

European Seminar for Kinetography

Paper No. 1

The Principles and Basic Concepts
of Laban's Movement Notation

by Roderyk Lange, 1985.

FOREWORD TO THE 2015 ELECTRONIC EDITION

In 1980, the **European Seminar for Kinetography (ESK)** was founded, with the aim to *illuminate, clarify and discuss notation issues encountered in our current work, or listed on ICKL agendas.*

The participants of ESK were advanced notators from the European School of Kinetography Laban. They came from the following countries: Belgium, Finland, France, Germany, Great Britain, Greece, Italy, Netherlands and Poland.

Once a year we came together for several days to discuss the current projects directly. The bulk of the work, however, was conducted by correspondence. This involved a huge task, not only in devising a long-term programme of work but also in structuring the particular projects, consulting the authors in the course of writing their texts, and checking and editing the advanced projects. Altogether fourteen well advanced papers were released. They were then lodged with the Research Panel at ICKL, for the purpose of further discussions.

It was a fascinating and demanding work. We gained a deeper understanding of the nature of the system, its premises and its endless possibilities (as long as done according to the basic principles).

Our work at ESK came to an end in the late 1990s. However, the participants fondly remember this productive period of intensive work in clarifying some notation issues.

In 2015 Marion Bastien initiated a project, to re-edit electronically all the 14 papers of the European Seminar for Kinetography. They will now be available to a wider circle of recipients and accessible online at kinetography.eu.

Roderyk Lange

LIST OF THE EUROPEAN SEMINAR FOR KINETOGRAPHY PAPERS

- No. 1 **The Principles and Basic Concepts of Laban's Movement Notation**, Roderyk Lange, 1985.
- No. 2 **Analytical Approaches**, Jacqueline Challet-Haas, 1986.
- No. 3 **Closed Positions of the Feet written with Black Pins**, Christine Eckerle, 1986.
- No. 4 **The Notation of Elasticity for Steps and Step-Motifs**, Gisela Reber, 1987.
- No. 5 **The Use of Retentions within the Laban System of Notation**, Jacqueline Challet-Haas, 1989.
- No. 6 **Some Thoughts on kneeling as written in Kinetography Laban**, Christine Eckerle, 1989.
- No. 7 **Some Thoughts on the Graphic Structure of the Laban System of Notation**, Donata Carbone, 1989.
- No. 8 **Minor Movements**, Christine Eckerle, 1989.
- No. 9 **The Duration of an Indication tied to a Path Sign**, Jacqueline Challet-Haas, 1990.
- No. 10 **Vertical Bows**, Marion Bastien, 1992.
- No. 11 **Space Measurement signs versus Measurement Signs**, Jacqueline Challet-Haas, 1990.
- No. 12 **The Notation of Floor Work within the Laban System of Notation**, Anja Hirvikallio, 1995.
- No. 13 **The Assessment of Distances in Supports in Kinetography Laban/Labanotation**, Christine Eckerle, 1995.
- No. 14 **Shifts**, Christine Eckerle, 1998.

The transcription of Paper No. 1 was done thanks to Béatrice Aubert, Roxana Barbacaru, Marion Bastien, Christine Caradec, Sylvie Duschene and Pascale Guénon, June 2015.

The Principles and Basic Concepts of Laban's Movement Notation

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1. THE HISTORY OF THE “PRINCIPLES” PROJECT AND SOME CONCLUSIONS REACHED DURING THIS SURVEY.

It was during the 1961 ICKL Conference in Addlestone that a group of our colleagues approached Albrecht Knust, asking him to prepare a survey of the *principles* of the Laban notation system. The discussions on technical matters were running round in circles during the conference and it became obvious that a clearly formulated framework for future work at ICKL was desperately needed.

There was an urgent need to clarify the principles of the system and to define the basic concepts. Unless this was done, some of the long term problems, which hamper the use, unification and further development of the system, could not be dealt with adequately.

Albrecht Knust responded to this call and prepared a paper for the 1963 Conference, which was originally entitled: “Die Grundsätze und Grundbegriffe der Kinetographie Laban”. This very important contribution he translated into English: *The Principles and Basic Ideas of Kinetography Laban* and it was distributed in this form before the conference. (70 typewritten pages).

