

**Analysis of the Acceptance Speeches from the  
Republican and Democratic Conventions  
by Peggy Hackney  
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Watching the Acceptance Speeches of both Mitt Romney and Barack Obama, I am acutely aware that both of these men project a “Presidential aura” through their “Body Attitude” (their habitual postural stance). They both stand upright with a one-unit Vertical Dimension stress through the torsos. No slumping for these guys! They both use a channeled pin-point focus that sweeps horizontally from Left to Right to Forward. This Direct spatial attention conveys a sense of focused clarity that can relate to their ability to convey and cope with detailed information as well as take in the entire audience. They both use movement that is not overly large (about mid range kinesphere, even though Romney’s is a bit larger) They both stride in with long easy-lower bodies. Mitt Romney’s upper body is also freely flowing, while Obama’s seems a bit more controlled. When he shakes hands with a colleague, however, I see the largess of his freely outpouring arm. I know that he has that Free Flow, but this analysis is only about these Acceptance Speeches.

As we all know, it is one thing to say words that indicate ideas, beliefs or actions, and it is another level of investment entirely to put your whole body into the statement! Even the colloquial phrase, “Put your weight behind it!” implies that there is a difference in meaning between using words alone and words supported by body movement.

It is important to always remember the following:

**There is no simplistic one-to-one meaning for any specific gesture. Meaning always comes within a context. So in this article we will look at the word context they are using when they do their habitual gestures. (Of course another context for the Acceptance Speeches is that they are speaking to their followers, not their detractors from the**

**opposite party.)**

**Movement can tell us what the innate preferences of the person are for moving into action, and what they are most invested in. Both Obama and Romney, of course, have habitual movements...all humans do. The issue then becomes, what moments in their speeches show the most bodily commitment to what they are saying? As you watch the upcoming debates you might want to compare your observations with mine....**

As a Laban Movement Analyst, I am often asked “What do you see in their movement? Which one is better for this job? But comparing movement from a Laban perspective is less about a battle where one person is seen as a “good candidate for being a good President” vs. a “a bad candidate.” What is true from the Laban perspective, is that **movement can tell us what the habitual approach or innate preferences of the person are for moving through a decision-making process into action.**

The Laban work in this context is more about looking at a **different style or presidential approach to living into the demands of the office.** There are obviously many different ways to do any job or to approach any successful career. And there are many different aspects of any job. So every person will have certain aspects of the required duties that we be a better "fit" or easier than certain other ones in any moment in terms of their movement style. Therefore, at any one time in the job, one man or the other might hypothetically be the "better" president. But we have no certain knowledge of what will happen in the future and what stage of the decision-making process will be most crucial in the thousands of required decisions in the short or long run of the 4-year term.

Since all leaders must constantly make decisions and move into action-- From the Laban work and the **“Movement Pattern Analysis” perspective of Laban’s heir, Warren Lamb**, we might be able to say which person is more innately driven to manifest a specific profile of being more interested in the following 3 stages of the decision-making process:

- (a) GIVING ATTENTION to the issue or problem at hand---**  
INFORMATION GATHERING &/or EXPLORING POSSIBILITIES

(b )**FORMING INTENTION**---BUILDING DETERMINATION & RESOLVE about what should happen &/or EVALUATING PRIORITIES

(c)**COMMITTING TO MOVING INTO ACTION**---KNOWING THE TIME TO MOVE INTO ACTION &/or ANTICIPATING AND PLANNING STEPS IN THE ACTION

My analysis does not use the fullness of Warren Lamb's framework, because in these Acceptance Speeches the podium gets in the way most of the time for seeing whole body movement. Therefore, I am looking mainly at gestures and somewhat at upper torso involvement.

In looking at Romney and Obama during their respective Acceptance Speeches, both men seem to have a lot of investment in Direct spatial focus in the **Attention** phase. Romney also seems to have skill with Indirectness (taking in more than more thing at once, checking in with giving attention in an all-encompassing way) This indirectness happens often at the end of his phrases. Both men are motivated to gather information. Romney has a lot of Spreading or Widening in his shape changes, and Obama has more Enclosing or Narrowing. Romney might be slightly more interested in exploring many possibilities—going wide and dropping a particular course of action and trying “something else” if the previous course of action isn't working in the moment. Obama might, in that situation, dig-in and research more facts of the situation.

