

Re-composing body language through dance in *Soledad* (2025)

Maria Sole Montacci

Introduction

Soledad is an original experimental solo piece that merges contemporary dance with live music. It explores the profound sense of solitude that arises from the challenges of expressing and understanding verbal language in a world that prioritizes spoken communication. Drawing from my personal experience of living with a hearing impairment, this work examines how individuals navigate their bodies and emotions when words fail or prove insufficient.

To effectively capture and communicate these dynamics, I have developed a method of movement analysis that synthesizes elements from existing systems, such as *Viewpoints and Composition* by Bogart and Landau (2005) and *Labanotation* (Laban, 1928). This method provides a framework for movement artists to analyse the kinetic aspects of both verbal and non-verbal communication, focusing on gestures, postures, facial expressions and bodily responses in both silent and spoken interactions. Through this method, movements can be annotated, reflected upon and creatively re-composed during the choreographic process.

At the core of this project is the concept of *translation*, not in the linguistic sense, but as a means through which bodily language conveys meaning and emotion when verbal communication is insufficient. The central research questions driving this work are:

How can movement act as a form of translation?

*How can a newly developed methodology of analysis reveal
the emotional depth within non-verbal communication?*

The ultimate aim is to create an original method of movement notation that not only documents technical aspects but also incorporates the emotional and expressive dimensions of non-verbal communication. This method will be tested in a choreographic context to explore its potential for creating, teaching and preserving choreography. The performative outcome seeks to highlight the significance of bodily communication as a means of transcending verbal barriers, addressing the theme of solitude through the lens of movement as a form of translation.

1. *Soledad*: A choreographic exploration of bodily communication

1.1 Introduction to the *Soledad* project



Figure 13.1 M. S. Montacci / *Soledad* (2024).

Soledad (Figure 13.1 and 13.2) is an original solo performance that integrates contemporary dance with live music to explore the dynamics of verbal and non-verbal communication in interpersonal encounters. Grounded in autobiographical experience, this project places significant emphasis on personal narratives, with my own lived experience serving as a key source

of inspiration for the choreography. However, while grounded in personal storytelling, *Soledad* extends beyond individual experience to investigate broader implications of communication, specifically, how non-verbal cues can function as a form of translation in situations where spoken language is inadequate or fails to fully convey meaning.

This exploration is informed by foundational research in social psychology, such as the work of Michael Argyle (1988) and Martha Davis (1978), alongside theories in movement psychology and analysis. Argyle (1988) highlights the crucial role of gestures and



Figure 13.2 M. S. Montacci / *Soledad* (2024).

actions in communication, arguing that these elements often carry more weight than verbal language. Building on these findings, this project examines how non-verbal cues, such as gestures, facial expressions and bodily movements, operate as integral components of communication. Through the choreographic process, these elements are not merely observed but are creatively recomposed to express emotions and meanings that transcend words. It is important to clarify that this recomposition is applied choreographically rather than during real-time spoken interactions.

1.2 Translation through bodily communication

At the heart of *Soledad* is the concept of translation, not in a purely linguistic sense, but as the body's capacity to convey meaning through movement. This project positions bodily communication as a form of translation, where each gesture, posture and facial expression transforms complex emotions into something universally understandable, even in the absence of words. Non-verbal elements (such as eye movements, tone, facial expressions and posture) are explored and reinterpreted choreographically to highlight how the body can function as an alternative language, shaping social interactions and emotional exchanges. Drawing on Argyle's (1988) understanding of the intrinsic link between verbal and non-verbal communication, the work examines how gestures operate with word-like significance, their meaning shifting depending on context. In *Soledad*, this idea becomes personal: as someone with a hearing impairment, I have long relied on non-verbal cues to navigate conversations and bridge the gaps where verbal language falls short. This experience has profoundly influenced the development of the project's methodology, underscoring the potential of the body as a powerful communicative tool. Through this practice-led exploration, *Soledad* demonstrates how movement can act as a medium of translation, transcending spoken language to reveal deeper layers of solitude, connection and the complexity of human interaction when words are insufficient.

2. Music as a translational medium

2.1 Music as translation

Music plays a fundamental role in *Soledad* (Figure 13.3), not merely as an accompaniment but as an active agent in the process of translation. In collaboration with composer Riccardo Militerno, I explored how music



Figure 13.3 M. S. Montacci / *Soledad* (2024).

can function as a secondary language, complementing spoken words through its structural and expressive properties. The soundtrack of *Soledad* integrates recorded text with musical elements, creating a layered interplay between verbal and non-verbal communication. This

approach was guided by the idea that music, like bodily movement, can serve as a medium for translation, conveying emotional and psychological dimensions that words alone might not fully capture.

In this project, music as translation is understood not in its conventional linguistic sense but as the process of transferring meaning, emotion and intention from one mode of expression to another. This encompasses the translation of verbal language into both movement and music, highlighting how different sensory modalities can convey similar or complementary meanings. As Helen Julia Minors (2012) suggests, music can function as a form of translation in interdisciplinary and performative contexts, carrying meaning across linguistic, bodily and cultural domains. Similarly, Nicholas Cook (1998) argues that music could translate emotional content through its sonic properties, such as pitch, timbre, harmony and rhythm.

