

# The influence of dance in Lawrence Halprin spatial drawings

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**Abstract.** Lawrence Halprin (1916-2009) is an American architect who is internationally well-known for having developed a prolific work especially in the field of landscaping and public spaces. His architectural legacy is directly influenced by his activity as a researcher in the field of interdisciplinarity, a work he exercised throughout his life in tandem with the avant-garde dancer Anna Halprin (1920).

The works and dance proposals of Anna Halprin as well as the projects that they developed together, determined his work and ways of doing and looking. Among these influences, there is one that stands out and that has to do with his way of graphing space and what happened in it. The architect firmly believed that the architectural graphic representation could include aspects such as movement. This paper aims to present part of these graphic works by Lawrence Halprin and to point out, in a critical way, how the experience of dance is present in them.

**Keywords:** dance, architecture, movement, notation, graphic ideation

## 1 Lawrence y Anna Halprin, a multidisciplinary life project.

Lawrence Halprin (1916-2009) was an American landscape architect and urban planner based on the west coast of the USA, specifically in the surroundings of San Francisco although his projects extend beyond these limits. Due to his architectural education at Harvard, he is introduced to the theories and dictates of the emigrated teachers of the Bauhaus, where he establishes a very special relationship with Walter Gropius [1]. The approach of the popular director of the Bauhaus leaves a great impact on Lawrence Halprin, especially regarding the relationship between disciplines. According to Gropius, art and architecture must be merged, an issue that the American architect will put into practice in the first person.

In San Francisco, Lawrence Halprin daily routine as an architect is going to be immersed in a panorama of a strong countercultural atmosphere of which he is fully involved. In addition to his well-known projects in the public space such as *Freeway Park* (Washington) or *Franklin Delano Roosevelt Memorial* (Maryland), Lawrence

Halprin also did an important job as researcher, disseminator and activist. This task was most of the times in tandem with the avant-garde dancer Anna Halprin [2].



**Fig. 1.** Freeway park, Lawrence Halprin. Washington, 1976 (opening date). Image: Freeway Park Association.

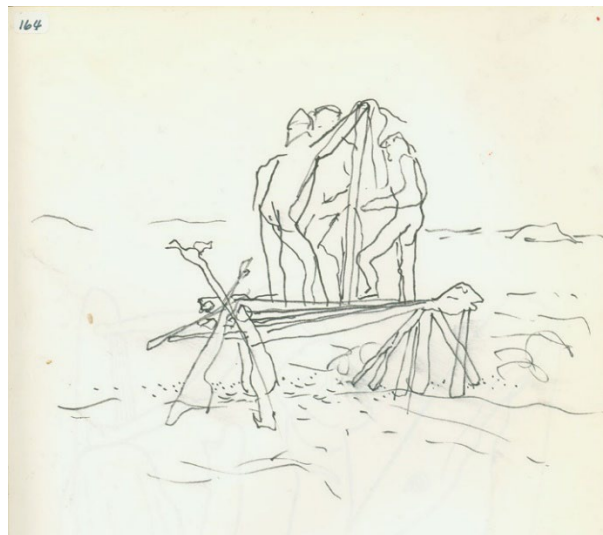
Lawrence Halprin and Anna Schuman met in 1939 being both students at the University of Wisconsin. A year later they got married and from then on, the profession of one and another will radically influence the work of each other. Lawrence Halprin is very attracted to the study of body movement through drawing as well as the role that the moving body plays in space [3], while his partner is interested in how architecture determines spaces and how these spaces define the movement of bodies.

In 1941, thanks to a scholarship granted to Lawrence Halprin, the couple moved to New York so that he could study landscape urbanism at Harvard. The experience is a revelation for both of them because they attend together (Anna Halprin as a listener) the art and design classes taught by the exiled masters of the Bauhaus from whom they learn, among other ideas, that art is not fragmented into isolated areas but the different branches of art complement and interconnect with each other. Moreover, the artistic disciplines are integrated and diluted within a whole of greater importance. Architecture and dance, the disciplines of the Halprin couple, are also included in this approach. It is in this way that they have developed the merge of these two fields, dance and architecture, in common works such as the workshops *Experiments in the Environment* [4] or the method *The RSVP Cycles* [5].