In the **Intention** stage of decision-making both men use Strength in their whole body movement to emphasize what they are saying. This will mean that they can probably use their determination to push through difficulties that they perceive. Obama seems more able to use his active Strength in **this** campaign than in 2008. He seems determined to put his weight behind what he has achieved that he is passionate about . Romney has a lot of movement that goes up and down, rising and sinking...which might indicate that he would be motivated to spend energy evaluating priorities. Obama also uses up-down in his movement , but it is not as prevalent as in Romney's signature. (This of course does not say anything about what either man might use as the criteria for those evaluations.)

In stage of the decision-making process that involves **Committing and moving into action**, both men probably tend to use Quick Timing. This indicates that they both could be skilled at rapidly moving into action in

a timely way, **if** given the situation where they could use their own sense of timing on what they consider to be urgent matters. (Given the congress at this point, it is rare that either one of them could use their own preference to make things change quickly.) Obama has a lot of movement that goes Forward, advancing...which might indicate that he would be motivated to use his skill at looking ahead and anticipating the results of his action, planning his steps accordingly. It is interesting that his campaign slogan, "Forward," is supported by his own movement preferences!

We can also see which person might be more easily **adaptable** to the situation in which they find themselves. Some people also have a greater desire to become **identified with and becoming a part of the situation**, while others want to/are willing to stand apart.

Romney's easy shape changing ability as well as high prevalence of Free Flow might make him adaptable, and also predicts that he will want to identify himself as being a part of whatever situation he enters....Some critics have called this "wishy-washy" or "unpredictable." Obama is also adaptable, but may not have such a need to become "one of the group" in any situation. He may like to remain more determined to follow what he believes and has made plans for.

Some people like more complex situations and tend to choose those in which they can manifest themselves in this way. Obama often seems to have more fully **loaded** energetic movement accompanying his words. (Loading refers to the number of different energy qualities happen at the same moment.) Obama likes to have many things happening at once...in his energy, he often loads at least 3 qualities. He feels comfortable with the complexity. Romney seems to load only two energies most of the time....This might indicate that he probably would feel more comfortable with fewer things on his plate at once in terms of what will require his energy.

One of the things I'm seeing so far is that **Obama's** most invested movement comes when he is talking about **what is happening right now** and **what will happen in the future**.

**Romney's** most invested movement happens **when he is referring to longed-for times in the past**. This indicates to me that he is more passionate about the past than about his approach to the future---except to return to the values and policies of the past.

The Republican party is longing for a return to the past. Romney's greatest number of fully engaged movement in his acceptance speech came when he was referring to something that he felt we **used to have** as Americans, but **now no longer have...** **"THAT AMERICA, that UNITED AMERICA!"** These words were the most emphasized in his energized body movement. Many of his highest intensities were in relation to what his mother thought about women in power (not necessarily what he thinks). His listing of all the women he has hired had almost no fully committed movement.

Obama has more investment around plans that project to the future and the critical involvement of the voters as they choose...thus his theme of "Forward," and his insistence that he cannot do it alone. "OURS is a fight..." "**EVERYONE** plays by the same rules....." "If **YOU CHOOSE** this path..."

SIDE NOTE: From looking at 27 world Leaders from other countries in our NYU GreenDot project in 2008, we know that full on high intensity Strong, Direct, Quick full-on POWER with large range kinesphere (such as Zhirinovsky from Russia uses...or Fidel Castro...or Chavez from Venezuela ) is not the style that the USA will accept in its Presidents of late. People will perceive it as "too quick to anger" and therefore, "dangerous." From doing our work on the 2008 Election I came to the conclusion that what the US population will see as "Presidential" and will vote for is a really relatively small range of dynamics in a mid-range kinesphere . We would never elect a Zhirinovsky or a Castro or a Chavez.

