

Twisting Your Melon: Describing Tricky Movements On The Page

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I have an exercise that I like to use towards the end of a warm up when I am working with a new group of students. For me, it's an exercise that works perfectly as a wake up tool (to borrow a term from Monika Pagneux), because it functions as a kind of puzzle – a puzzle that can only be solved through practical and physical investigation.

The steps of the exercise are fairly easy to explain. However, although the verbal instructions are simple, it is quite difficult to realise them in practice. I have yet to find a student who has trusted herself enough to simply follow the instructions to the letter without starting to panic. Indeed, if I want a room full of people to freeze in utter confusion, looking around the room in the hope that someone else will be the first to give it a go, this is the movement pattern I choose.¹

Beyond the difficulty of translating the instructions into actions, the pattern is also difficult to copy. Because of its rotations and continuous axis shifting, it is quite tricky for students to see the details of the movement as it is demonstrated.

With all of this in mind, I thought that trying to illustrate and describe the movement in purely verbal and pictorial formats would be an interesting challenge. I have tried to set out the following material in such a way that the patient reader should be able to work his/her way through the various steps in order to find some version of the pattern. However, if it gets too frustrating, there is a link to a demonstration video at the end of this text.

I love this exercise. It is great for softening up the chest, spine and hips. When you finally get it, it is more fun than laughing.

Verbal Instructions:

1. Please lie on your back with your arms and legs outstretched as if you were trying to make an 'X'.
2. When you are ready, turn onto your front while swapping the positions of your left hand and your right foot.
3. Your right hand and your left foot should stay relatively fixed in place.

Sometimes I leave the instructions at that and just wait. If I am feeling nice enough to throw my students a bone, I say:

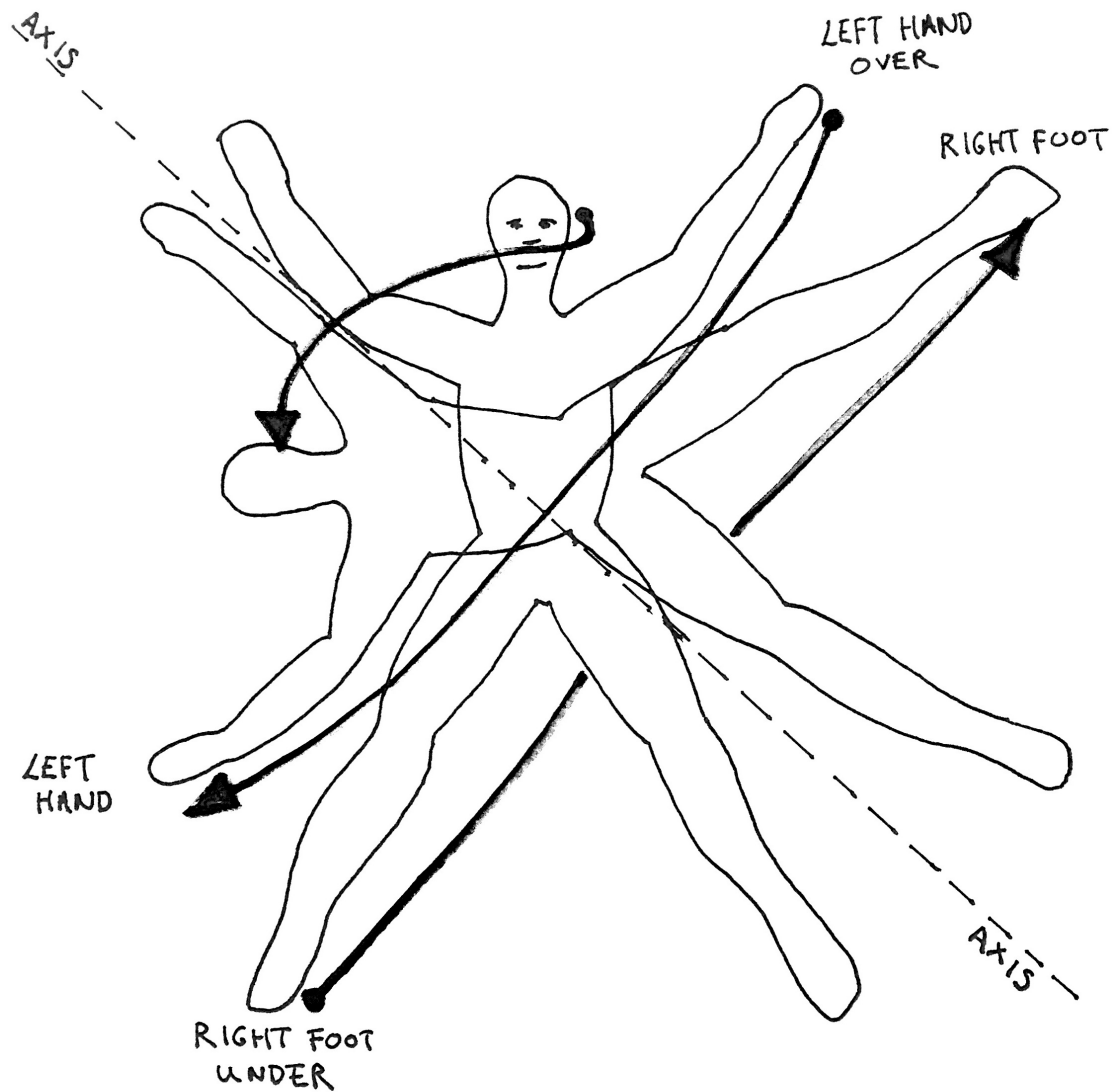
4. To do this movement, you need to bring your left arm over the top of your torso while your right leg travels underneath.

