

# Research in Human Movement: In Search of Hidden Likenesses

By David Bauer

By way of introduction, the reader may find it of interest to know that I started my academic career in the natural sciences. Only later did I move to psychology. Thus, my early roots in biology color my thinking today, so that as I reflect on research regarding human affairs I am reminded of George Gaylord Simpson's observation concerning what is peculiar about being human:

Fully developed symbolization occurs only in man. Our most complete and systemic set of symbols is language, which has had tremendous biological and social consequences. It has done as much as any other one factor to make us altogether unique organisms.<sup>1</sup>

Of particular consequence to those of us investigating human movement is the fact that just as spoken and written languages make up a complex symbol system in human beings, so too do their patterns of movement comprise an equally complex set of symbols. As Laban pointed out, "Movement itself is a language in which man's highest and most fundamental inspirations are expressed. We have forgotten not only how to speak this language, but also how to listen to it."<sup>2</sup> For the human animal, then, movement not only has evident biological functions such as locomotion of the body, but it has elaborate symbolic meanings as well.

To elaborate briefly, it appears that body movements embody one of the first cultural extension systems, whereby the individual person not only expresses his or her living self, but whereby he or she gives shape and form to that self in relation to others as well.<sup>3</sup> That is, just as language has been found to be a powerful force in the creation of human thought and action, so too does movement shape human thinking. Yet, the significance of movement as a cultural extension system has only recently begun to be fathomed. Indeed, recent popular attention given to the literature focused on so called "body language" reflects beginning awareness of the potential symbolism associated with isolated body postures and gestures. According to that literature, however, the argument is advanced that the body is used to convey underlying human thoughts and motivations through a variety of static postures and gestures. Until the publication of the works of Rudolf Laban and Warren Lamb, what has not been consciously recognized is the role of the *dynamic* merging of postures and gestures to form a language of movement itself.

What the foregoing observations suggest for our research, then, is first that we truly stand on a leading edge in the creation of humanity's knowledge about itself. And, as authentic pioneers have always found, we of *Motus Humanus* ought not be surprised to find resistance and skepticism about our research among colleagues who are operating out of more traditional frames of reference. We need to remember that, as Cassirer pointed out nearly a half century ago, an inevitable conflict exists between traditional and innovative, between reproductive and creative, forces in human experience.<sup>4</sup>

Another implication of the extent to which our research is embedded in human symbolism is that as researchers we need to be aware that we ourselves are simultaneously operating within the creating systems of symbolic representations. In turn, we deploy these symbols to guide our own thoughts about and actions in research. For our investigations to be meaningful they must be cast in a linguistic-theoretical framework that is broad enough to encompass a vision of the *whole person as a dynamic creator of a unity of body and mind*. That is, the person is viewed not as a bundle of separated elemental physical mechanisms which are simply pushed and/or pulled by various external (environmental) and/or internal (genetic) forces. Rather, the individual is conceptualized as being an actor who is an active decision maker in and creator of a symbolically unique world.

What is to be avoided in our researches is the segmentation of the person into disconnected sets of component parts (e.g., emotional, cognitive, sensory, and physiological processes) which in turn themselves can be reduced ad infinitum to further elements. Fortunately, while the study of human movement is necessarily multi-disciplinary in scope, the linguistic-theoretical framework set out by Laban and Lamb offers us a common conceptual system for creation of a unified body of knowledge regarding the varied symbolic meanings of human movement. What is most critical about our having this shared linguistic-theoretical framework is that only through such a common public system it is possible for professionals drawn from any array of disciplines to generate a coherent line of scientific research. That is, the framework established an arena for the conduct of creative science, which as Bronowski pointed out, is essentially humanity's search for hidden likeness.<sup>5</sup>

Before closing, let us remember that, like the pioneer prospectors who first discovered gold at Sutter's Mill in 1848, we too stand on a rich vein yet to be unearthed. Our Mother Lode consists not of minerals but of a relatively new dimension in human knowledge. However, what we can learn from the experience of those California 49ers is that we need to proceed more like archaeologists uncovering a lost civilization than like miners possessed by "Gold Fever." That is, we ought to strive to maintain our intuition, enthusiasm, curiosity, courage, perseverance, and informed judgment, while we proceed carefully, thoughtfully, and judiciously in our diggings. Our cries of "Eureka!" need to lead us to uncover riches in human understanding and not, as has often been the case in both academic and mineral exploration, to feverish and mindless picking at the earth. Let us, then, begin our search for the riches of human movement which are hidden in human nature.

## References

1. George Gaylord Simpson and William S. Beck, *Life* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1965), p. 415.
2. Rudolf Laban and F.C. Lawrence, *Effort* (London: McDonald & Evans, 1947), p. 65.
3. For further discussion of the human use of extension systems, see, Kaoru Yamamoto, "The Way We Are: On Being Peculiarly Human," *The Educational Forum*, 56 (Summer 1992): 337-346.
4. Ernst Cassirer, *An Essay on Man* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1944).
5. J. Bronowski, *The Common Sense of Science* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978).