2.2 Music as an active translational device

The integration of looping techniques and guitar improvisations in the soundtrack reinforces the themes of repetition and recomposition that underpin the choreography. By treating music as a translational device, this project extends beyond conventional dance accompaniment, positioning sound as an essential component of meaning-making in choreographic practice. This process aligns with theories of musical semiotics, which suggest that music can translate linguistic meaning through its sonic structure and phrasing (Monelle, 2000). In other words, the composition does not merely support the text but reinterprets its meaning through rhythmic, timbral and dynamic variations.

Through this research, I have found that music can act as a form of translation by:

- Amplifying or transforming emotional content: Music reinforces the affective dimensions of speech, sometimes enhancing what is being said, and at other times reshaping its interpretation.
- Creating a sensory bridge between different modes of expression: The interplay of spoken text, music and movement demonstrates how meaning can be transferred across multiple artistic languages.
- Expanding the communicative potential of performance: By positioning music as an active translational force rather than a passive accompaniment, *Soledad* highlights the interconnected nature of verbal, musical and bodily expression.

2.3 In *Soledad*, this concept of translation operates on multiple levels

1. Between spoken language and music: The recorded text in the soundtrack is not a passive background element but an active participant in the musical composition. Militerno's (Figure 13.4) score mirrors the speech through dynamic shifts in tempo, harmonic changes and melodic contours that reflect the cadence and affective tone of the words. This mirroring was not incidental but an intentional compositional choice, developed through an iterative process of listening, adapting and refining the interaction between movement, speech and sound.
2. Between verbal and non-verbal expression: Just as the body in *Soledad* translates emotions and meanings that cannot be fully articulated through words, the music also translates the psychological undertones of speech into a non-verbal realm. The emotional charge of a phrase, for example, may be reinforced or even reinterpreted by the harmonic structure of the accompanying music.
3. Between sound and movement: The interplay between the choreography and the soundtrack reinforces the idea that movement and music are interconnected forms of expression, both capable of translating human experience in ways that transcend linguistic boundaries.

Ultimately, *Soledad* demonstrates that translation is not merely about converting words from one language to another but about transforming meaning across different expressive modalities. Music, in this sense, serves as a crucial agent of translation, reinforcing, reinterpreting and expanding the emotional and psychological depth of both speech and movement.



Figure 13.4 D. Farlam / *Soledad*, R. Militerno (2025).

3. The choreographic process and methodologies of movement analysis

3.1 The choreographic process and the development of the analysis methodology

Soledad is a solo performance that investigates the theme of solitude through contemporary dance and live music. The choreography is built around moments of silence, non-verbal cues and bodily expressions that emerge from everyday scenarios such as a first date (Figure 13.5), emotional struggle (Figure 13.6) or a conversation (Figure 13.7). These moments highlight the coexistence of verbal and non-verbal communication, where the body becomes the primary vehicle for expressing emotions and meanings that words fail to capture.



Figure 13.5 M. S. Montacci / *first date* (2025).



Figure 13.6 D. Farlam / *Soledad*, M. S. Montacci *emotional struggle moment* (2025).



Figure 13.7 M.S.Montacci / *conversation* (2025).

To effectively analyse and communicate these dynamics, I developed a method of movement analysis that synthesizes elements from *Labanotation* and *Viewpoints & Composition* by Bogart and Landau (2005). This hybrid system allows for the breakdown of everyday actions such as gestures, facial expressions and posture to reveal their emotional depth. For instance, a simple gesture, reach out the hand, can convey a spectrum of emotions depending on its context. The analysis methodology is not the creative method itself, but rather an analytical tool that informs the choreographic process, enabling me to recontextualize movement and explore its emotional nuance.

By applying this analysis methodology, I was able to uncover subtle emotional layers within movements that might otherwise have been overlooked. This process of recomposition where initial movements were transformed through the lens of emotional analysis, enriched the choreography, reinforcing the idea that movement, when combined with emotional intention, can transcend verbal communication, and allow the body to 'speak' in ways that words cannot.

3.2 Recomposition as a mode of bodily translation

Within the choreographic process, *recomposition* refers to the transformation and recontextualization of movement material to generate new meaning. In this project, recomposition is understood as a form of bodily translation, where movement sequences are adapted in response to shifts in musical, linguistic or spatial contexts. Rather than treating movement as a fixed structure, I consider it a fluid language in constant dialogue with sound, text and environment.

Foster (2011) explores the concept of choreographic empathy, demonstrating how kinaesthesia and movement perception are influenced by bodily interactions. Similarly, Lepecki (2006) emphasizes choreography as an open and dynamic process rather than a rigid sequence of movements. These perspectives inform my approach, positioning recomposition as a process of continuous transformation rather than static reproduction.

3.3 Movement analysis and translation

In this context, translation refers to the process of interpreting physical motion into structured notation to reveal deeper insights into bodily communication. This involves breaking down body positioning, spatial orientation and movement dynamics to understand how physical actions express emotion, intention and interaction.