During the 1963 ICKL Conference it was confirmed that the clarification of the principles of the system was basic to all technical discussions at ICKL. Unfortunately, no further steps were taken on this matter.

Work on the Principles was continued some years later by Lucy Venable, and a brief report was prepared for the 1979 ICKL Conference. It was distributed among the membership under the title: “Principles of Labanotation/Kinetography Laban”. (2 typewritten pages).

Further investigation into this problem was required and by general consensus the new Principles Committee was formed in 1979, during the ICKL Conference in Chantilly. (See document 5 of the ICKL 1979 Report, p. 56 and p. 48).

The initial members of the Committee were:

Roderyk Lange, Chairman
Muriel Topaz
Jacqueline Challet-Haas

During the following two year period, a great deal of material was carefully sifted through. The existing survey by Albrecht Knust was studied as well as the paper by Lucy Venable. Attention was focused, though, on the existing principal textbooks of our system of notation, written in the past by Ann Hutchinson, Albrecht Knust, and Maria Szentpál. This research revealed that many of the basic concepts were, in fact, not always clearly defined by the particular authors of these textbooks. At times the author’s interpretation of a problem had to be deduced from the scattered statements.

Also during this period the Research Panel of ICKL sent out a questionnaire to the ICKL membership on technical matters. This included a section on the principles of our system of notation. This material was also researched carefully, as it represented a cross-section of the actual opinions of the ICKL membership on this topic.

The current paper on the “Principles” should have been presented during the 1981 ICKL Conference. Unfortunately Roderyk Lange was prevented from attending, so the release of this paper had to be postponed. This gave us, however, the chance to work further on this document and the time has been used to full advantage. Each entry was checked again, with the Committee consulting some of our colleagues. This preview of the preliminary draft brought constructive response from invited members and helpers (about 20). As a result we were able to introduce essential amendments and improve the paper.

The Principles paper was also presented at several meetings of the European Kinetography Seminar and selected issues were discussed at length. Several members of the Seminar have supplied us, over the years, with their comments and suggestions.

The first draft of the Principles paper was distributed and presented finally at the 1983 Conference in Tarrytown, U.S.A. The following discussion highlighted certain issues (1983 Conference report, p. 20), and we received some written comments afterwards. As a result our committee was encouraged to continue with this work and to present our next draft during the 1985 ICKL Conference.

The Principles Committee has successively co-opted further members: Ann Kipling Brown (1983), Jennifer Shennan (1985). In addition, Christine Eckerle and Billie Mahoney gave their help in reading and commenting on the different drafts of the presentation.

The Principles Committee can state at this point that, in its opinion, the only way to clear the paths for further developments within this notation system is to spell out the principles and basic concepts of the system. This work is meant to help the healthy growth of the Laban’s system of notation and in no way can it be a hindrance to further development.

Our system of notation is clearly founded on a certain *category of truths*. As these are inherent in the system, the task of the “Principles Committee” was to elicit them. Nothing was invented by the Committee itself. It led to a careful study of the logical foundation and the structure of this system of notation.

Following the expansion of the system over the years, truths of a *different category* have been unwittingly introduced. This has started a growth within the system which will prove to be alien to it. This may hinder the further development of our system of notation and endanger its reliability as an adequate means of notating human movement.

In the course perhaps, of incompletely considered innovations, the clarity and compactness of this *alphabet based script* could be spoiled. It could eventually become a mixture of different approaches in describing movement. Also, the *universal traits* of Laban’s notation could be lost in this way, being exchanged for *conventional* formulae. This would inflict terrible damage on the system. The great asset of Laban’s notation – its **universality** – allowing very diverse movement and dance styles to be notated, would be lost.

Therefore, half-solutions, reached by a rushed consensus on technical problems do not answer our needs. The problems and difficulties we encounter have to be viewed within the *context of the system*, before truly valid conclusions can be reached.

