary for the actor to be heard, so the dancer must be seen (1959:85-86, and see Fig. 2).



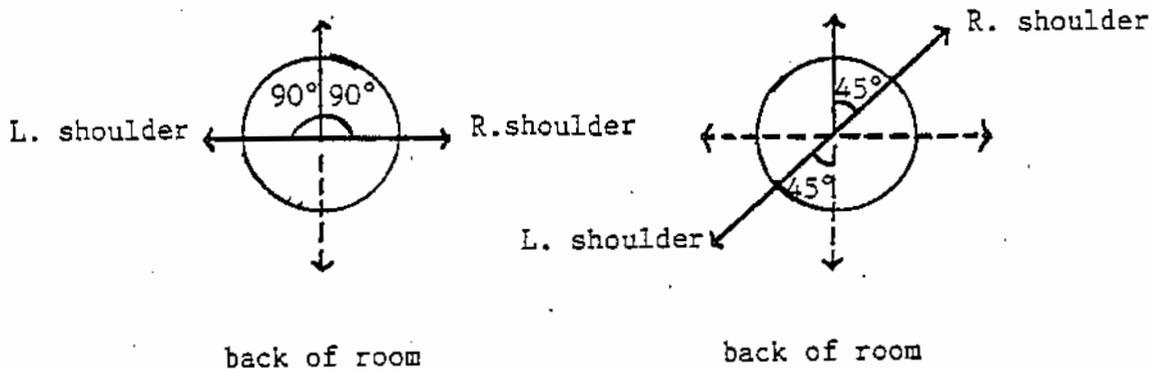
(diagram from Humphrey, 1959:86)

(Fig. 2)

In the Graham Technique, however, to perform all exercises with this frontal orientation would be seen as quite limiting, as such performances would render a flattened, two-dimensional image of the body. Therefore, the Graham dancer is taught almost immediately the use of a "Via Triumphalis" that is seen to lie internal to the body instrument. Although this folk model does not include Humphrey's term as a descriptor of this principle for moving,¹⁶ there is a strong enough connection between this spatial metaphor and its logical internalization into the visible body language itself to warrant its use as a particularly appropriate description at an analytical level.

When practicing this principle for action, called 'spiraling',

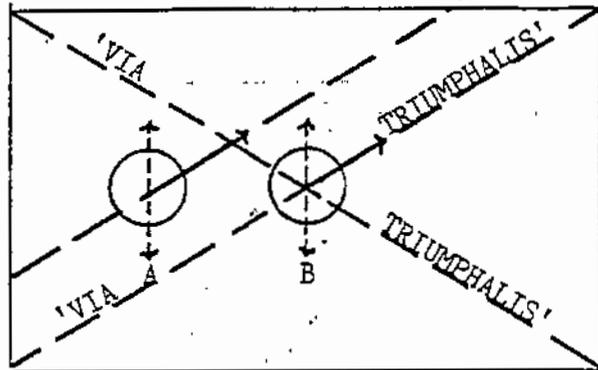
the torso turns around its own axis up to forty-five degrees so that one side moves forward as the other side moves back, thus creating a diagonal through the body (see Fig. 3). In fact, the precise degree of turn is relative to the dancer's position in the room, and may or may not be forty-five degrees. Much of the time, a smaller degree of spiral is appropriate.



(Fig. 3)

Depending upon where the dancer is situated, his or her internal diagonal may or may not correspond to the diagonals of the room. The Graham dancer is not expected to aim his or her shoulders at the audience or to gaze towards the corners of the room in the manner of ballet dancers, but rather to produce a sense of matching the tensions of those imagined lines producing a similar tension in his or her own personal space. For example, while doing the same exercise, dancer A (see Fig. 4) would not attempt to focus on the same spot as dancer B, unless, in a piece of choreography, the requirements were precisely that the two dancers both focus upon some common object.

mirrored wall ('audience')



(Fig. 4)