Martha Davis (1978) extensively explored movement notation, highlighting *Labanotation's* focus on the movement process rather than isolated gestures. Laban's system allows analysts to observe weight shifts, trunk engagement and limb activity within a structured pattern rather than simply labelling individual gestures. This method highlights the flow and evolution of movement rather than just its surface characteristics (Davis, 1978).

Through this approach, movement is not only documented but also analysed to uncover patterns of communication. This is particularly relevant in choreographic practice, where subtle shifts in movement can alter meaning and impact interaction.

To systematically analyse and translate movement, this research utilizes notation tools, structured systems designed to record and interpret movement patterns. The two primary notation methods employed are *Labanotation* (Laban, 1928) and *Viewpoints & Composition* (Bogart & Landau, 2005):

- *Labanotation*, developed by Rudolf Laban, is a comprehensive system for recording human movement. Unlike traditional descriptions that focus on isolated actions (e.g. *raising an arm* or *crossing one's legs*) *Labanotation* captures movement dynamics, including spatial patterns, force and timing (Laban, 1950).
- *Viewpoints & Composition*, formulated by Anne Bogart and Tina Landau, provides an alternative approach that focuses on time, space and kinaesthetic relationships in performance. This method emphasizes improvisation and spatial awareness, allowing for a more flexible interpretation of movement (Bogart & Landau, 2005).

By integrating elements of both systems, this research adapts and expands existing notation frameworks to better serve the study of bodily communication. This approach bridges gaps between structured analysis (*Labanotation*) and creative exploration (*Viewpoints & Composition*), offering a versatile methodology for examining how movement conveys meaning.

3.4 Translation as a creative tool

The concept of translation within this project extends beyond verbal-to-verbal conversion; it is an embodied process of transforming emotional and social meanings into physical actions. In this context, translation involves:

- Capturing emotional import: By analysing selected actions through the dual lenses of *Labanotation* and *Viewpoints & Composition*, I was able to reveal

the emotional significance embedded in everyday movements. For example, a simple gesture like reaching out an arm (Figures 13.8, 13.9 and 13.10) can shift in meaning depending on the timing, spatial distance and emotional context surrounding it.



Figure 13.8 M. S. Montacci / *reaching out an arm to grab something* (2025).



Figure 13.9 M. S. Montacci / *reaching out an arm to help someone* (2025).



Figure 13.10 M. S. Montacci / *reaching out an arm to someone to shaking the hand* (2025).

- **Recomposing movement:** Once the actions were documented, I used this analysis methodology to guide the creation of the choreography. This allowed me to explore how subtle modifications in gesture could alter its emotional impact and narrative meaning (Figures 13.11 and 13.12).



Figure 13.11 D. Farlam / *Soledad*, M. S. Montacci *reaching out an arm/ gesture* (2025).

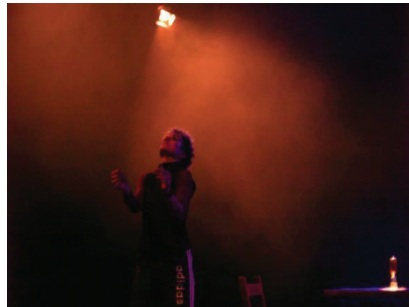


Figure 13.12 D. Farlam / *Soledad*, M. S. Montacci *reaching out an arm/ recomposing* (2025).

Ultimately, this research demonstrates that translation, within a choreographic context, is not simply about converting meaning from one form to another but about dynamically reshaping it. By integrating movement analysis, notation and recomposition, *Soledad* (Figure 13.13) presents bodily communication as a nuanced and evolving language, one that transcends verbal limitations and reveals the depth of human expression.



Figure 13.13 D. Farlam / *Soledad*, M. S. Montacci *Soledad* (2025).

3.5 Gesture-based movement and communication

One specific case study involved a gesture-based movement sequence designed to explore linguistic barriers and communication breakdowns. *Labanotation* provided a means to codify micro-movements, such as hesitation in hand gestures (Figure 13.17) or shifts in gaze direction (Figures 13.14, 13.15 and 13.16) pauses contributed to a sense of miscommunication or connection.



Figure 13.14 M. Mendones / *Soledad*, M. S. Montacci *gaze 1* (2025).

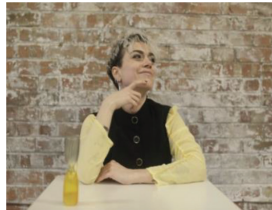


Figure 13.15 M. Mendones / *Soledad*, M. S. Montacci *gaze 2* (2025).



Figure 13.16 M. Mendones / *Soledad*, M. S. Montacci *gaze 3* (2025).



Figure 13.17 D. Farlam / *Soledad*, M. S. Montacci *a hesitation hand* (2025).

This dual approach provided valuable insight into the interplay between technical execution and expressive intent, reinforcing the notion that movement is both a structured physical action and a communicative medium.

3.6 Research objective: Enhancing non-verbal communication

The primary objective of this research is to develop a deeper understanding of how movement functions as a communicative tool. While dance remains the central focus, this study also considers its relevance across other disciplines such as psychology, education and professional training. Through detailed observation, translation and interpretation of body language, the research aims to enhance non-verbal communication skills and provide a structured framework for analysing bodily expression.