The *Experiments in the Environment* are constituted by a set of activities aimed at dancers and architects so that both professions inform each other. Several editions are developed during the summer season, the one of 1966, placed in The Sea Ranch (California) is especially important due to the presence and collaboration of the architect Charles Moore. The kind of activities carried out in these workshops were: blindfold walks to refine body perception, spatial appropriation exercises, structural knowledge work with the body, etc. Lawrence Halprin used to invite his office colleagues to join these workshops so that they could get to know these common territories of dance and architecture from a new point of view.



**Fig. 2.** 1966 Summer Workshop. The Sea Ranch, California. Architectural Archives, School of Design, University of Pennsylvania.



**Fig. 3.** 1966 Summer Workshop. The Sea Ranch, California. Boceto de Lawrence Halprin. Architectural Archives, School of Design, University of Pennsylvania.

Throughout his life, Lawrence Halprin, worked individually and jointly with Anna Halprin from whom he learnt her way of understanding and creating with the body in the space. Very especially, Lawrence Halprin was interested in dance from the point of view of graphic representation, how it could provide new levels of information mainly from the introduction of body movement in the architectural and urban drawings.

## 2 Lawrence Halprin: architecture, dance and graphic representation.

The first documentary sources found on the influence of dance on the architect Lawrence Halprin are not directly linked to the issue of graphic representation but to the concern that the space designed by architects and urban planners should be a suitable place for the body. Space and body constitute an indissoluble couple in both fields, dance and architecture, however, in this latter discipline the body is not yet as present as in dance. In this sense, Lawrence Halprin wrote in 1949 a first article in which under the title *The choreography of gardens* [6] underlines how gardens should be a support for the moving body.

Lawrence Halprin's early graphic attempts in relation to the world of dance begin with some simple collaborations with Anna Halprin and her ensemble. He will start by drawing her and her dancers as they dance, some first sketches in the traditional way that will be of great help to him for the subsequent construction of the outdoor dance platform generally known as *The Deck* [7]. This is one of his smallest but more transcended works and in which drawing has a key role. The freehand drawing of dancing people always entails the added difficulty of the representation of the movement and, in addition, the approach of the drawing of the body in relation to its associated space.

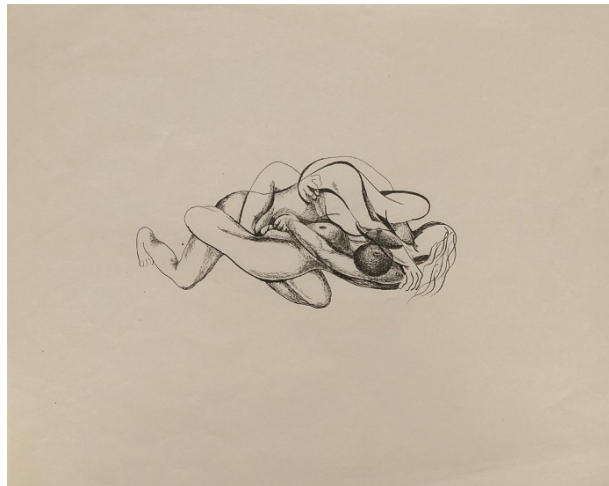


Fig. 4. Untitled. This is my beloved series. Lawrence Halprin. 1946. E. Cella Art &Architecture



**Fig. 5.** Anna Halprin, *The Branch*, the Halprins' dance deck, Kentfield, California, 1957. Fotografia de Warner Jepson. Museum of Performance and Design.

