

# **THREE MULTIMEDIA PROJECTS TO COMMUNICATE ON DANCE ANALYSIS**

by

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**ABSTRACT:** The session will present three different projects, off-line ("Labanotation" CD-ROM prototype) and on-line ("Notation du mouvement" and "L'atelier virtuel" web sites). The three projects are designed to promote notation and/or dance analysis to a non-specialist audience. The projects and several aspects and strategies, such as contents choices, targeted audiences, dissemination, etc. will be examined. The new multimedia technology, and particularly Internet offers new opportunities for organizations working in very specialized fields, and the notation community can only benefit in communicating as much as possible on this new media.

The three different projects, "Labanotation" CD-ROM prototype and web sites "Notation du mouvement" and "L'atelier virtuel" have been developed in different contexts, for different aims, by Geraldine Rey, graphic and interactive designer, and/or Marion Bastien, notator and media designer. Eventually the projects were presented separately, however we feel it is interesting to present them together, as somehow each project has nurtured the next one. They are pieces of a collaborative process we started three years ago, in order to develop multimedia and interactivity tools for dance analysis and dance pedagogy.

## **Labanotation**

The first project, "Labanotation", was conceived by Geraldine Rey, with the collaboration of Marion Bastien for the notation-related content. It is a CD-ROM prototype done in 2001 as a final project for a 5th year diploma in interactive design. The purpose of the CD-ROM is to allow the user to discover some basic principles of notation through focused interactive experiments. Interactivity is indeed the main characteristic of this CD-ROM. Each of the eleven sequences offers a short experiment associating notation examples with made-to-measure videos. The user is able to interact with one of the components of the notation, the result of his manipulation showing up on the video. Through the manipulation on screen of the graphic elements of the notation system, the user can also understand that a notation system is a unique device to decipher movement.

This prototype CD-ROM was presented at several occasions (ICKL 2001, Numer 2002, lecture at Conservatoire de Paris in 2002, Monaco Dance Forum 2002) and proved to be each time well received. But we did not find ways to pass from the stage of a prototype to the stage of a finished CD-ROM, available for distribution. To go further implied financial means and a publisher or a network for distribution.

Designing interactivity implies a thoughtful preparation, ahead of the production phase, in order to prepare the media (in this case the videos were shot weeks before the actual CD-ROM realization). The programming code must include as much as possible all user's actions, expected or unexpected. The design, through highlights of active symbols, magnetic grids, etc., guides the user in its actions.

### **Notation du mouvement**

The second project, "Notation du mouvement" (or Movement notation), was conceived by Marion Bastien, with the collaboration of Eliane Mirzabekian, Benesh specialist, for Benesh-related parts. It is a web site. It was launched in February 2002 and, since then, is regularly fed with new material.. Two branches - Benesh and Laban - offer learning sections, general information, links towards resources and news on notation.

The initial goals behind the project were to disseminate information at a local scale within a global network, to eliminate the distribution problem, to do a project where financial means were not mandatory.

- Local scale: the web site is in French. As we intend to catch the interest of a non-specialist audience, young dancers, dance audience, etc, it seemed necessary to provide information to people in their mother tongue.
- Global network: through the Internet our local centers or local community of interests can network and exchange. The site intends to give as much access as possible to other sites or other on-line resources and to build a virtual community.
- Distribution: as long as the user has access to Internet s/he can access freely to its content. A very particular effort for referencing and promoting the site is constantly made, in order to attract people. With appropriate keywords search engines such as Google easily find the site. After a year, the site statistics show a figure of 400 to 500 visitors monthly.
- Financial means: the site is made with minimal technology, except for a few animations. It is a realistic choice: we can do it on a volunteer basis without spending too much time and without investment. On the other hand, more interesting developments with interactivity, as in "Labanotation", have been deliberately put aside.

The main structure of the site is fixed, with six main headers, but within each header sub-headers and contents can be freely organized. This flexibility has been planned at the very beginning of the conception phase. The site is conceived as a living media, where users can come regularly to find new contents. A few means to communicate with users are implemented: the possibility to register for a newsletter (sent once or twice a month), a quiz to fill out. Other possibilities, such as organizing chat events, are explored.

This project confirmed the fact that a specialized topic, somehow marginalized within the network of dancers, teachers and dance organizations, could reach a larger audience through the accessibility of the web medium.

### **L'atelier virtuel**

The third project, "L'atelier virtuel" (or Virtual workshop), is currently under development. It is co-authored by Geraldine Rey and Marion Bastien. It is a web site based on twelve modules to be launched one each month during a year. We received a grant from the French Minister of Culture to develop a prototype (one or two modules).