Additionally, this study seeks to create a secure and collaborative learning environment where dancers can express themselves freely. Although my solo practice forms the core of this investigation, the developed methodology could also be applied in pedagogical settings to support skill development, creative exploration and inclusivity in dance education.

3.7 Studying body language and emotional translation

This research explores the codification of non-verbal communication in dance, focusing on how emotions and interpersonal dynamics are expressed through bodily signals. Posture, gesture, facial expression and spatial dynamics play a crucial role in both interpersonal communication and choreographic storytelling (Brooks, 2021).

By developing the analysis methodology captures not only choreographic structure but also the expressive and emotional nuances embedded in movement (Farnell, 1999). This provides dancers and choreographers with a practical tool for interpreting, preserving and transmitting emotionally charged movement in performance and rehearsal contexts.

3.8 Key actions in the sequence and their emotional and physical meaning

To ensure the practical applicability of this research, I identified keys actions that exemplify bodily communication in real-life scenarios. These structured frameworks allow for a systematic analysis of how body language translates into choreographic material (Leach, 2014).

For instance, in a social context such as a first date, initial physical contact or personal space negotiation can indicate interest or discomfort. Similarly, in a formal presentation, a speaker's posture and gestures, whether expansive and open or closed and tense (Figure 13.18), can communicate confidence or uncertainty to an audience (Figure 13.19).



Figure 13.18 D. Farlam / Soledad, M. S. Montacci *position closed and tense* (2025).



Figure 13.19 D. Farlam / Soledad, M. S. Montacci *to lean back tensely, facing the audience* (2025).

These specific actions and gestures were carefully selected for their clarity and impact in revealing underlying emotions and intentions. They serve as the foundation for movement analysis, recomposition and choreographic development (Brooks, 2008).

3.9 From observation to choreographic translation

After selecting key movements, I created a short sequence of actions to illustrate the recomposition and translation of bodily communication into a choreographic form. These movements were systematically documented and analysed, highlighting both their theoretical implications and practical applications in dance-making.

A detailed table (Table 13.1) presents the key movements within this sequence, categorizing them according to their emotional and physical significance. This provides a structured reference point for understanding how gesture, posture and spatial interaction contribute to the narrative and emotional depth of movement-based expression.

Table 13.1 Key Movements and their Physical and Emotional Meanings

Movement/action	Physical meaning	Emotional significant	Contextual example
Gesture A: crossed arms (Figure 13.20)	Tension in the shoulders, hands crossing over chest	Defensiveness, self-protection	Withdrawing from a conversation topic
Gesture B: arm reach (Figure 13.21)	Extension of the arm in a gentle arc	Curiosity, openness	Reaching out to someone or something for the first time
Gesture D: head tilt (Figure 13.22)	Slight tilt of the head to the side	Empathy, interest, inquiry	Listening attentively to someone's story



Figure 13.20 M. Mendones / *Soledad*, M. S. Montacci *crossed arms* (2025).



Figure 13.21 D. Farlam / *Soledad*, M. S. Montacci *arm reach* (2025).



Figure 13.22 M. Mendones / *Soledad*, M. S. Montacci *head tilt* (2025).

This approach not only highlights the expressive potential of movement but also provides an analytical methodology for transforming bodily communication into a structured and meaningful choreographic language.

4. Integrating *Labanotation* and *Viewpoints & Composition* for advancing non-verbal communication analysis

4.1 Practical applications of *Labanotation* in non-verbal communication

Labanotation (Laban, 1928) serves as a precise and standardized method for recording and analysing movement. While it is traditionally associated with dance notation and reconstruction, its potential extends to fields such as professional training, psychology, negotiation and therapy, where understanding body language is crucial. By translating movement into a structured format, *Labanotation* allows researchers to document, analyse and compare non-verbal communication patterns with accuracy.

According to Studd and Cox (2013), experts in Laban/Bartenieff Movement Studies, *Labanotation* has been underutilized in non-verbal communication research. They argue that adapting *Labanotation's* terminology and observation practices could significantly enhance studies in gesture analysis, interpersonal dynamics and cultural communication differences.

Labanotation, a system traditionally used to document dance movements, has significant applications beyond the performing arts. Its ability to analyse and codify bodily movements can enhance the understanding and refinement of non-verbal communication across various fields. In professional training and negotiation, non-verbal communication plays a crucial role: posture, gestures and spatial awareness influence perceptions of authority and trust (Hall, 1966). *Labanotation* could be employed to study and refine these signals, optimizing communication in high-stakes environments such as diplomacy and management. In psychology and therapy, body language is often indicative of deep-seated emotions, trauma or social difficulties (Davis, 1978). *Labanotation* provides a structured method for recording and interpreting these movements, offering valuable tools in movement-based therapy, autism interventions and emotional rehabilitation. Finally, in artificial intelligence and motion capture research, the need for detailed movement databases to improve gesture recognition and human-computer interaction is becoming increasingly evident (Sebe et al., 2004). Integrating *Labanotation* into these fields could enhance the precision of movement models, with applications spanning robotics, animation and augmented reality.