The viewing of notation problems within too narrow a context cannot lead to satisfactory answers and certainly cannot lead to any durable conclusions. The solutions proposed have to be perfectly adequate and have to correspond to the logical structure of the whole system. They must also be comprehensible to practitioners of the system without causing too much awkwardness in their application.

Any changes in the existing ways of writing, introduced to the notation practice, must be carefully checked and considered. Haphazard changes and their eventual revocation, do not help the practitioner. Published material becomes easily outdated. This does not foster the credibility of the system.

There must be enough time left for research and experimentation, before *accepting* new developments and introducing changes. Particularly they must be tested within the context of the system, against its principles and basic concepts.

The Principles and Concepts, as elicited by the Principles Committee, are contained in a list (item no. 3 in this paper). They deal basically with four essential issues: analysis, graphic layout of the system, movement functions, and movements in a group situation.

This is followed by a survey. All the statements concerning principles and concepts are boxed in and consecutively numbered (Roman numerals). These statements are followed in each case by commentaries, with a few added examples, which illuminate the particular issues (item no. 4 in the paper).

We have listed some of the technical terms as used in the survey. Definitions of these terms had to be included to avoid any misconceptions (item no. 2 in this paper).

Finally, all the published and distributed materials explored in this survey, are listed (item no. 5 in this paper). It shows the wide scope of sources researched in this project.

2. DEFINITIONS OF SOME TECHNICAL TERMS AS USED IN THIS SURVEY.

<i>concept</i>	<p>– Logic and Philos. The product of the faculty of conception: an idea of a class of objects, a general notion or idea. Oxford Dict.</p> <p>– ... any generic or class term, exclusive or relational terms or categories. Sometimes, loosely, any general or abstract representation. Dict. of Phil.</p>
<i>convention</i>	<p>– General agreement or consent, deliberate or implicit, as constituting the origin and foundation of any custom, institution, opinion, etc. ... Oxford Dict.</p>
<i>field</i>	<p>– the range of any series of actions or energies. Chambers Dict.</p>
<i>function</i>	<p>– Math. and Logic. Function is a law of correspondence between an ordered set of things. Dict. of Phil.</p> <p>– the special kind of activity proper to anything: the mode of action by which it fulfils its purpose. Oxford Dict.</p>
<i>fundamental</i>	<p>– Serving as the foundation or base on which something is built. Hence, forming an essential or indispensable part of a system. Oxford Dict.</p>
<i>gravity</i>	<p>– attractive force by which bodies tend to centre of earth, degrees of intensity ... with which one body is affected by the attraction of gravitation exercised by another body... Conc. Oxford Dict.</p>
<i>idea</i>	<p>– mental image, conception, notion. More generally: A picture or notion of anything conceived by the mind: a conception. Oxford Dict.</p>
<i>notion</i> (Ger. Begriff)	<p>– ... it refers to the essence or nature of the object of thought: on the other side, it refers to the true thought of that essence or nature... Dict. of Phil.</p> <p><i>Begriff</i></p> <p>– idea, notion, concept; comprehension, conception. Cassel's Ger. Dict.</p>

<i>position</i>	<p>– situation, arrangement. Chambers Dict.</p>
<i>postulate</i>	<p>– a fundamental principle: a position assumed as self-evident. Chambers Dict.</p>
<i>principle</i>	<p>– (Lat. <i>principe</i>, from <i>principium</i>, a beginning). A fundamental cause or universal truth: that which is inherent in anything... Dict. of Phil. – a fundamental truth on which others are founded or from which they spring: a law or doctrine from which others are derived: a settled rule of action... Chambers Dict.</p>
<i>progression</i>	<p>– motion onward; act or state of moving onward. Chambers Dict. (Ger. <i>Verlauf der Bewegung</i> = process (of time), to proceed). Cassel's Ger. Dict.</p>
<i>relation</i>	<p>– ... the field of a relation is the logical sum of the domain. Dict. of Phil.</p>
<i>sign</i>	<p>– ... that which represents anything to the cognitive faculty. That which signifies or has significance: a symbol. Dict. of Phil.</p>
<i>state</i>	<p>– condition, mode of existence, a phase or stage. Chambers Dict.</p>
<i>symbol</i>	<p>– used by some writers as synonymous with sign. A conventional sign, i.e., a sign which functions as such in virtue of a <i>convention</i>, explicit or implicit, between its users. In this sense 'symbol' is sometimes opposed to 'natural sign'. Dict. of Phil.</p>
<i>system</i>	<p>– the set of correlated principles, ideas, or statements belonging to the same department of knowledge or belief: a department of knowledge or belief considered as an organised whole: a connected and regularly arranged scheme of the whole of some subject: a comprehensive body of doctrines, conclusions, speculations or theses. Oxford Dict. – the kind of an interpretation, or assignment of meaning, which is normally intended for a logistic system is indicated by the technical terminology employed. This is namely such an interpretation that the formulae, some or all of them, mean or express propositions: the theorems express true propositions: and the proof and valid inferences represent proofs and valid inferences in the ordinary sense. – A logistic system</p>