We expect a relatively narrow range of expression from someone we see as "Presidential."

**Presidential Hopefuls: A Movement Analyst's Interpretation of Romney and Obama's Body Movement in their Acceptance Speeches**

Democratic & Republican Conventions, 2012,

viewed on C-Span

BY PEGGY HACKNEY

Laban Movement Analyst

Integrated Movement Studies, President

October 1, 2012

Watching the Acceptance Speeches of both Mitt Romney and Barack Obama, as a Laban Movement Analyst, I am acutely aware that both of these men project a "Presidential aura." Both men project an upright, vertical torso show of confidence that asserts their presidential aspirations. They both use a channeled pinpoint eye focus that sweeps horizontally from left to right to forward. This direct spatial attention conveys a sense of clarity that would make both men good at conveying detailed information to colleagues on the job. Most Americans listen to WORDS, when someone is speaking, but the message is also coming through the BODIES. What are the candidates saying with their bodies as they speak those words? **There is no simplistic one-to-one meaning for any specific gesture. Meaning always comes within a context. So let's look at the word context they are using when they do their habitual gestures.**

It is one thing to say WORDS that indicate ideas, beliefs or actions, and it is another level of investment entirely to put your BODY into the statement. Even the colloquial phrase, "Put your weight behind it!" implies that there is a difference in meaning between words alone and language supported by movement. **Movement can tell us what the innate preferences of the person are for moving into action, and what they are most invested in. Both Obama and Romney, of**

**course, have habitual movements...all humans do. The issue then becomes, what moments in their speeches show the most bodily commitment to what they are saying? As you watch the upcoming debates you might want to compare your observations with mine....**

### **OBAMA:**

**Obama's most invested movements come when he is talking about what is happening right now and what will happen in the future.** He puts his forceful, contained, sudden movement behind statements that recognize the work that it takes, the difficulties he has overcome, and steps that he has taken to develop "real achievable plans" to "cut taxes for those who need it," and to move into action to increase "manufacturing, education, and national security." He puts his passion into gestures that encourage an action-oriented electorate that to join him and choose to act decisively now and in the future. He uses his direct focus to innumerate and pinpoint issues. His movement is more varied and more dynamically rich than Romney's. (He often uses 3 energy qualities at the same time, such as Strong, Controlled, Sudden) This might indicate that Obama is comfortable with complexity and can deal with multiple diverse or conflicting agendas at once...which could be useful in the Whitehouse. Obama's more controlled flow in gestures (as opposed to Romney's freer or less formed flow) could possibly show that he is more careful when he changes courses or plans that he has made. It might also mean that people will feel discouraged--that his way might be more difficult (even if perhaps more realistic at this time in our world). Freer flow is more inviting and accessible.

### **ROMNEY:**

**Romney's most invested movement occurs when he is referring to an abstract idea or a remembrance of**

**times in the past...The past glory of America and the American dream...”That America”...where we’re all doing the same thing...where “we see everybody else doing the same thing we’re doing....In our best days we feel the vibrancy of our communities...”** This

indicates to me that he is more passionate about the past than about his approach to the future---except to return to the values and policies of the past. Even in his statement about the importance of women, Romney outpoured his strength and physical commitment when he was referring to what his **mother** would say or would have loved to have seen (not himself) in relishing Governor Fallon, Governor Haley, etc...” He uses a freely flowing open palmed gesture, with direct focus to lay out his beliefs as he refers to our communities, our families, our faith saying...”That’s the bedrock of what makes America, America.” This implies that all Americans have experienced that same thing that he has in those three areas. (Have they?) Romney has many gestures that utilize free flow, and this predominance of flow might indicate that he will want to, or be willing to, flow into whatever container is provided for him. Some critics have called this “unpredictable,” constantly changing his position on issues. This style might be valuable for getting along with people, but might be difficult in planning or setting policy. His use of free flow is infectious and tends to encourage the listener to entrain with him, to come along and nod easily (perhaps unconsciously) with whatever the words are. His movement also uses a large kinesphere range than Obama, which might make Romney seem more “open.”