4.2 Viewpoints & Composition and its application beyond theatre

Viewpoints & Composition (Overlie, 1979; Bogart & Landau, 2005) offers both a philosophical and practical framework for training performers, fostering ensemble work and developing movement for the stage. It consists of a set of movement principles, categorized into Time and Space *Viewpoints*, which together provide a shared vocabulary for discussing and shaping performance (Bogart & Landau, 2005).

Initially articulated by choreographer Mary Overlie, the *Viewpoints* system was later expanded by Anne Bogart and Tina Landau, who integrated vocal and physical viewpoints, emphasizing the interplay between movement and voice in the creation of performance.

While originally developed for theatrical performance, the principles of *Viewpoints* extend beyond the stage into a variety of fields, including movement training, somatic practices and non-verbal communication. For instance, in education and public speaking, *Viewpoints* enhances spatial awareness and gesture clarity, enabling educators and speakers to utilize body language effectively to engage their audiences (Rendahl, 2008). In movement therapy, the framework's improvisational nature supports individuals in exploring physical expression and breaking habitual movement patterns. Additionally, in cultural studies and communication, understanding Time and Space *Viewpoints*, such as duration, speed and repetition, can aid in interpreting and adapting to diverse cultural non-verbal cues, thus reducing miscommunication in intercultural interactions (Hall, 1966).

By combining *Viewpoints* with *Labanotation*, this approach bridges the gap between structured analysis and creative improvisation, offering a comprehensive method for studying, refining and translating bodily communication.

4.3 Integrating Labanotation and Viewpoints & Composition for comprehensive movement analysis

Integrating *Labanotation* and *Viewpoints & Composition* offers a dual-layered framework for analysing, enhancing and translating body communication. While *Labanotation* provides a rigorous and precise system for describing movement, breaking it down into objective elements such as body positioning, effort and spatial relationships (Laban, 1928), *Viewpoints & Composition* (Overlie, 1979; Bogart & Landau, 2005) offers a qualitative, improvisational approach, emphasizing time, space and expressive dynamics.

By combining these two systems, this research creates a hybrid methodology that integrates both the measurable, structural aspects of movement and the more subjective, performative qualities. This approach makes it possible to analyse movement not only in terms of its technical execution but also in terms of its communicative and expressive impact.

4.4 How the two systems were combined: A practical example

In this project, I developed a notation-based movement analysis system that incorporates elements from both *Labanotation* and *Viewpoints & Composition* (Table 13.2). The process involved:

1. Recording movement sequences: Using *Labanotation*, I documented the precise physical execution of movements, including body direction, weight shifts and effort dynamics.
2. Applying *Viewpoints & Composition*: I then analysed the same sequences through the *Viewpoints* framework, focusing on how elements like tempo, duration, spatial relationships and kinaesthetic response influenced the meaning and emotional tone of the movement.
3. Cross-referencing both systems: The final step involved layering both analyses, allowing me to observe where precisely notated movements intersected with interpretive performance choices. For instance, I examined how a small shift in weight (*Labanotation*) could drastically change the intention behind the movement when viewed through *Viewpoints'* lens of spatial tension and timing.

Table 13.2 Actions with Viewpoints & Composition and Labanotation Models

Action	<i>Viewpoints & Composition</i>	Structural model <i>Labanotation</i>
<i>Self-touch</i>	Duration – Tempo	Intrapersonal – Touch
<i>Ring reassurance</i>	Duration – Shape	Surround with touch – intrapersonal
<i>Shrinking posture</i>	Duration – Tempo	Close – Impulse
<i>Displacement fiddling</i>	Duration – Repetition	Isolation – Continuous
<i>Animation</i>	Tempo – Shape	Pathways – Continuous
<i>Postural retreat</i>	Tempo – Shape	Impact – Retreat
<i>Covering mouth and ear point</i>	Duration – Shape	Sustained – Intrapersonal
<i>Truth slips</i>	Repetition – Tempo	Isolation – Impact

Table 13.2 (Continued)

Action	Viewpoints & Composition	Structural model <i>Labanotation</i>
<i>Lip bite</i>	Shape – Duration	Close – Impact
<i>Preening</i>	Shape – Duration	Free – Touch
<i>Facial touching</i>	Duration – Shape	Intrapersonal - Touch
<i>Softened fist gestures</i>	Shape – Duration	Soft – Sustained
<i>Nodding</i>	Repetition – Duration	Impact – Continuous
<i>Smile</i>	Duration – Shape	Soft – Open
<i>Downward chop</i>	Repetition – Tempo	Pathways – Close
<i>Sincerity squint</i>	Duration – Shape	Close – Soft
<i>Head tilt</i>	Duration – Shape	Impact – Sustained
<i>Neck touch</i>	Duration – Tempo	Intrapersonal – Touch
<i>Chin jut</i>	Spatial relationship – duration	Impact – Open
<i>Lean in</i>	Architecture – Spatial relationship	Pathways – Continuous
<i>Heart claps</i>	Shape – Duration	Touch – Impulse

4.5 Example: ‘Self-touch’ – combining *Labanotation* and *Viewpoints & Composition*

In this example, we examine the gesture of ‘self-touch’ (Figure 13.23), incorporating Intrapersonal and Touch from *Labanotation* along with Duration and Tempo from *Viewpoints & Composition*.