The topic is dance composition, hence it is not directly related to notation. However, the ways used in notation to analyze choreography and movement underlies its content.

Each module will offer an interactive experiment allowing the user to experiment with simple actions such as organizing a canon for a group, organizing a sequence with set material, organizing the time element of a movement phrase, etc. To enrich the experiment the user will have access to a "know more" page with documentary material (texts, photos, videos, illustrations, etc.) on the topic.

This third project is somehow a hybrid between "Labanotation", with the same kind of interactivity, and "Notation du mouvement" with the same kind of free access and dissemination.

Although this project is on dance composition, not on dance notation, we incite the user to manipulate symbolic graphic representations. Indeed the manipulation interface is like a sketch of a score. The user will be able to print its combination in order to keep in hand a "mini-score". He will be able then to experiment further in a dance studio, with a graphic representation on paper. The other modules will be on various topics, consequently the manipulation interfaces will be each time different, but we will keep some basic constants (like the time representation with visual "blocks of duration") close to the notation logic.

From our experience on those three projects, a few key points emerged.

Contents: of course contents must be of interest, of quality, and clearly organized. Specific features of multimedia, such as the possibility to present animations and interactive parts are particularly well adapted for dance-related topics, and one should take advantage of those new tools available.

Dissemination: it is essential not only to create contents, but also to think ahead on how it will be disseminated. We favour the web, a perfect medium to reach audience while avoiding the cumbersome problem of distribution. It restricts some of the possibilities (a wide use of video excerpts on the web is not recommended, for example), but for us it is

more strategic to opt in priority for dissemination. Nevertheless a web site project need to be accompanied to reach a better visibility, and this aspect, promotion, is something to work out to expand our audience.

Audience: more then one type of audience should be targeted, and indeed it would be most fruitful to catch the interest of several audiences: dancers, dance teachers, but also stage artists, young people, school children, school teachers, anyone interested in movement.

Image: the topic of notation being not well known, very specialized, eventually carrying a conservative or old fashioned image, we find important to break out those preconceptions. Publishing on an electronic media already brings notation in the new technology field. Furthermore we carefully work on the visual aspects and ergonomic details of our projects, in order to build a good profile within the multimedia landscape.

The rise of Internet in the last years appears to be deeply reshaping the communication world. Individuals and small organizations can have access to a worldwide media, requiring limited technical means. It is a great opportunity for a very specialized field like dance or dance notation to be able to get in this network, and we should make a special effort to be in. Our field can only benefit in communicating as much as possible on this new media.

URLs

Notation du mouvement: <http://notation.free.fr>

L'atelier virtuel: <http://ateliervirtuel.free.fr>

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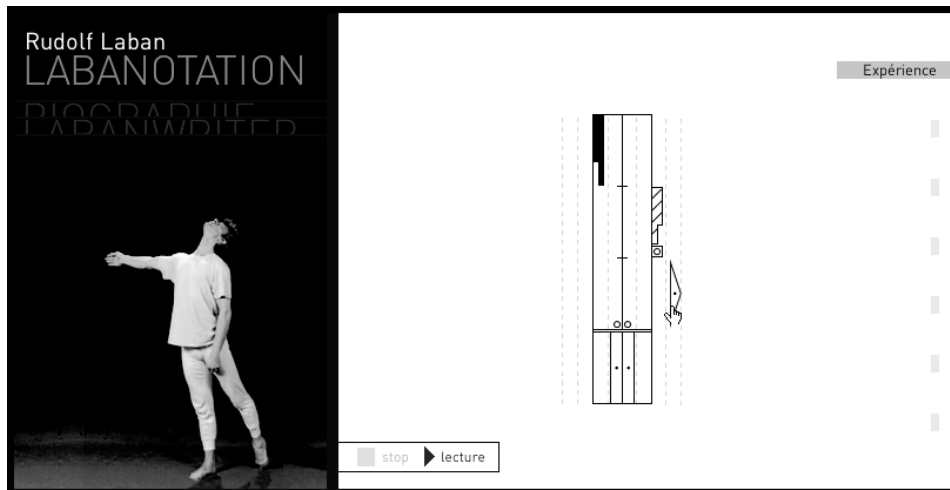


Illustration A: Labanotation

One of the experiments: the user can manipulate the notation signs on the right of the screen, and launch the related video. In this specific example 27 videos representing all the possibilities have been shot. Through the programming code, the right video is picked up and played from the series once the user has arranged its combination.