may thus be regarded as a device for obtaining – or, rather stating – an objective, external criterion for the validity of proofs and inferences (which are expressible in a given notation).

Dict. of Phil.

truth

– ... that which is true or according to the facts of the case: the true state of things, or facts: a true statement: an established fact: true belief: known facts, knowledge ...

Chambers Dict.

– (coherence theory) ... truth is **systematic coherence**. This is more than logical consistency. A proposition is true insofar as it is a necessary constituent of a systematically coherent whole.

Dict. of Phil.

Dict. of Phil.	D. D. Runes (ed.). <i>The Dictionary of Philosophy</i> , London, 1970 edition.
Oxford Dict.	<i>The Oxford English Dictionary</i> , Oxford, 1979 edition.
Conc. Oxford Dict.	<i>The Concise Oxford English Dictionary</i> , Oxford, 1964 edition.
Chambers Dict.	<i>The Chambers Twentieth Century Dictionary</i> , Edinburgh, 1972 edition.
Cassell's Ger. Dict.	<i>Cassell's New German Dictionary</i> , London, 1965 edition.

3. A LIST OF PRINCIPLES AND CONCEPTS AS SURVEYED IN THIS PROJECT

Principles and Concepts concerning analytical issues

- I. The movements of the human being are related primarily to the **vertical**.
- II. All directions are basically to the **front** of the mover.
- III. The **symmetrical** build of the body conditions distinctive movement sequences.
- IV. The **centre of gravity** is an essential analytical criterion in defining the progression of movements involving the transference of body weight.
- V. **Supports** are movements involving the transference of weight.
- VI. **Gestures** are movements not involving the transference of weight.
- VII. The **place**. “Place” is a spot on the supporting base above or below which, in the vertical, the centre of gravity is located.
- VIII. The **centre**. The “centre” is the point of relation from which every direction of a body part is judged within the spatial model. The “centre” is the main point of orientation in analysing and writing “gestures”.

Principles concerning the Graphic Layout of the System

- IX. The shape and the shading of the direction signs describe the **progression of movement three-dimensionally**.
- X. The **duration** is indicated by the proportional length of a movement sign.
- XI. The symbols written vertically up the stave denote the **succession** of movements. Symbols written laterally, across the stave, denote **simultaneity** of movements.
- XII. The location of the symbols in the columns within the staves or in the columns which are added to a stave at its right or left side, indicates **which part of the body** will perform the given movement.

Basic Concepts concerning the different Movement Functions

- XIII. **Gradual change** is indicated by all basic movement signs i.e. the direction, rotation and path signs. The duration of the change is indicated by the proportional length of these signs. Any contractions and expansions of the body parts which are indicated by \times and \sphericalangle respectively, will be written into the length of the particular movement signs.
- XIV. The result of a **definite transition** into a new state is maintained until a new movement indication changes it.
- XV. A **passing change** of a state is valid only for the time it is being indicated.
- XVI. A **retention** means that a state is being continued.
- XVII. **General cancellation** means that a body part which has been involved in a particular situation returns to its “usual” alignment.