These and other rules of orienting self in the danced space are built into the technique class and are learned along with movement principles, during the course of training. When finally the dancer is ready to appear on the stage, the only adjustment that is necessary is to take into account any difference between the dimensions of the class or rehearsal space and those of the stage, since essentially the stage is a teleomorphic model for the classroom.¹⁷

There is far more concern with geometrical spatial relations of this kind now than there was previously, when Graham was forging her first movement materials. In earlier days, before ballet dancers and the influence of ballet technique were incorporated into her work, emphasis was placed less upon a sense of 'line' than upon the motivation for moving. Helpert has stated that "Unison work by Graham's group was achieved by sharing a common attack (dynamic phrasing), not by reproducing the way other dancers looked" (1981:90). It is a significant diachronic development in the growth and enrichment of Graham's body language that in rehearsals now¹⁸ corrections given to chorus members often refer to whether or not the linear 'spacing' of dancers in a group is accurate enough, or whether everybody's arms are at exactly the same angle. No doubt these aspects of performance were important in earlier times as well, but it has been mentioned by many that the approach to achieving them was quite different.¹⁹

During the latter part of a class, movement combinations are

practiced on the two diagonals of the classroom. These paths are used because they provide the longest straight line in the room, therefore giving each dancer the chance to perform the combination a maximum number of times. The diagonal also allows the dancer to be seen (as well as to see him or herself in the mirror) from what is considered to be the most flattering of all angles. This, again, is a value which has accompanied the balletic aesthetic of 'line' and spatial usage which has become fairly standard in many modern dance idioms as well. In addition, a connection between the use of diagonals as the primary path on which long combinations are practiced, and the use of spatial diagonals to make powerful statements on the stage should not be overlooked.

Dancers travel in pairs across the floor, first 'on the right side', then 'on the left side'. These are dancers' terms for the diagonal from upstage left to downstage right and from upstage right to downstage left, respectively. In fact, all combinations during the class are practiced 'to both sides' to achieve a symmetry of strength and dexterity. This is in contrast to the asymmetrical nature of sidedness in the repertoire, where one movement is followed by a different one, and so on, without necessarily repeating each phrase or group of movements to the other side.

Many choreographers, including Graham, tend to favour certain movements to one side over the other. Dancers are usually said to be 'right turners' or 'left turners', meaning that it is easier for them to perform single (or multiple) turns standing on one leg turning in one direction than on the other leg and in the other direction. It is generally more common, for this reason, to find that turns and other steps involving 'handedness' are choreographed to the right, as a greater number of dancers are right-handed in this extended sense of the term. Such is the case in Graham's repertoire, where 'Cave Turns'²⁰ and other moves are usually choreographed to the right. In the classroom, however, one attempts to perform equally well on both sides. The unspoken rules of proper etiquette require that partners change places with each other when doing a combination to the second side, thus giving each person a chance to be closer to the mirror and the teacher's eye when traveling across the floor.

Time is important in the technique class, but the dominant feature is that of meter or rhythm. 'Time' in a Graham Technique class is reckoned simultaneously in a number of ways. First, there is 'real' time, i.e. the duration of a class and of each sequence performed in class. Within the hour and a half class period are divisions into three more or less equal sections of a half-hour each: the first is for floorwork, the second for standing movements which stay in one place, and the third includes combinations, which may include weight-supported and air-borne

movements. These sections are rarely kept exactly to their allotted amounts of time, varying with the specific needs of the class population, or with the teacher's plans for the class.