As he works with Anna Halprin on the creation and recording of her choreographies, Lawrence Halprin meets the world of *notations*. These are a kind of scores for the record of body movement that, although they do not have the usual use that musical scores, may have awakened in numerous architects and theorists an important interest since they show parallels with the representation of the architectural space and the inclusion of movement in it [8]

Throughout the history of dance several notation systems are known, however, by Halprin's time, the one that had transcended the most was *labanotation* [9], although it never became common use even among dancers and choreographers. This notation system is based on a series of symbols that include the direction of movement, the part of the body with which it is performed, its duration, its quality and its purpose. This results in a series of attractive black and white drawings of very difficult translation if you do not have a specific training in the writing system.

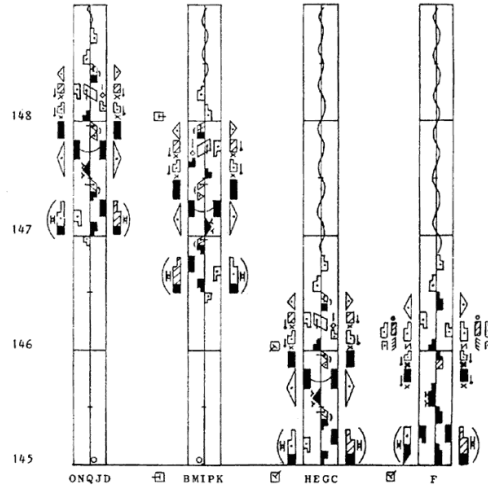


Fig. 6. A piece of a labanotation score.

Once Lawrence Halprin has known this system, he decides to take a step further and creates what he calls *motations* in order to, according to the author himself, introduce the concept of movement into the word. Lawrence Halprin firmly believes that one of the elements to work with in the design of buildings and cities is movement and, for this reason, it is crucial that it is represented. The *motations*, unlike the other notations, were intended to be a record of movement in the architectural and urban space, and therefore, it focuses not only on representing the movements of the human body but also on giving data about its environment. This is because Halprin's intention is that *motations* would not only serve to be used by choreographers and dancers but could also be used by architects, designers or artists of any other discipline who might consider them useful.

The *motations* are organized, such as labanotation, based on two vertical and parallel stripes to be read in a complementary way. In the strip on the left, or horizontal axis, different schemes are made in plan as a frame of the state of the objects or people in motion. It is mainly useful to see the path of the movement. Small sketches are inserted on the right stripe or vertical axis as elevations in which it can be read simultaneously how this movement occurs. Somehow, it might be seen like an attempt of movement's ortho projection system. This system is complemented by a set of 26 symbols representing concepts such as person, car, acceleration, etc. [10]

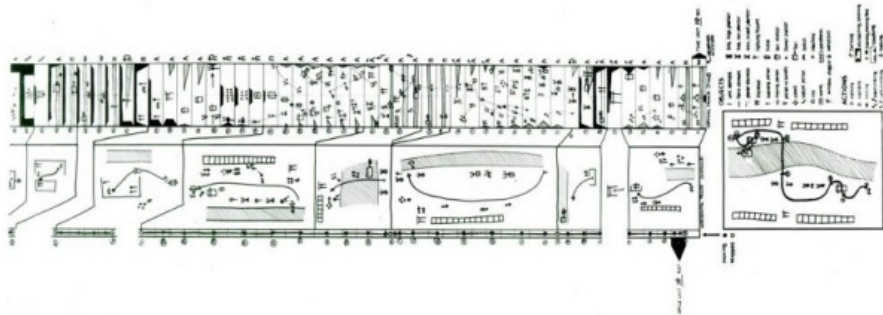


Fig. 7. Journey in Collide Corner, Lawrence Halprin. 1974. Fuente: Harris, A.: *Choreographing the Space*. *Architectural Studies Integrative Projects* 62,12 (2014)

Among Lawrence Halprin's main interests was to find a new way to graphically represent the architectural and urban space so that it overcome the geometric definition of its elements and incorporate the action of bodies into that space. An intention very similar to that is the one that Bernard Tschumi would have years later and which is very clearly reflected in his *Manhattan Transcripts* [11]. Unlike Tschumi, who stays on a more artistic and intentional plane, Lawrence Halprin wants to develop an objective method applicable to different situations and by different professionals. His initial approach is far from any subjectivity. And although the method is tested on many occasions (Dancer's workshop, Freeway trip, Student Union Plaza, etc.) Lawrence Halprin himself recognizes the difficulty and patience to have for its learning [12], it resembles the time required to start reading musical scores.

