

**Please see Part 2 of this document. Part 1 is guidelines for observing movement/performance as a cultural event. Part 2 is guidelines for "dropping down into the body" to pull up somatic memory of an event in order to write, i.e. connecting somatic and verbal modes. These guidelines were written in the years I was doing fieldwork, writing and teaching in dance ethnology. I hope you find them useful. Thanks to Katarina for uploading. Deidre
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Performance Observation Guidelines, Parts I & II • ¹

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Part 1: The Guidelines

These guidelines are intended to expand traditional ways of looking at and analyzing performance by directing attention to sensory and contextual features. The guidelines can be applied to any event, from a Pueblo harvest dance to a staged ballet, from a mall scene to a hospital operating room. They are

¹ The movement analysis guidelines were developed and tested during two years of fieldwork (1986-1988) at the annual fiesta of Our Lady of Guadalupe in Tortugas, New Mexico, and then honed through use with my students at the University of California, Irvine, UCLA, and the University of New Mexico. I am indebted to Marcia Siegel's course in movement analysis taught at NYU in the Department of Performance Studies, 1984-86, and especially to her attention to focal point and pulse; to Elsie Dunin's courses in movement analysis taught at UCLA in 1980-82; to Joann Kealliinohomoku's "Field Guides" (Kealliinohomoku 1974); and to Richard Schechner's "whole performance sequence" (Schechner 1985). Lavender and Oliver (1993) provide helpful supplementary reading for those especially focused on dance observation. Thanks to David Gere for pointing out to me the usefulness of this checklist. The guided meditation draws from my work in Buddhist meditation; I am grateful to Michelle Kisliuk for inviting me to test it on her graduate Fieldwork Methods class at UCLA in 1996 and then giving me the audio tape she made of that presentation. The full essay presented here was prepared in 1998 for the volume, *Embodied Pedagogy*, edited by Sally Harrison-Pepper and Jill Dolan; unfortunately that volume was never published. Please feel free to work with the ideas presented here.

suitable for beginning to advanced students of fieldwork in performance, depending on how the instructor uses them.

Fieldwork is often understood to involve either the gathering of structural or functional information (“He takes three steps toward the door,” “She is going to the store to buy mangos”) or the search for symbolic meanings (“The gun represents a phallus”). However, as an embodied form of research, fieldwork offers opportunities for a more somatic engagement with performance. These guidelines work toward the commitment of full faculties: sensation, feelings, analytical intelligence, intuition. In particular, since Euro-American ways of noticing have traditionally emphasized the visual, students should be encouraged to suspend the objectifying gaze and perceive kinetically, “as if” experiencing in their own bodies what they are observing.

Some of the guidelines are geared toward deepening awareness of the sensory features of an event, some toward making connections to larger cultural patterns. Sensory elements and cultural meanings are always inter-related. The goal is to engage deeply and then analyze widely. Not all the factors will be significant for any one performance event. In considering each category, it is helpful to contrast the event under consideration to other genres with which the student is familiar.

Steps:

- 1) Students select a fieldwork site, or the instructor assigns the class to a collaborative fieldwork project. The guidelines can then be offered in total or customized selectively. For example, the different categories can be given as separate fieldwork assignments, or the class can be divided up with different groups covering different categories. It is difficult, if not impossible, for one person to cover all the categories in one observation. Therefore, repeated viewings, live and/or on video tape are recommended.
- 2) Optional: As preparation for observation, the instructor can lead the classroom exercise, "Moving into Somatic Awareness" (See Part II).
- 3) Students take notes, during observation if possible, or immediately afterward. These should be quick inscriptions, key words, drawings, and associations rather than full sentences.
- 4) Expand notes, filling in more details from memory.
- 5) Analyze expanded notes, seeking the salient features and patterns in the performance. This can be done individually as a homework assignment or together in class discussion.
- 6) Optional: To recall fieldwork impressions in class, the instructor can lead the exercise, "Moving into Somatic Awareness" (See Part II).

7) Students write up analysis of performance in essay form. Alternately, if the performance observation is part of a larger research project, students would incorporate their findings with interviews, literature search, and critical analysis, before writing.

The Guidelines:

First impressions give clues to the salient features of an event and also to the observer's preconceptions and expectations. Therefore, the first question to ask is:

What stands out for me? What captures my attention?

The "whole event"

- Who is participating and who isn't? (age, gender, race, culture, economic status...) What is participants' relation to each other? (family, religious community, performers and audience...) For whose benefit do they perform? (participants, money-makers, divinities, tourists...)
- Why are people doing this? Is this part of a larger event?
- What kinds of preparations are needed? (rehearsal, practice, cooking, sewing, previous education or training...)