4.5.1 *Viewpoints & Composition* (Duration & Tempo)

In *Viewpoints*, the focus is placed on the Duration and Tempo of the movement:

- **Duration:** This refers to how long the self-touch lasts. For instance, if the performer gently touches their face or chest, the duration may be prolonged (signalling a calming or introspective moment) or brief (indicating urgency or anxiety).



Figure 13.23 D. Farlam / Soledad, M. S. Montacci gesture self-touch (2025).

- **Tempo:** This captures the speed of the movement. A slow tempo (a lingering touch) could suggest a meditative or contemplative feeling, while a fast tempo (a quick flick of the hand to the face) might convey tension or discomfort.

4.5.2 *Labanotation (Intrapersonal & Touch)*

From the *Labanotation* perspective, we analyse the Intrapersonal and Touch elements:

- **Intrapersonal:** This relates to the performer's relationship with their own body. A self-touch is an intimate gesture, reflecting self-reassurance or grounding. The quality of the touch (whether light, firm or hesitant) can indicate emotional states such as comfort, self-assurance or distress.
- **Touch:** In *Labanotation*, Touch refers to the physical interaction with one's own body (or another object), and its nature conveys emotional or psychological states. A soft, slow touch might express vulnerability or tenderness, while a sharp, quick touch could signify irritation or frustration.

4.5.3 *Cross-referencing Viewpoints and Labanotation*

To combine both systems, we layer *Viewpoints'*

Duration and Tempo with *Labanotation's*

Intrapersonal and Touch:

- **Duration (*Viewpoints*) and Intrapersonal (*Labanotation*):** If the duration of the self-touch is sustained, it could signal a moment of self-reflection or emotional grounding. This aligns with an intrapersonal connection, where the performer seeks comfort or calm (Figure 13.24).
- **Tempo (*Viewpoints*) and Touch (*Labanotation*):** A slow tempo combined with a soft touch may suggest a meditative state or a gesture of reassurance. Conversely, a quick touch might manifest stress, with the intrapersonal aspect indicating a response to inner discomfort or a need for self-soothing.

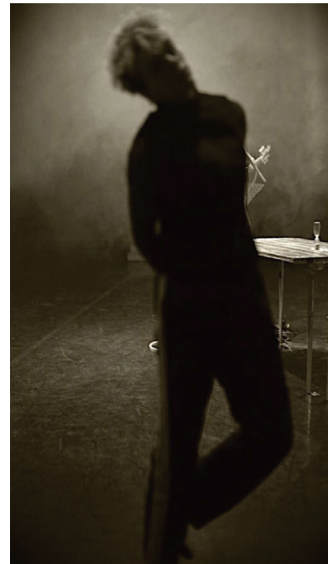


Figure 13.24 D. Farlam / Soledad, M. S. Montacci re-composing self-touch (2025).

- *Labanotation* provides a highly detailed movement analysis but does not inherently convey qualitative, emotional or improvisational aspects of dance.
- *Viewpoints & Composition* offers a fluid and interpretative lens but lacks a standardized notation system.

To address this, I experimented with layering both approaches:

- *Labanotation* was used to map expressive variations (Intrapersonal and Touch).
- *Viewpoints*-based annotations were added to indicate technical details (Duration and Tempo).

4.6 Combining *Labanotation* and *Viewpoints*: A case study in gesture and emotional expression

Imagine a performer slowly touches their own cheek during a scene (Figure 13.25). The duration of the touch is long, and the tempo is slow, creating a thoughtful and introspective moment. This could be notated in *Labanotation* as a sustained duration with a slow tempo. From the *Viewpoints* perspective, this gesture is interpreted as an intrapersonal action, where the touch conveys tenderness and a need for emotional grounding.



Figure 13.25 D. Farlam / *Soledad*, M. S. Montacci *slow self-touch own cheek* (2025).

The slow tempo suggests a calm emotional state, while the intrapersonal quality highlights that this gesture is a moment of connection with the self (Figure 13.26).



Figure 13.26 D. Farlam / *Soledad*, M. S. Montacci *a moment of connection with the self* (2025).

By combining *Labanotation*'s precise description of duration and tempo with *Viewpoints*' focus on intrapersonal experience and the nature of the touch, we gain a richer, more nuanced understanding of how this simple gesture communicates both physically and emotionally.

A specific case study involved a gesture-based movement sequence designed to convey linguistic barriers and communication breakdowns. *Labanotation* allowed me to codify micro-movements (e.g. hesitation in hand movements, changes in gaze direction), while *Viewpoints* analysis revealed how rhythmic shifts and spatial pauses contributed to a sense of miscommunication or connection.