Romney uses gestures that are often less complex dynamically than Obama...often using only 2 energy qualities at the same time (Such as Free, Direct). He probably would feel more comfortable with fewer things on his plate at once in terms of what will require his energy if he were to be in the Whitehouse. He often

cocks his head, closes his mouth, and widens his eyes in an innocent gesture, sort of like a quizzical puppy.

The simplicity of his movement is appealing, as is his almost constant head nodding and bobbing up and down like a ball on water. Is he saying “yes” to himself, and hoping other people will start nodding their heads along with him and say “Yes” to him as well? The answer to this, I suppose, will come on November 6<sup>th</sup>.

## Obama's 3 Frequent Movements when Speaking

As seen in Acceptance Speech at the DNC on C-Span, Sept. 6, 2012

By Peggy Hackney, Laban Movement Analyst,

Currently teaching at UC Berkeley, and Integrated Movement Studies, Pres.

### **OBAMA:**

**Obama's most invested movements come when he is talking about what is happening right now and what will happen in the future.**

He puts his forceful, contained, sudden movement behind statements that recognize the work that it takes, the difficulties he has overcome, and steps that he has taken to develop "real achievable plans" to "cut taxes for those who need it," and to move into action to increase "manufacturing, education, and national security." He puts his passion into gestures that encourage an action-oriented electorate that to join him and choose to act decisively now and in the future. He uses his direct focus to innumerate and pinpoint issues.

His movement is more varied and more dynamically rich than Romney's. (He has a wide range of gestures and often uses 3 energy qualities at the same time, such as Strong, Controlled, Sudden) This might indicate that Obama is comfortable with complexity and can deal with multiple diverse or conflicting agendas at once...which could be useful in the Whitehouse. Obama's more controlled flow in gestures (as opposed to Romney's freer or less formed flow) could possibly show that he is more careful when he changes courses or plans that he has made. It might also mean that people will begin to feel discouraged--that his way might seem more difficult (even if perhaps more realistic at this time in our world). Freer flow is more inviting and accessible.

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## **EXAMPLES: (the numbers below refer to the Motion Capture Animation of the Gestures)**

### **1. OBAMA-GESTURE 1 (OG1) taking hold of an idea and presenting it or embracing it**

Movement of one arm with hand palm open with slightly rounded fingers(as if holding a small ball about 3-4 inches in diameter). Lower arm follows along, making an arc from the elbow. This usually moves repeatedly palm facing forward in the Sagittal, or palm facing up going up and down--can also be used with both hands.

When using this style of gesture, Obama is usually saying "Here's what I believe....I'm presenting it to you to grab hold of and embrace, or run with the ball."

OG1-017726-017807 "Real, achievable plans" This is a passionate urgent statement about a situation in the now moment that he is already addressing.

OG1-041115-041136 "Government should be a force for good...government should work harder..." This is a belief that he puts his weight behind with strength and conviction implying that he knows it won't be easy and will need to be grappled with (note the controlled flow).

Also near 4:46 on the C-Span YouTube version "Two fundamentally different visions for the future."

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### **2. OBAMA-GESTURE 2 (OG2)--This might be labeled "Cutting" or "Incisive"**

Movement of one arm or both with flat open hand, cutting downward, like a knife,

When Obama uses this style of gesture, he is usually saying something that needs incisive action orientation."

OG 2-017011-017044 9:25-9:26 "But know this America, our problems CAN be solved (cutting hand in Direct, Sudden Awake State). Here he is saying, "Wake up, pay attention, things are not hopeless." This is a future oriented statement.

OG 2-034224-034288 "...sustain the strongest military." This is an example of putting his weight behind something he believes he is doing in an incisive way now and in the future. He is passionate here (Strong, Controlled, Sudden)

This cutting gesture is also used in a different way in 7:15-7:16 "TRY a tax cut" Right hand cutting with side of hand. Directness to Left-Forward, arc-like This is used in this case in a slightly sarcastic way, implying that he feels the Republicans don't really have a plan, but will try anything that will sell, even if it couldn't possibly work. "Here he is cutting to the chase."