Principles concerning Movements in a Group Situation

- XVIII. If a number of people move concurrently, in varying or in identical sequences, these actions are identified as **group movements**.
- XIX. The resulting **group paths** are performed by the group as a unit.
- XX. When a group of people moves together along the lines of the movement progression, **following** occurs.
- XXI. When a group of people moves along lines which happen at the right angle or diagonally in respect of the movement progression, **parallel paths** result.
- XXII. If all participants of a group turn at the same time, in the same way, or turn to achieve the same result, **group turns** occur.

4. A SURVEY OF PRINCIPLES AND CONCEPTS OF THE LABAN SYSTEM OF NOTATION

PART A

THE FUNDAMENTALS OF THE LABAN SYSTEM OF NOTATION

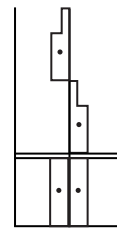
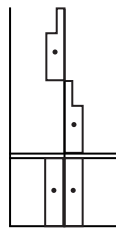
Rudolf Laban recognised and identified the observable factors of human movement. In the long line of attempts made over centuries, by authors like, for example, Arbeau, Beauchamps and Delsarte, Laban succeeded in working out a rational systems of analysis and graphic description, which portrays *the functions of the human body in space and in time as a dynamic progression (flow) of changes*.

His notation is based on an analytical system, relating to the fundamentals of human movement. The basic means of reference being used is the universally experienced and applied notion of the **spatial dimensions**. The application of the *spatial criterion* is one of the essential issues conditioning the **universality** of Laban's system of notation.

The *relativity* of experience and achievement is another universal trait of the human race. In spite of similar characteristics human beings are not uniform creatures. Some physical or cultural features may condition a different approach in carrying out universally human actions. This applies not only to particular human groups, it is already evident with each individual human being.

In his system of analysing and recording movement, Laban respected this truth all the way through. For example, the movement unit commonly called a "step" is basically recorded with one direction sign of an applicable length (duration). However, the execution of this "step" will differ from one person to another as also will the length of the step, its secondary characteristics, the use of energy, etc. If we mean in general terms "a step in a particular direction, of a particular length of time, in a particular level", then this means a universally understood human motion, but it includes at the same time the relativity conditioned by the differences in detail between human beings. As a result everybody will perform a "step" according to his physical build and cultural inheritance. (Ex. a).

Only if, for special reasons of documentation, the measurements of the "step" have to be made precise, the accompanying characteristics made evident, one adds the required details in notation. This may, of course, vary in different degrees, depending on the purpose of the recording. (Ex. b, c, d, e).

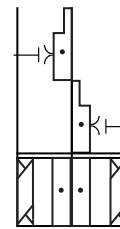
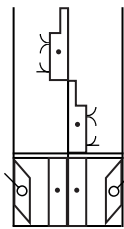
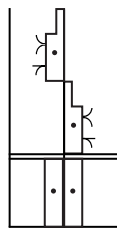


1 = 75 cm

Ex.

a) general description
- ordinary steps.

b) steps of stated
measurement.



c) “street walk” –
from the heels
onto the whole foot.

d) stylised walk –
from the toes
onto the whole foot.
The legs are turned out.

e) “old man’s walk” –
feet kept parallel
and flat.

It is thus possible to prepare a recording of a movement sequence to various degrees of precision; either a generalised, or a very detailed recording of what is actually performed.

A detailed notation is necessary for any particular analytical investigation, and, first of all, to describe the attributes of a particular movement style or dance “dialect”. What is, however, essential is to understand a detail within the full *movement context*. What has been before and what comes afterwards, very often conditions the appearance of the detail. Movement is logically structured according to the functions of the human body in space and time.

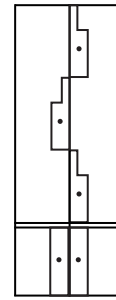
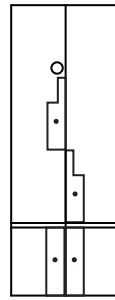
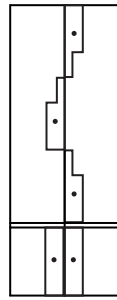
Also, this system allows to record a particular, single performance (**descriptive approach**), as well as to prepare a more generalised instruction for performing a movement sequence (**prescriptive approach**).