Lawrence Halprin's *motations* could be summed up in a mixture of a set of plans to explain the space and a few notations to describe the movements that are happening in this space. Somehow, Lawrence Halprin thought architecture would be humanized if the architectural representations included the human being. In fact, it might be suggested that Lawrence Halprin himself took a step further on labannotation by being able to enter space in a more intuitive way. It is easier to read the space on a plan than through a set of symbols as was the case with Laban's system.

### 3 Architecture, dance and representation. Other approaches.

Lawrence Halprin is not the only architect who has looked at dance [13] in order to make transfers to the field of architecture, although it could be said that he has been one of the pioneers in doing so, and one of those who has shown the most dedication in this regard. Among the architectural professionals who have looked at dance because of the representation of the moving body the figure of Bernard Tschumi could be highlighted.



Bernard Tschumi also finds in the notation of dance a certain suggestion to enrich the architectural graphic representation, however, he departs from Lawrence Halprin as long as his intention is more related to a way of introducing life, activity and meaning in architectural drawings. The goal was to collect some of the action that happens in that architecture and not only its formal definition and material characteristics. For Bernard Tschumi, there was no architecture without an event, so it was important to bring the event to the representation of architecture.

Probably, Bernard Tschumi's most paradigmatic work in relation to the use of notation is *The Manhattan Transcripts*, which are neither real projects nor mere fantasies, just an attempt to transcribe a certain interpretation of reality. The main idea of the *transcripts* is to transcribe things that the representation of conventional architecture does not, for example, the complex relationships between use and space. It is also, therefore, a critique of the representation of architecture from which Tschumi intends to expand its boundaries.

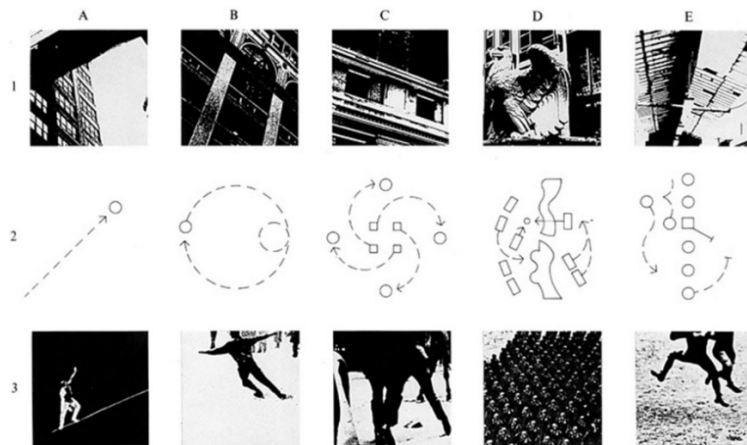


Fig. 8. *The Manhattan Transcripts*. Bernard Tschumi. 1976-1981. © Bernard Tschumi Architects.

The *transcripts* take place in Manhattan, a real space where real things happen. Its structure is divided into three worlds: that of architectural objects represented by plans, sections or volumetrics, that of movements, for which notations and traces are used, and that of events, for which newspaper news or photographs are chosen so that they document some action happened in that space. As Tschumi suggests in the publication of the same name, the choreographic notation is brought to analyze the movement since the notation suggests an energy that sculpts a volume, or, conversely, how an enveloping space is generated within a rigid space.