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### 3. OBAMA-GESTURE 3 (OG3) "Delineating" "Forceful Defining" "Make no mistake" (This may be the most used type of gesture and the most recognizable!)

Movement of one arm or both with hand that is closed with the thumb touching the first joint of the forefinger, and lower arm that is following along making an arc from the elbow.

This movement is often used with high intensity energy investment --a forceful, contained, urgent passionate energy (Strong, Controlled, Sudden---Passion Drive) to point out things that going on in the present moment or he has already taken action on.

He also often uses this energy to recruit people to join him in taking action.

10:44-10:45 "We are making things again" Right hand, Thumb to Forefinger "enumerating fact" Strong-, Bound, Quick- (diminished Passion Drive) Passionate about his achievements.

OG 3\_013901-013963 "I've cut taxes for those who need it."

OG 3\_017656-017707 Delineating what he has accomplished in "manufacturing, education...national security."

OG 3-028250-028374 "some of the worst schools in the nation have made gains..."

OG 3\_030604-030744 "Help me recruit...math and science teachers"

9:27-9:32 "Our challenges **CAN** be **MET**. (both with Right Hand Thumb to Forefinger—enumerating facts Direct, Strong-, Bound (Remote State to Spell Drive) This energy quality was more prevalent in his 2008 campaign and in his 2012 State of the Union speech. It is the style of an orator rather than that of an action person who fights for what he believes with a passion. Obama now has less Spell Drive and more Passion than in 2008!

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#### **TRANSITION GESTURE:**

Obama often maintains Direct, Bound ("Remote State") Eye Contact while tongue goes behind lip to touch front of teeth. This gesture could be a "Coming to Presence and centering himself inwardly—cleansing his palette, and coming to a distance from what he has previously spoken" before moving on to the next thought or statement

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## Romney's 3 Frequent Movements when Speaking

As seen in Acceptance Speech at the RNC on C-Span, August 30, 2012

By Peggy Hackney, Laban Movement Analyst,  
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### **ROMNEY:**

**Romney's most invested movement occurs when he is referring to ideals he believes in (such as what Americans deserve that they used to have), a remembrance of times in the past...or when he is talking about money-making investments , or entrepreneurial successes.** This indicates to me that he is

more passionate about the past than about his approach to the future---except to return to the values and policies of the past. The greatest bodily involvement in his acceptance speech comes when he refers to something that he feels we used to have as Americans, but now no longer have.

5:56-5:57 "It's what Americans deserved."

8:30-8:35 "My children deserve better, my family deserves better my country deserves better."

He seems most interested in the past glory of America and the American dream.... "That America"... "That United America..." where we're all doing the same thing.... where "we see everybody else doing the same thing we're doing.... In our best days we feel the vibrancy of our communities..."

Even in his statement about the importance of women, Romney outpours his strength and physical commitment when he was referring to what his **mother** would say or would have loved to have seen (not himself) in relishing Governor Fallon, Governor Haley, etc..."

He uses a freely flowing, with direct focus to lay out his beliefs as he refers to our communities, our families, our faith saying..."That's the bedrock of what makes America, America." This implies that all Americans have experienced that same thing that he has in those three areas. (Have they?)

In speaking about his investment company and about Steve Jobs he uses movement that implies that we all know what it takes to

be a success—it's obvious—hence the easeful outpouring flow with direct eye focus.

