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 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 6th.