4.7 Implications of integrating *Labanotation* and *Viewpoints* & Composition

By merging these two approaches, this research offers new insights into non-verbal communication and its role in performance, education and interaction. Key questions explored include:

- *How does the integration of Labanotation and Viewpoints illuminate the role of non-verbal communication?*

This hybrid approach demonstrates how structured movement analysis can coexist with interpretative performance techniques, offering a more nuanced understanding of how meaning is conveyed physically.

- *In what ways can emotions be translated into movement through a hybrid system of notation?*

The combination of *Labanotation's* precision and *Viewpoints'* expressivity reveals how emotional states can be mapped onto movement patterns, showing the relationship between intention and execution.

- *What are the practical applications of this integrated system in performance, education and communication?*

Beyond dance and theatre, this methodology can be applied in training public speakers, enhancing gesture recognition in AI, refining movement therapy techniques, and improving intercultural communication.

Ultimately, this integration highlights the interdisciplinary potential of movement analysis, bridging scientific observation with artistic interpretation. By combining *Labanotation's* analytical depth with *Viewpoints'* dynamic adaptability, this project offers a comprehensive method for studying, documenting and translating human movement, expanding our understanding of non-verbal communication in both artistic and everyday contexts.

5. The *Soledad* project: Exploring hybrid methodologies in choreographic and non-verbal communication

5.1 Objectives and methodology

The *Soledad* project (Figure 13.27) emerged as a practical case study aimed at exploring how bodily communication can be codified, translated and analysed within choreographic practice. As both choreographer and researcher, I undertook a practice-led inquiry, working closely with musician Riccardo Militerno to investigate how movement sequences communicate emotions, attitudes and interpersonal dynamics, building on existing research on embodied communication (Brooks, 2008). The central objective of the project was to develop a notation-based tool that dancers could use not only to document and preserve choreography but also to interpret and deepen its expressive qualities. To achieve this, I followed three key methodological stages. First, I focused on codifying movement, using *Labanotation* to record technical elements such as body positioning, spatial orientation, and effort qualities (Hutchinson, 1977). Second, I turned to interpreting expressive elements by applying principles

of *Viewpoints & Composition*, analysing how rhythm, timing and spatial relationships shape meaning and emotional resonance in performance (Newlove & Dalby, 2004). Finally, I worked on translating bodily communication, moving beyond technical documentation to identify subtle non-verbal cues, including hesitation, urgency and resistance, and encoding them in a form that reflects both precision and emotional intent.

5.2 Challenges and findings

One of the primary challenges was bridging the gap between the rigid nature of *Labanotation* and the fluid, interpretative nature of *Viewpoints & Composition*.

Labanotation provides a highly detailed analysis of movement, yet it does not inherently capture the qualitative, emotional or improvisational dimensions of dance. On the other hand, *Viewpoints & Composition* offer a more fluid and interpretive perspective but lack a standardized system of notation. To address these limitations, I experimented with layering both approaches: I used *Labanotation* to map the technical details of movement and incorporated *Viewpoints*-based annotations to highlight expressive variations.

This hybrid approach acknowledges that movement is not merely a series of physical actions but also a medium of communication, carrying intent, emotion and narrative subtext.

The analysis method had to be adapted to capture not just the technical aspects of movement but also the emotional depth conveyed through gestures, spatial relations and timing. The findings highlight the potential for this hybrid methodology to offer a comprehensive understanding of how emotions are translated into physical actions, making it a useful tool for analysing and teaching body language, both in dance and beyond.



Figure 13.27 D. Farlam / Soledad, M. S. Montacci (2025).

5.3 Practical applications and future research

This hybrid method has proven relevant across various areas of practice, offering a structured yet flexible tool for documenting and refining choreography while

allowing space to interpret and enhance the emotional layers of movement. Its potential can extend beyond dance, supporting educators and public speakers in using body language more effectively and offering valuable insights for the analysis of everyday gestures within non-verbal communication studies. While still in development, the approach expands the scope of movement notation by preserving both technical precision and intuitive expression. Future research will focus on validating its applicability across diverse contexts and populations, with particular interest in exploring extensions to other forms of non-verbal communication, such as sign language. Collaborative studies and practical applications will help assess its effectiveness across different choreographic disciplines, contributing to a deeper understanding of movement as both a technical framework and a dynamic language of human expression.

5.4 Audience feedback and reception

The performance *Soledad* (Figure 13.28) received insightful feedback from the audience, highlighting the effectiveness of the hybrid methodology in conveying emotions through movement. Many viewers described experiencing a sense of serenity, despite the underlying themes of melancholy and solitude. They expressed appreciation for how the choreography managed to evoke emotions in a harmonious way. Some audience



Figure 13.28 D. Farlam / *Soledad*, R. Militerno (2025).

members, even without prior knowledge of the theme, were able to intuitively grasp its essence through the initial gestures and their subsequent recomposition. Others described the experience as a journey through waves of emotions, perhaps not entirely comprehensible on a rational level but nonetheless fluid and cohesive, leaving a lingering sense of calm. This response suggests that the approach successfully bridges technical precision and expressive depth, reinforcing movement as a powerful medium of communication beyond verbal language.