Space (think of these as concentric circles from largest to smallest):

- Describe the environment (indoors/ outdoors, boundaries, scale, venue such as theatre, park, city streets, architecture...)
- What is the relation of movement to environment? (constrained by it as in a bus? small corner of it as in a theatre? event creates own space as in a powwow?) How is the performance space demarcated? Are there spatial boundaries? Spatial relation between performers and spectators?
- What kinds of patterns in space do the performers create? Is there a design or groundplan? (lines, circles, large/ small area, choreographic patterns, traffic patterns...) Note entrances and exits, directional changes.

Time (again, think of concentric circles from largest to smallest):

- Whole event (time of year, time of day. Is event part of a regular cycle, like daily classes or annual ceremonial events? Does it commemorate a special occasion?)
- Performance event (length of performance. Are its time boundaries clear? blurred? Are there pre- or post-performance activities?)
- Movement event (underlying pulse or beat of individual moves; rhythm; emphases and punctuations; beginnings & endings). Try to feel the pulse

rather than merely counting it. It is through rhythm that people synchronize (Hall 1977). Register the tempo and dynamics, punctuations, when and how the pulse changes.

- “Sense” of time: What does the energy or vitality of time and pulse feel like? (slow / fast, smooth, suspended, erratic...) How does it effect you? How does it effect the whole event?

Shape: (individual bodies)

- What is the overall shape, or body posture, of each moving performer (silhouette)? Is it different by gender? Age? Status?
- What kind of body shape is created by locomotion and gestures? How extended or contained are people’s limbs (kinesphere)?
- Is body shape changed by clothing? By accessories held or worn?

Weight & Force

- What is people’s relation with gravity and inertia? (rebounding, airy, heavy, swinging...) Does movement emphasis groundedness or flight? Is it allowed to gain momentum or stopped short?
- How would you describe people’s muscular effort? Is it localized in some parts of the body? Is potency a valued quality?

Interaction

- How are people relating to each other? (distances, amount of touch, eye contact, all doing same thing or different?)
- What kinds of groupings do people make? (size, shape, regular or irregular)
- What is the nature of interactions between performers and non-performers?
- What physical, political, spiritual, aesthetic, etc. factors influence interaction?

Sound

- Are there environmental sounds, and how do they effect performance?
- What are the sounds of the performance itself? What effect do they have on movement? (organize rhythm? effect energy or mood? determine beginnings and endings?) Be specific in describing sounds and their affective qualities.
- Do performers make their own sound?
- Is there talk, and if so, what is the relation between talk and movement?

Focus:

- On what are the performers focused? (attending to material objects? performing “for show”? inner-directed and non-material? functional focus, such as “Where am I going to put my feet?”)
- How does performers’ focus direct spectators’ attention?

Style

- What constitutes a good performer? What is considered beautiful (or truthful, or other desirable qualities)?
- Are there differences in individual style? Describe. Are these significant? (gender, age, occupation, status...)
- Is there any relationships between performance movement and everyday movement?

Symbolic elements

- Do any performance elements act symbolically? (steps, gestures, floor patterns, outfits, paraphernalia, setting, music, rhythm, song text, words...)
Are these interpreted the same way by all participants?
- Is there a story? Many stories?

- Why are people performing? How do participants interpret their actions?
How do others interpret them?
- Are there esoteric codes used in the performance? Does audience understand these? Who understands these?
- How are performances / movements learned?
- Does the event have a local history? A history elsewhere?

What insights do you get from doing this analysis?

Part 2: Moving into Somatic Awareness

This exercise complements “Part I: The Guidelines,” outlining a method for bringing attention away from verbal thoughts and into fuller somatic awareness. The exercise can be used as preparation for observation of performance or as an aid to sensory memory after fieldwork. It is suitable for students at all levels.

In order to appreciate the lived dimension of performance, one must do more than note patterns, transcribe narratives, interpret symbolic meanings, and analyze historical and social contexts. One must also be able to “feel with” what others are doing, to attune to their rhythms, postures, dynamics. The only way

to do this is through one's own body, shifting from a verbal mode of thinking to a somatic one. Students are frequently unaware of how they know what they know, whether they access information visually, auditorily, kinesthetically, etc. Used to thinking with words, we may have difficulty allowing consciousness to reside with the senses, especially the kinetic sense. And we are often at a loss for words to describe somatic understandings. By focusing on the breath, attention is shifted away from the flow of verbal thoughts and to sensation. The breath is an entry point to somatic awareness and memory.