In a lecture given by Tschumi himself at the Architectural Association in 1982, he attributes to the notation another utility. This is the ability to eliminate preconceived ideas or images about bodily actions in a way that what prevails is its spatial effect, that



of movements in space. In this regard, nowadays certain Laban supporters continue to defend the use of notation for the registration of choreographies against audiovisual media as it is the only way to communicate the essence of choreography and not only a visual image. In other words, if we were talking about music, it would be as if the musicians learned to play the pieces from recordings instead of playing the scores.

It is interesting how architecture has come particularly close to the means of representation of dance, especially when in the field of dance its use has not spread too much. In fact, most of the choreographers and dancers do not use them even to register or to create their choreographies. According to Paul Virilo, the interest of architecture in these drawings elaborated by choreographers is probably the fact that they are intimate drawings in which the energies related to the body become visible. Indeed, Paul Virilo himself [14] acknowledges having begun to study *labannotation* to see if he could somehow complement the plans and the sections since they do not include time or the feeling of volume. To Halprin, Tschumi or Virilo, we can add the architect Sony Devabhaktuni [15] who has studied the notations and drawings of the choreographer Merce Cunningham from a spatial point of view with the intention of revealing new approaches to architecture from the dance notations.

In both the case of Bernard Tschumi and Lawrence Halprin, their use of notations does not become systematized in a way that can be used as a language of representation of any project or work. It gives the impression that the use of notation offers them an appropriation of the perceived or created space more than a real language to put into practice. However, even if this has not happened, both acknowledge that their work would not be the same without their studies on notations. Tschumi states that neither *La Villette* nor *Le Fresnoy* could have existed without the *transcripts* which are included in the graphical documentation of each architectural project. Just like Lawrence Halprin whose notations for the motion study of Anna's workshops appear as graphic and project material with the same treatment as other architectural works in his monographies.

## 4 Conclusions

For much of his professional life, Lawrence Halprin tested with his team a series of experiences about the representation of space and what was happening in it that were clearly influenced by the discipline of dance with which he lived so closely. In some, the incorporation of the space-body wisdom of dance introduces what it could be called small advances, while, in others, an overly academic look at dance arises somewhat more debatable results. That academic look focuses on notation systems, an issue that has also been addressed in architecture by Bernard Tschumi or Paul Virilo. Lawrence Halprin focused primarily on the *labannotation* that was neither commonly used by

Anna Halprin herself, and which departs to some extent from other more enriching experiences such as *Experiments in the Environment*, workshops made up of architects and dancers in which the two exchanged experiences through different activities and where there was also a presence of the drawing even if it did not have a main role.

In any case, although the *motations* did not extend as a system for different reasons they did serve as a personal challenge through which a more human architecture based on drawing could be considered. The use of *motations*, and his knowledge of the world of dance, allows Lawrence Halprin to better understand the perceived or created space [15], this goes beyond the traditional plans and elevations by promoting a new reading on the project. It should not be forgotten that the proposal of the *motations* must always be read as a complement to the planimetry and not as a substitute for it, according to the writings of Lawrence Halprin himself [16].

It could be said that Lawrence Halprin's approach to *motations* paved the way for experiences that are now being studied accompanied by new motion-recording technologies such as mappings or *space syntax* which manage to incorporate movement in a more advanced and effective way. Their initial motivation, in any case, is shared. Therefore, it is important to emphasize that although today we are closer to a more complete and reliable representation in the architectural and urban space, this representation should never be understood as a substitute for the experience of the body in space but as a complement that helps us to understand it. This question is paramount and is very present in Lawrence Halprin who tried to transfer his knowledge of dance, and therefore of body and space, not only to representation but also to architecture, understanding that the disciplinary fields are diffuse and, thanks to this, more enriching.

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PhD architect achieved at the University of Seville where she works as a lecturer and researcher at the Graphic Expression in Engineering section within the Department of Design Engineering. Graduated in classical dance and specialized in contemporary dance she developed her doctoral thesis on the relationship between dance and architecture from the point of view of body-spatiality.

Her lines of research are inscribed in the field of interbreeding between the arts and in the field of industrial design, having published journal articles, book chapters and conference papers in various specialized media.