And finally (if only to compound the total confusion that has spread across the studio):

5. As you swap the position of your hand and foot, the movement of your head will describe a quarter circle on the floor in an anti-clockwise direction – moving from 12 o'clock towards 9 o'clock.

If you managed to work this out then congratulations. You shouldn't find any difficulty in giving yourself a pat on the back because you are a master of movement. You might also think about joining Mensa. But for those of you like me, who got a headache just trying to imagine the pathways through space and the changes in orientation, maybe the pictures will help.

Figure 1.



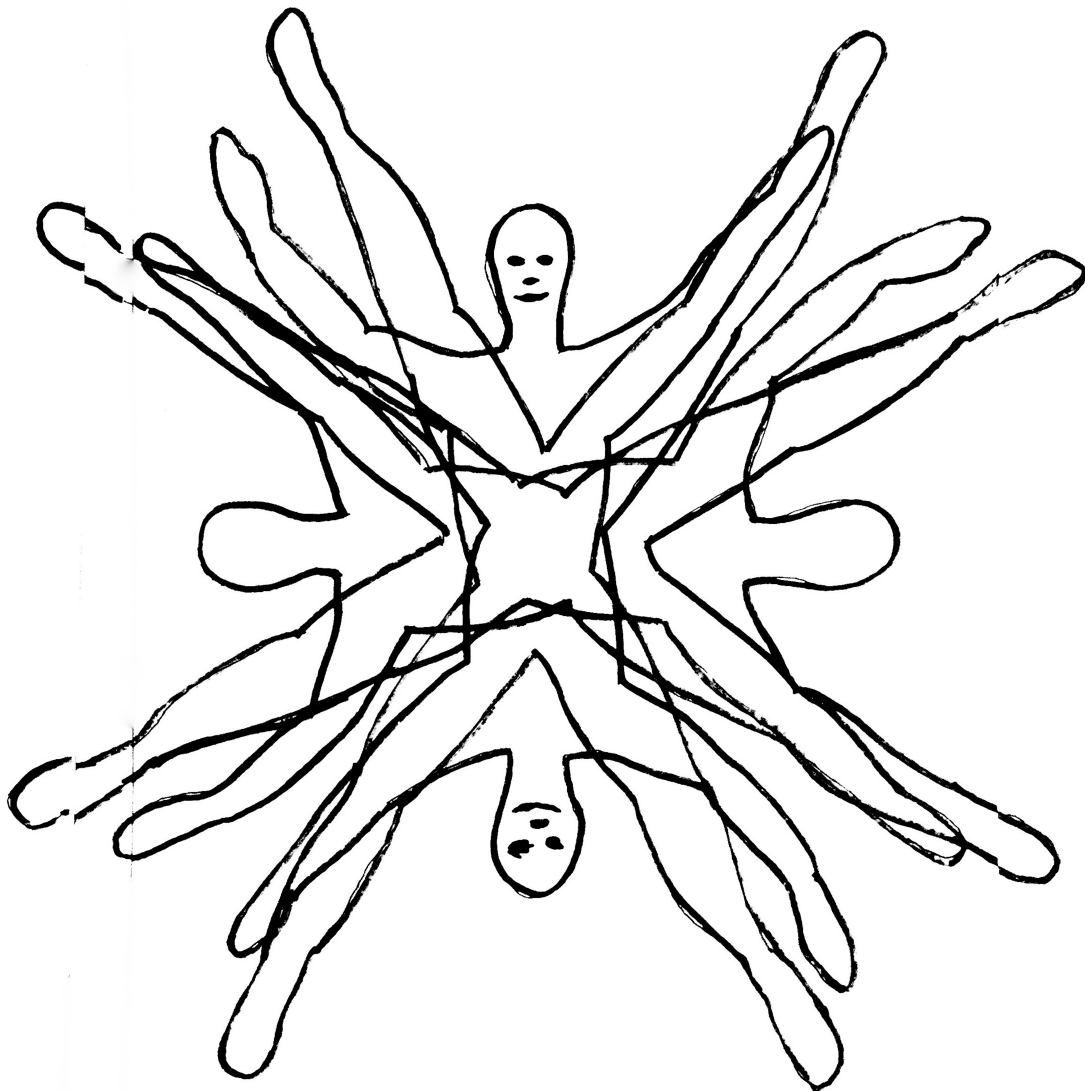
In this picture I have tried to map a quarter rotation of the body (starting at 12 o'clock and finishing at 9 o'clock) Hopefully, by marking out an axis that runs from the right hand to the left foot, and showing the over/under movement of the left hand and right foot, you can begin to get a better idea of what is supposed to happen.