Thus, this exercise gives practice in "thinking" in a somatic mode.

Its objectives are:

- 1) to learn to switch from an objectifying mode to a sensorially attuned one.
- 2) to make one's own somatic sensibilities available to consciousness.
- 3) to practice accessing and discriminating between the senses, identifying one's own sensory preferences and prejudices.
- 4) to expand the capacity to recuperate the details and dynamics of lived-through events.
- 5) to evoke somatic understandings in words.

Steps:

Note: The following steps provide an outline. Each instructor will find her or his own rhythm for giving the verbal instructions. For example, in enacting the steps along with students and observing their responses, the instructor can gauge when words need to be repeated, when there should be periods of silence, and when to modify the instructions. Before beginning, students should have paper and pen close by, available for the last step of the exercise.

1. *Dropping down into the body*

Take a comfortable sitting position that you can maintain for twenty minutes, undisturbed by the people around you. Let yourself become aware of sensations: your back against the chair, the restriction of clothing or shoes, any muscular knots or tensions. Take a large and deep breath, letting go any discomfort.

Become aware of any verbal chatter occupying your mind. Take another deep breath and let the thoughts go, bringing your attention, instead, to your breath. Follow the passage of breath in and out, through the nostrils, into the chest, down to back and belly, up again across the throat. Try to catch the change of direction, when the out-breath reverses to in-breath and the in-breath lets go into an out-breath. Let the breath become a figure "8" and follow its full passage.

Any time you find your mind wandering, simply acknowledge the passing thoughts and bring your attention back to the breath.

2. Re-member/Re-view/Re-call

Now let your attention come to rest in the breath's depth, the interior space held within belly and lower back. Awareness is in your body, familiar and deep, warmed and nourished by breath. Keep your attention on the physical, on sensation and breath.

When your attention is comfortable and deeply settled, the breath even, and the observing mind aware, allow the memory of a performance event to arise. Does the memory arise as a visual image? As words? As music or other sound? As kinesthetic sensation? Mentally take note of this and return to the memory.

Gradually let it fill out, bringing to mind as many details as possible.

- See the event in visual memory, **re-viewing** body positions from all angles, discerning the details of movement, expanding your focus to take in the setting.
- Hear it in sound, **re-calling** its layers of soundscape, music, voices, rhythms.
- Re-embody its kinetic feel, **re-membering** its energy and dynamics, the sensations of moving, the feeling of positions and gestures.

[Allow ample time for memory to unfold].

Note: If this exercise is being done in conjunction with “The Guidelines,” the instructor can choose to call attention to any of its specific categories.

3. Return and Inscribe/Describe

Slowly, keeping your attention on the gradual shift of awareness, allow yourself to return to the sensations of breath. Before you “return,” remind yourself that this is a space of memory you can revisit at any time. With eyes still closed, let awareness be with your body as it is at this moment, the sensations of all its parts, its position, its situatedness in the room. Gently wiggle or otherwise move one small part. Try out movement in other parts until your attention is re-oriented to the present. Before opening your eyes, lift your hand before your face so that on opening your eyes you will see your own hand. This sight will help you to keep your somatic focus.

When you feel adjusted to the present, and while keeping the thread to your memory, take up paper and pen and write down what you experienced. Try to evoke the memory in all its details.

[Allow at least 10 minutes for writing]

4. What happened?

After everyone is finished writing, discuss the experience. In which sensory mode did the first bit of memory arise? Which was the easiest mode to bring up? Which was the most difficult?

These questions give a “sensory profile” (Howes and Classen 1991), a self-portrait of one's sensory preferences and prejudices. It is suggested that, in doing observations in the future, one can both take advantage of one's own preferences but also try to balance out one's strengths and weaknesses.

What was your experience?

Students can either read their writing or describe their experiences. Some students have profound experiences with this exercise, reporting radically altered states of awareness. Others have difficulty keeping thoughts from interfering. Others stop listening to the instructions and “go off” on their own, sometimes not remembering what happened. These are all perfectly fine responses to the exercise, since the exercise is a way of getting to know more about one's own “thinking” process.

5) *Assignment*

Students type up their descriptions at home.

If the exercise is done in preparation for fieldwork, these descriptions become the first page of one's performance observation notes, serving to "locate" the fieldworker somatically in relation to those she or he observes. If done following fieldwork, the descriptions become data for one's final essay.

*Prepared in 2009 for volume on Embodied Pedagogy, Sall Harrison-Pepper, ed -- not published

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