Each exercise in the class has a particular metric rhythm and a tempo that unifies the performance of the class. This presents an apparent paradox when one considers that the movement vocabulary is used throughout the enormous variety of contexts of the repertoire, and therefore is performed in many rhythms and at different speeds. The sequences which are performed in class each day are really vehicles for practicing the movement principles described in the analysis of the technique (cf. Hart Johnson, 1984:143-162), which have no intrinsic rhythm or tempo of their own. However, it is obvious that some repeatable rhythms and tempos have been arbitrarily set, and that there must be some reason why the particular choices were made instead of all the ones which were not. Beyond the obvious, that western musical conventions of phrasing have been adhered to, one can only speculate that once again, the influence of classical ballet phrasing has had an effect upon the eventual codification of musical phrasing for Graham's technique as practiced in the classroom. Other factors lie outside the scope of this essay.²¹

If it were not for the teacher and the accompanist, a Graham class would be practically silent. During a class, dancers generally do not talk unless it is to ask a question, usually for the purpose of clarifying a point about an exercise. The teacher issues commands, suggests images and gives corrections using spoken language in ways which would seem strange to an outside observer with no prior knowledge of the situation, or of the kind of technical spoken language required for adequate communication of the Graham dancer's body language game. To the uninitiated listener, it would seem at times that the English language was being badly mangled, or that the dancers are not very bright, and that the teacher is slightly mad.

While students perform 'deep stretches', for example, it would not be unusual to hear the teacher say something like this: "In two, and over more, and stre-t-c-h and rise, keep going now in two ...". This kind of moment-to-moment coaching would usually be heard in an intermediate or lower level class, but it would certainly not be out of place in an advanced class. In any case, such commentaries make perfect sense to the dancers, who understand those words, as well as their apparently ungrammatical order.

In this essay several points have been raised by examining the context of a dance technique class: (1) We see that it provides the means by which dancers may learn a non-vocal, danced idiom of body language. (2) That act of learning takes place in a mostly non-vocal yet highly verbal context in which the learners

participate in a complex system of "... logical relations among themselves ...", as Ardener has imagined to be possible (see epigraph). (3) It is possible to examine these and other non-vocal systems of meaningful actions, and by so doing to add further to our understanding of human beings. It would, for example, be of interest to be able to compare and contrast the way in which American Graham Technique dancers acquire knowledge of their idiom with the way in which Australian Aboriginal dancers acquire knowledge of their danced idioms of body language. Such a study, or any similar study, could only add enormously to our understanding of human knowledge in general.

Diana Hart Johnson

NOTES

1. Dancers may purchase a single class ticket; however, those who attend regularly and frequently find it more economical to buy a card that may be used for entrance into ten classes. These cards are sold at a considerable discount off the single class price, and serve to encourage greater attendance. Class prices also vary according to the student's level: at the Fundamentals I and II levels the price is higher. As dancers graduate to Elementary, Intermediate and Advanced levels, the price becomes lower. Company members who take classes at the Graham School pay nothing.
2. These are the traditional practice clothes of dancers. Leotards are stretchy garments that are basically shaped like a one-piece swimsuit. They may vary in color, size and cut (i.e. long or short sleeves, V-neck or round neck, zippered or zipperless). Usually men wear a white T-shirt instead of a leotard, although in recent years leotards are worn by both men and women. Tights are a kind of thick, nylon pantyhose, worn underneath the leotard. These are worn by both men and women. Leg-warmers are thick, knitted leg coverings that are made of wool or acrylic fibers. The term is generic, for they may be very short, covering only the ankles, or as long as the entire body, like a snowsuit. They are worn over tights and leotards and are usually shed once the dancer's muscles have become sufficiently warm.
3. Criteria for what constitutes a 'good' class vary from individual to individual; however, many dancers hope that (i) their muscles will become warm quickly, and that they will begin to feel the 'connections' early on in the class. This

concept is difficult for non-dancers (or even beginning dancers) to understand, but it refers to the fine-tuning of the professional dancer's body, of which the dancer is keenly aware, and which must be rediscovered each day. It is possible for these 'connections' not to be made from time to time, on an 'off' day, and this is a bitter disappointment to the dancer. (ii) Many dancers hope that the instructor will spend a little less time on the floorwork and center portions of class, and slightly longer on the 'across the floor' portion, which is more enjoyable to the dancer in certain ways. The first portions of class could be compared to playing scales, and the last portion to playing a piece of music. (iii) Dancers hope that the instructor will not assign combinations that are particularly hated for their difficulty, or for another reason. These vary from one dancer to another, and obviously a given class does not satisfy all dancers equally.