You can also see how the movement starts with your face to the ceiling and ends with your face to the floor.

The next quarter turn involves turning onto your back again. This time it is the right hand that travels over the body to swap with the left foot - which travels under the body.

You can continue to turn over from front to back and back to front while swapping your hands and feet until you have described a full circle.

Figure 2.

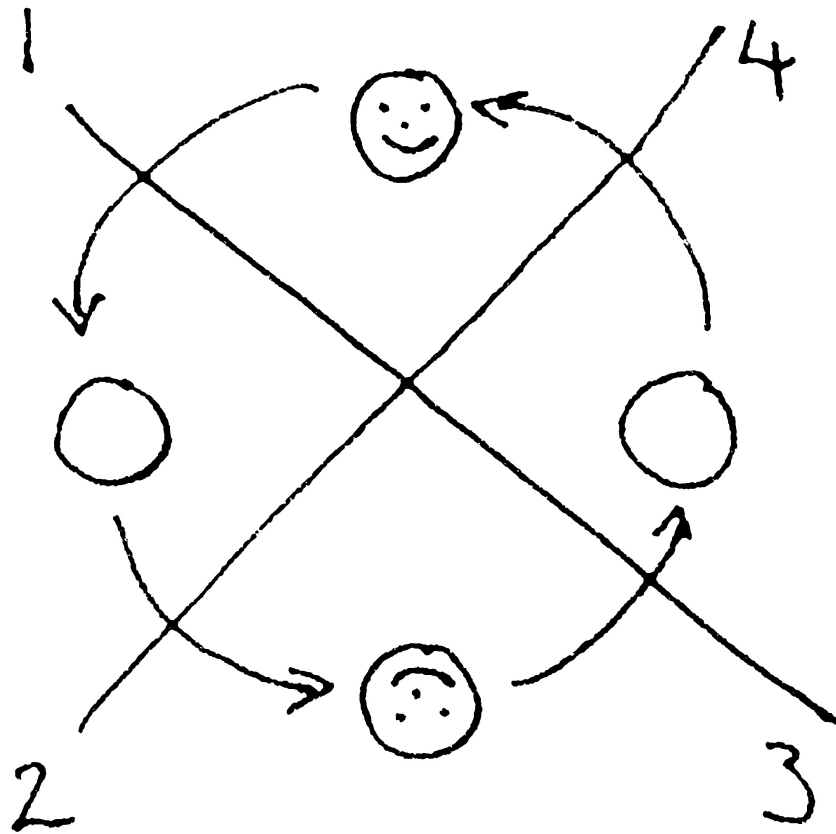


If I were to take a photo of you at rest after each quarter turn of the circle, and then laid them on top of each other it would look like this.

If you read the image in an anti-clockwise direction starting from 12 o'clock, you can begin to imagine the path travelled by the hands and feet as they are swapped in the process of each quarter turn.

(In reality, very few people have the flexibility to swap the hands and feet exactly. You might need more than four turns to describe a full circle.)

Figure 3.