Conclusion

This research demonstrates the transformative potential of integrating *Labanotation* and *Viewpoints & Composition* to enhance and deepen the understanding of non-verbal communication. By combining *Labanotation's* detailed documentation and analysis of movement with *Viewpoints'* dynamic exploration of spatial and temporal relationships, this study offers a richer, more nuanced perspective on how we communicate through the body.

Labanotation (Newlove & Dalby, 2004) is a precise system for documenting the technical aspects of movement, such as spatial patterns, dynamics and qualitative components. It allows for the thorough analysis of movement structures, enabling an understanding of the technical and expressive facets of bodily actions. This system plays a pivotal role in capturing both the form and the emotional undertones of movement, contributing to a comprehensive framework for analysing how non-verbal communication functions in everyday life.

In contrast, *Viewpoints & Composition* (Bogart & Landau, 2005) is an improvisational technique that focuses on time, space, shape and movement. It encourages spontaneity and a responsive, intuitive relationship with both space and co-performers. This system fosters a dynamic exploration of movement possibilities, revealing new ways to embody emotions and interactions. The immediacy and organic nature of this approach complement the structural clarity provided by *Labanotation*.

The integration of these two methods, *Labanotation's* precision and *Viewpoints'* improvisational freedom, creates a powerful tool for understanding and crafting non-verbal communication. By combining the technical with the expressive, this research reveals how bodily movement can be used to communicate complex emotions and interactions. This hybrid method allows practitioners to explore movement in a more detailed and emotionally resonant way, enhancing their ability to communicate non-verbally.

This methodology has particular significance for individuals with hearing impairments or those navigating language barriers. Emphasizing bodily communication as a primary mode of interaction fosters inclusivity and opens new avenues for understanding across communities. By focusing on the emotional subtleties expressed through movement, this integrated approach helps bridge the gap between people with different communication needs, facilitating more effective and empathetic social interactions.

The research also contributes to the field of movement analysis by offering practical tools for the study and application of non-verbal communication. Future work could explore how combining these methods with other systems could further enhance our understanding of embodied communication, particularly in areas like pedagogy, therapy and cross-cultural exchange.

An additional significant aspect of this research is the use of translation on multiple levels. Translation here is not limited to linguistic conversion but extends to the transposition between expressive systems: from gesture to language, from notation to live movement, from improvisation to formalization. This multi-layered use of translation made complex concepts more accessible and facilitated dialogue between different disciplines. In this sense, translation became a creative and communicative act in itself, reflecting the multifaceted nature of non-verbal communication.

Ultimately, by formalizing the analysis of movement through notation, this study provides a foundation for future exploration into the emotional and communicative potential of the body. Continued research and development of this integrated methodology will help refine how we interpret and practice non-verbal communication, offering new insights into embodied expression.

In the end, by delving into the intricate language of movement, this research invites us to recognize the body not merely as a vessel of physical action, but as a profound communicator of our deepest emotions, intentions and connections, transcending words and bridging the silent spaces between us (Figure 13.29).



Figure 13.29 D. Farlam / Soledad, M. S. Montacci (2025).

References

- Argyle, M. (1988). *Bodily communication*. Routledge.
- Bogart, A., & Landau, T. (2005). *The viewpoints book: A practical guide to viewpoints and composition*. Theatre Communications Group.
- Brooks, M. (2021). *Body Language decoder: 50 cards to reveal what they're really thinking*. Illustrated by R. Levit Ruiz. Laurence King Publishing.
- Sebe, N., Lew, M. S., & Huang, T. S. (2004). The state of the art in human computer interaction. In A. Camurri & G. Volpe (Eds.), *Gesture-based communication in human-computer interaction*. Springer.
- Cook, N. (1998). *Analysing musical multimedia*. Oxford University Press.
- Davis, M. (1978). *Movement and meaning: A guide to understanding human movement and its psychological implications*. Academic Press.
- Farnell, B. (1999). *Moving bodies, acting selves: A theory of somatic communication*. Cambridge University Press.
- Foster, S. (2011). *Choreographing empathy: Kinesthesia in performance*. Routledge.
- Hall, E. T. (1966). *The hidden dimension: Man's use of space in public and private*. Doubleday Anchor Books.
- Hutchinson Guest, A. (1977). *Labanotation: The system of analyzing and recording movement*. Routledge.
- Leach, J. (2014). *Dance analysis: Theory and practice*. Routledge.
- Lepecki, A. (2006). *Exhausting dance: Performance and the politics of movement*. Routledge.
- Laban, R. (1950). *The mastery of movement: A guide for teachers and students*. Macmillan.
- Minors, Helen Julia. (2012). *Music, dance and the moving image: Interdisciplinary perspective on translation*. Bloomsbury Academic.
- Monelle, R. (2000). *The sense of music: Semiotic essays*. Princeton University Press.
- Newlove, J., & Dalby, A. (2004). *Laban for all: A guide to Laban movement theory*. Macmillan.
- Overlie, M. (2017). *Standing in space: The six viewpoints theory and practice*. Drama Book Shop.
- Studd, S., & Cox, C. (2013). *Laban/Bartenieff movement studies: Principles and practices*. Routledge.