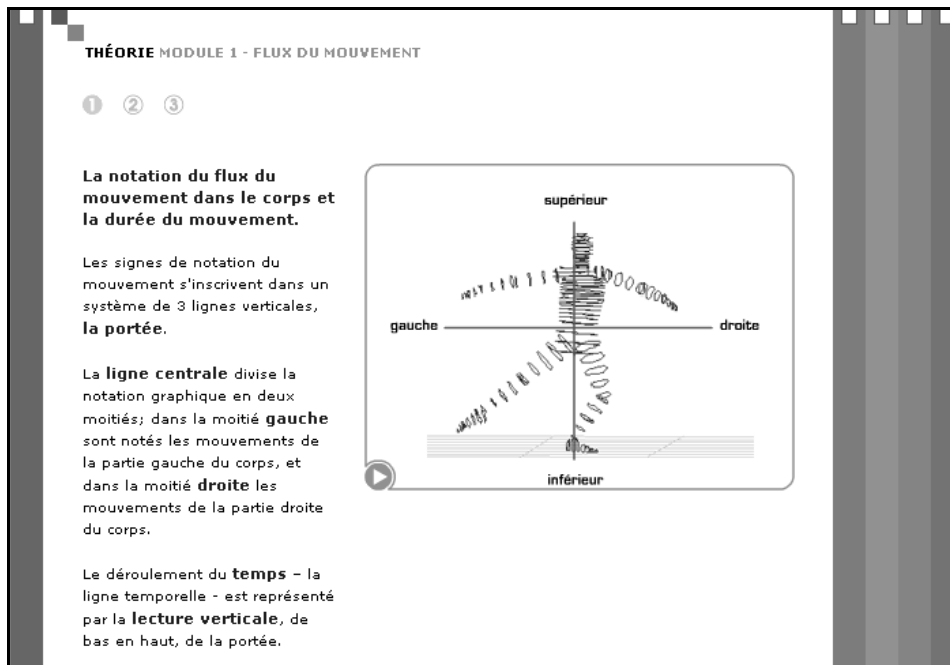


Illustration B: Notation du mouvement

One of the screens of the learning section: multimedia is used with pedagogical animations and videos using Life Forms examples.

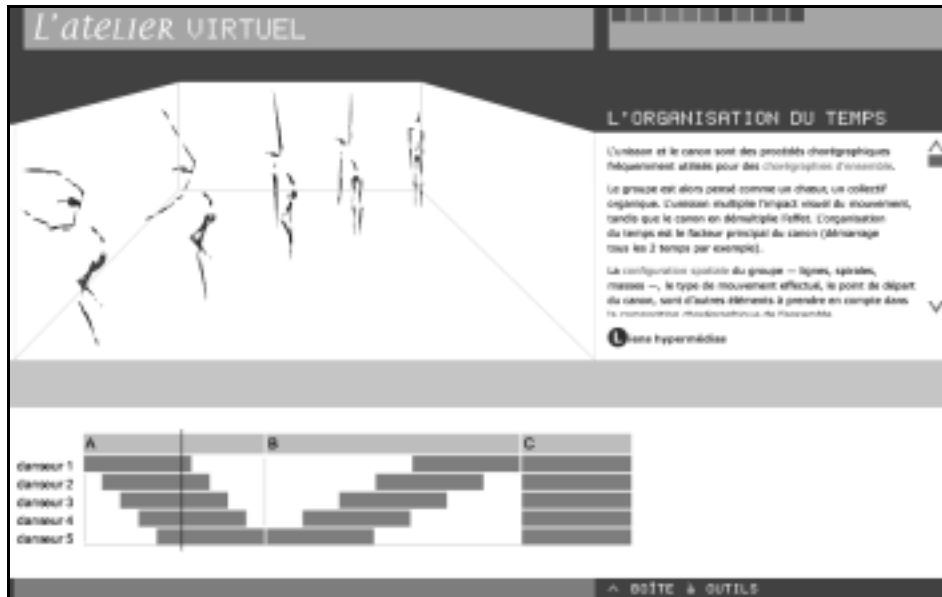


Illustration C: L'atelier virtuel

A first rough screen for the design of "L'atelier virtuel", a project still in progress by Spring 2004. The stylized stage (left upper screen) contains animated figures. A text, on the right, gives some information on the topic. The "manipulation interface" (lower screen) allows the user to interact with the animated sequences. In this specific example, on canon form, the users can organize for three pre-set dance phrases (A, B, C) the canon or the unison of the five dancers,. From this page the user will access a "know more" page. In this specific module we will provide animated examples of several types of canon as defined in our notation system (regular canon, canon starting in sections, canon finishing in sections, simultaneous canon, canon in space).