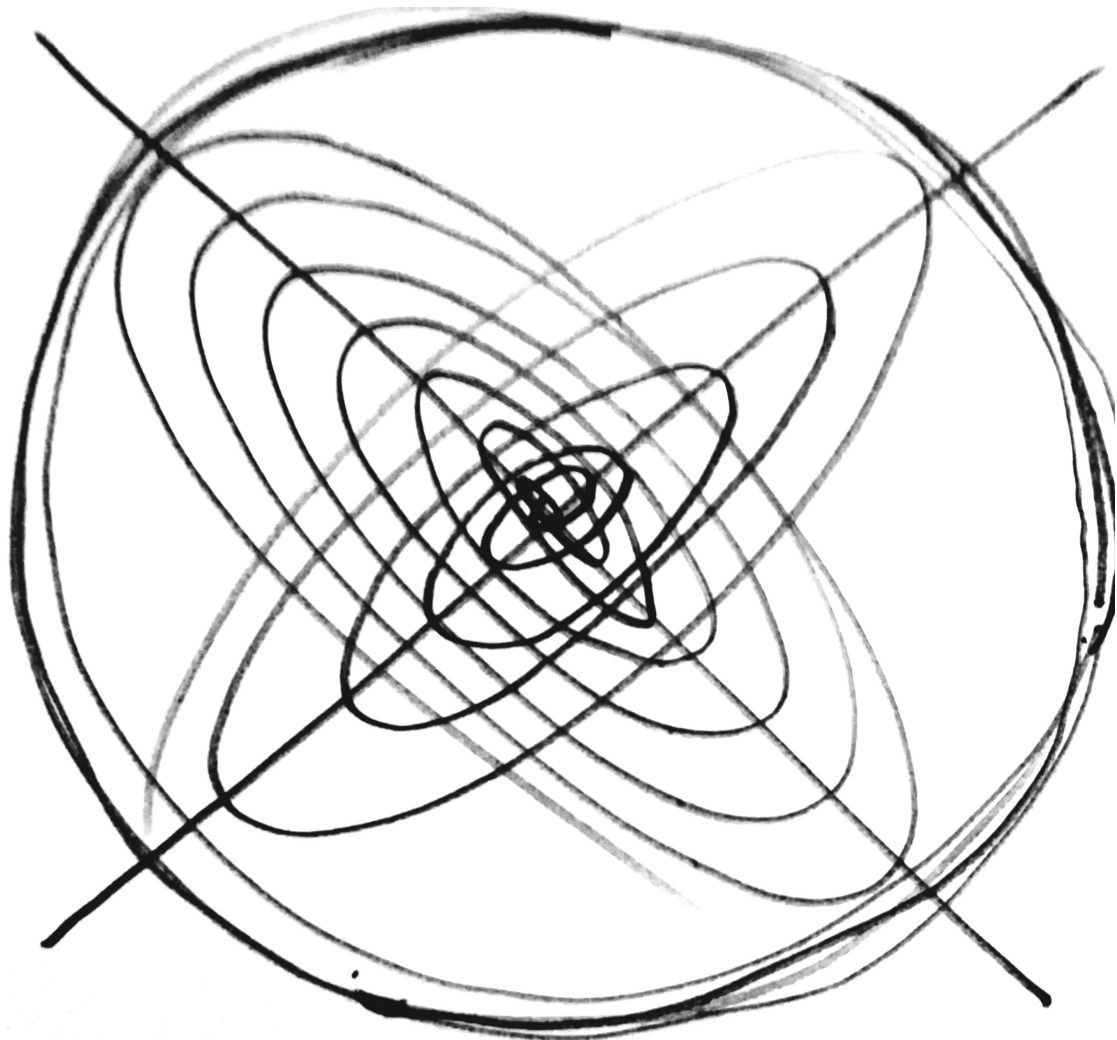


This image attempts to illustrate the framework you might use to guide the way you shape the movement.

In the image, the arms and legs are discarded in order to focus on the circle described by the head, and the changing position of the axis around which the swapping of the hand and foot is organised.

You can see that for each quarter turn of the head there is corresponding change in its orientation (from looking at the ceiling to the looking at the floor).

Figure 4.



Finally there comes a point when you stop thinking too much about what you're doing. You no longer have to worry about fixed points and counter-clockwise quarter-turns. You just get a sense of the pattern and have fun. In this next drawing I've tried to show the spirit of the movement. For me, when you get going, the pattern becomes a series of dynamically opposing spirals, with the head moving its position around the circle's circumference as the arms and legs continually swap places.

This image might be useful when considered in parallel with Figure 3, which somewhat flattens out the three-dimensionality of the movement for the sake of its structural abstraction.

Here is a link to a video of me doing the movement:

<http://theatredanceperformancetraining.org/2016/05/what-are-we-warming-up/>

Having thought your way through the movement using the pictures, you might be able to pick up some of the more complex and nuanced details of the pattern. You might look at how and when the knees and elbows bend, or the paths taken by the hand and foot.

Now that you've seen the movement, try it again.

Have you got it?

Don't forget to breathe.

I hope you feel like you've had a good 'wake up'.

And remember you can always try the movement in the other direction. As Moshe Feldenkrais said, 'All intelligent movements are reversible.'

¹ In reality I never want to do this, but I often find that it happens anyway.