4. This term is borrowed from ballet terminology, as indeed are several others. It refers loosely to one of five basic positions for the feet in ballet, one wherein the dancer's heels touch one another and the toes point laterally away from the vertical midline of the dancer's body. However, other than a superficial resemblance, a ballet first position and a Graham dancer's usage of 'first position' have little or nothing to do with one another.
5. The 'barre' in both Graham and ballet classes is a long wooden (or sometimes metal) pole that is horizontally attached to the wall of the classroom, about three and a half to four feet from the floor. As few as one or as many as four walls may have these barres attached to them. During the section of class referred to here, the dancer holds the barre with one hand, the frontal plane of his or her body perpendicular to the wall, while executing various movement combinations which are then repeated while holding the barre with the other hand. Some exercises are performed facing the barre and holding it with both hands. There are no connections between the 'barre' in a dance class and a 'bar' (drinking), a 'bar' (law) or a 'bar' (prison).
6. Graham, at various times, has expressed the view that the kind of 'excessive sweating' she has seen on her stage is not necessary, and she has said that she never sweated like that. Several dancers who actually performed with Graham on the stage have testified that they never saw her sweat. Whether she did or not, what is interesting is Graham's denial of what for many dancers is an inevitable fact of life; when a dancer performs, a dancer sweats, and more often than not, he or she

sweats profusely.

7. There are several categories of 'falls', but the one which is reserved for the end of the technique class is distinguished by the fact that it is performed only to one side. It also serves as a kind of ritual ending for the class, as a part of its significance lies in the fact that dancers cannot perform this 'fall' in its advanced form until they have mastered the ability to move easily between all vertical levels on an up/down axis.
8. The subject of exactly what place a dance department should have within an academic institution (a university or college) has been a much debated point since dance classes first made their appearance into the university system in the United States in 1918 via physical education departments. There are many who will argue that American educational dance departments can train dancers adequately to continue on in a professional dance career; however, I would strongly suggest that this is the exception and not the rule.
9. It is profitable to remember that most American dance companies, with a few exceptions, do not have paid work for fifty-two weeks (or even for forty-eight weeks) out of a year. When I was a member of Graham's company, a 'good year' included slightly more than six months of paid rehearsals and performances. Even though wages are based on a union scale, the weeks and months spent on unemployment lines offset this otherwise decent salary. Dancers often supplement their incomes by teaching, free-lancing, or taking part-time jobs in restaurants or bars. The point here is that although money can be seen to be an 'external good' for the professional dancer, it is hardly the drawing card for entrance into the profession.
10. The phrase 'taking class' in British schools usually refers to an instructor who actually teaches the class. In the United States, we tend to say 'teaching class' if reference was made to the teacher and not the class participants. British students who are 'taking' a class in university often refer to that act as 'sitting class'. Such phrases are important linguistic clues to the attitudes and conceptual thought-patterns of the people in a particular culture. It is easy to see here that even phrases in the same language, but from distinctly different cultures, must be examined beyond their surface appearances.
11. Professional modern dancers can be seen to form a community of individuals who have elected to live according to particular sets of rules and ideas, much in the same way that Carmelites

(for example) have chosen to live their lives in a particular way (see Williams, 1975). They must pass through various stages of apprenticeship, whether as a long-term student at the Graham School or as an understudy for company members. They must also maintain a sense of commitment which will sustain them through years of hard work, self-doubt and possible disillusionment.