Romney has many gestures that utilize free flow, and this predominance of flow might indicate that he will want to, or be willing to, flow into whatever container is provided for him. Some critics have called this “unpredictable,” constantly changing his position on issues. This style might be valuable for getting along with people, but might be difficult in planning or setting policy. His use of free flow is infectious and tends to encourage the listener to entrain with him, to come along and nod easily (perhaps unconsciously) with whatever the words are. Romney uses gestures that are often less complex dynamically than Obama...often using only 2 energy qualities at the same time (Such as Free, Direct). He probably would feel more comfortable with fewer things on his plate at once in terms of what will require his energy if he were to be in the Whitehouse. He often cocks his head, closes his mouth, and widens his eyes in an innocent gesture, sort of like a quizzical puppy. The simplicity of his movement is appealing, as is his almost constant head nodding and bobbing up and down like a ball on water. Is he saying “yes” to himself, and hoping other people will start nodding their heads along with him and say “Yes” to him as well? The answer to this, I suppose, will come on November 6<sup>th</sup>.

## **EXAMPLES:**

**ROMNEY-GESTURE 1 (RG1)** A freely flowing, direct gesture of the lower arm with a closed hand, thumb touching forefinger. Could be labeled a “delineating” or “defining” gesture (this is similar to the hand position of Obama, but with a freer flowing less controlled, and generally less forceful and urgent.

**RG1\_024694-024924** referring to what his **mother** would say or would have loved to have seen (not himself) in relishing Governor Nicki Haley, Governor Suzanne Martinez...” speaking at the Republican convention. Free, direct, diminished strong (Spell Drive)

**RG1\_031489-031626** “Our families, our communities, our faiths...That’s

the bedrock of what makes America, America.”

**RG1\_039105-031947** Referring to successful business ventures backed by Bain Investments“...these are American success stories.”

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**2. ROMNEY-GESTURE 2 (RG2)**--This might be labeled the “Cutting gesture,” with open hand, slicing down repeatedly with free flowing directness.

In speaking about his investment company and about Steve Jobs he uses movement that implies that we all know what it takes to be a success—it’s obvious—hence the easeful outpouring flow with direct eye focus. (see also above)

**RG2\_041774-041886** “American free enterprise system to harness the extraordinary creativity and talent of the American people...” Free Flow Strong -, Direct - (Diminished Spell Drive) This also uses head-nodding

**RG2\_064427-064579** “extraordinary creativity...creating America’s prosperity. This clip has the freely flowing and direct gesture, and has also a bit more forceful strength with the gesture. The strength is mainly in the voice. Free, Strong, Direct (Spell Drive)

**3. ROMNEY-GESTURE 3 (a & b) (RG3) THIS HAS TWO PARTS:**

(a) “Head-tilting to the side” with rising eyebrows—open countenance with wide-eyed wonder...sometimes with close-mouthed smile. This could be called “quizzical puppy.” This gesture is sort of like a non-verbal “statement after the statement” or a transitional “comment on the previous statement” that is short-lived, and could be simply, “Don’t you agree with me?” (as in seeking assurance from outside)...OR it often seems to me to be saying something a bit more sarcastic and smug, such as. “Surely no one would be stupid enough to think differently than what I think on this one!” or “Any idiot can see that I’m right, can’t they?”

(b)“Head-nodding, "saying yes"-Head nods up and down.

This gesture goes on almost continuously when Romney is listing anything that is “information” oriented that he wants us to believe as “facts.” It is an important gesture, because it probably causes audiences to subconsciously entrain and say “yes” with him. From a more developmental perspective, it is like an oral sucking rhythm that the baby uses and which most humans use to help us “take in” to let the speaker know that we are taking in what they are saying--as in “ingesting.” In our culture it usually means, “Yes, I agree. I’m ingesting what you are saying.”

**RG3ab-056630-057428** This video clip has the two parts in the order of (a) and then (b)

(a)Head-cocking:

“President Obama promised to begin to slow the rise of the oceans...and

to heal the planet.”

b) **Head-nodding** “My promise is to help you and your family.”

**RG3\_057280-057284** This video clip has the two parts in the order of (a) then (b)

**RG3\_0459-046031** This video clip has the two parts in the order of (b) then (a)

“What America needs is jobs...lots a jobs” Head-nodding “Saying Yes” into Head-tilting “quizzical puppy”

**RG3\_057335-057428** This video clip could have a tiny bit more added to the beginning of it, and then it would be in the order of (a) then (b)