12. "Actions are ... taken to be movements which possess agency, that is, intentions, language-use, meanings, rules" in contrast to movements which are seen as "... 'behaviours' which are taken to imply mechanical, causal conceptions and accounts of movements which are appropriate when agency is either absent, or in a human being, temporarily destroyed" (Williams, 1976:140-141).
13. Although the subject is not discussed in this paper, it is well to point out that knowing how to write Labanotation precisely enables one to write and to reproduce the actions of dancing, thus avoiding the problems which arise from the English glosses commonly used to describe the actions of Graham Technique. for a thorough discussion of this subject with regard to American Sign Language, see Farnell (1984). For Labanotated examples of ten of the first exercises practiced in Graham floorwork, see Appendix I, p. 74, in Hart-Johnson (1984).
14. Dancers often claim (in their own spoken vernacular) that 'the body remembers' what to do, and in a certain sense one can say that it does. Neuro-muscular patterns are established through the repeated practice of specific actions. It is important to remember, however, that dancers can and do exercise control over what patterns become established, and they also have the capacity to change those patterns.
15. See note 7 above.
16. Graham's two main principles for moving are not discussed in detail here, but 'spiraling' is one of the constituent elements of Graham Technique.
17. In rehearsals, the classroom is treated as though it were a stage. Dancers idealize the classroom, imagining the presence of entrance and exit areas, called 'wings', various set pieces if they are not available (and they usually are not, except for a few weeks during a given rehearsal period), the downstage and upstage edges of the stage, and so on.
18. The term 'now' refers to the ethnographic present, i.e. the years during which I was a soloist in the Graham company

(1973-1978).

19. Usually, mention is made in the form of negative harangues about the sad state of affairs in the current, younger Graham company, i.e., "they've lost the force" or "they're too focused on line". There is very little sense of genuine interest on the part of critics in the diachronic changes themselves, why they have occurred and of what, exactly, they consist.
20. The term 'Cave Turn' was created to identify a particular action sign which first appeared in Graham's choreographic work entitled "Cave of the Heart" in 1946, and which later became a standard part of Graham's movement vocabulary, both in the classroom and in other choreographed works.
21. Interesting studies might be made of the relations between the meters of movement utterances in their repertoire contexts and the same utterances reconstructed as exercises for the classroom, or, the relation between meters which might be considered to be intrinsic to certain moves (by Graham), and their actual arbitrary meters which are assigned in the classroom context.

REFERENCES CITED

- Ardener, E. 1971. 'Introduction'. In Social Anthropology and Language (ASA 10). London: Tavistock.
- Chomsky, C. 1980. 'Stages in Language Development and Reading Exposure'. In Thought & Language/Language & Reading. (Eds, Wolf, McQuillan and Radwin). Cambridge: Harvard Educational Review, Reprint Series No. 14.
- Farnell, B. 1984. 'Visual Communication and Literacy: An Anthropological Enquiry into Plains Indian and American Sign Languages'. Unpublished Master's Thesis, New York University.
- Hart-Johnson, D. 1984. 'The Notion of Code in Body Language: A Comparative Approach to Martha Graham Technique and American Sign Language'. Unpublished Master's Thesis, New York University.
- Helpern, A. 1981. 'The Evolution of Martha Graham's Dance Technique'. Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation, New York University.

- Humphrey, D. 1959. The Art of Making Dances. New York: Grove Press.
- Polanyi, M. 1958. Personal Knowledge. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Puri, R. and D. Hart. 1982. 'Thinking With Movement: Improvisation vs. Composing'. JASHM 2(2), New York University.
- Ross, R. 1970. Obligation: A Social Theory. Michigan: University of Michigan Press.
- Williams, D. 1975. 'The Brides of Christ'. Perceiving Women. (Ed. Ardener, S.) New York: Halsted Press.
- Winch, P. 1958. The Idea of a Social Science and its Relation to Philosophy. London: Routledge, Kegan & Paul.
- Worth, S. and J. Adair. 1972. Through Navajo Eyes: An Exploration in Film Communication and Anthropology. Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press.