Laban says in connection with this:

“Very often it is not necessary to notate all the effects of movement contributing to the final effect”.

(*Principles of Dance and Movement Notation*, 2nd edition, 1975, p.18)

Many details evolve out of a certain movement context and it is up to the notator to understand these connections when analysing movement. Laban’s notation is a *movement script* which secures the **recording of movement progression**. It has to represent the dynamic content inherent in movement, not merely to provide an external picture. This point is actually the asset of Laban’s system in comparison with many of the existing notation systems.



Ex.

f)

g)

h)

The execution of the second step in each example is modified by its context. In example f, the weight begins shifting backward during the end of count 2. In g, its slows down in count 2 in order to come to rest at count 3; in h, the weight moves continuously forward throughout count 2. Also for count 2, the preparatory right leg gesture might be similarly described for each example.

Laban's system of notation is the *equivalent of phonetic script* and it is applicable to any movement manifestation, like dance, gymnastics, working actions etc.

A particular style of dance is based on specific choreotechnical characteristics. Therefore when analysing and notating it, one has to disclose the particular "code" system on which this dance style is based. This can be best accomplished through direct experience of a dance style by the notator. An adequate standard of analysis has to incorporate the understanding of the dynamic context of movement within the structures of a particular dance style.

Further, Laban strongly stresses the necessity of understanding the signs within a notated sequence as having counterparts in the *movement capacities* of the human body:

"The motion characters of the script are compounded according to simple orthographical considerations which we have learned to appreciate in the long exercise of our experimental notation activity".
(*Principles*, p.13)

These orthographical considerations, however, Laban has based on criteria which were derived from the understanding of the *motor principles* of the human body.

Laban has devised the signs of the notation system as visual representations of the equivalent movement occurrences. They can be easily associated with the particular movement properties like direction, duration, right and left etc. They form a congruous, logically organised system and they correspond to sensitively established *fields of notions*. This is a well thought out basic set which proved to work adequately. It is for these reasons that Laban could claim in 1956, after the system had been in use for 28 years:

“... throughout the whole of this period the fundamental signs that I have invented have remained unaltered, which proves that the underlying principles of the system as first devised by me are sound and practical”.
(*Principles*, p. 1)

Any new, necessary additions to the system must fit into this set of *symbols*. It is here that we often encounter problems. It is *not* a problem to have new signs introduced. This may be of course badly needed. The problem starts when the proposed new signs are *alien* to this system of symbols.

Any thoughtless mixing of symbol categories would cause a chain reaction of inconsistencies. A cluttering of the system with arbitrarily invented, and indiscriminately added signs would prove disastrous. Therefore the utmost care should be taken in developing and incorporating any additions. Laban was very much aware of this danger:

“A script can become universal only if its basic principles are clearly defined and its essence kept free from contamination”.
(*Principles*, p. 12)

Laban has based his system on thorough observation and a search for existing fundamentals, rather than on imposing conventional, contrived and short sighted solutions. This approach puts his system on a par with other profound achievements of human thought.

PART B

SPATIAL AND BODILY ORIENTATION

The idea to record simultaneously the three dimensional aspect and duration of bodily actions, as introduced by Laban, has been combined with a systematic approach in analysing movement. The criteria for this, Laban has based on the essential clues evident in the progression of the body through space : the vertical stance, the three dimensions, and the centre of gravity.




The vertical and the spatial model

The **upright stance** of the body with the support on both legs is a general human characteristic. This stance has shaped the **human** concept of space. Therefore :

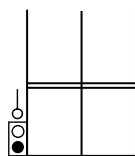
- I. The movements of the human being are related primarily to the vertical.

The force of gravity conditions this constant axis. Therefore, when standing in the upright position, “high” is always in the direction of the head and “low” in the direction of the feet.

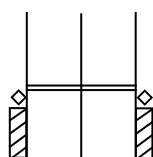
Our movements are constantly going “away” from the vertical and are “returning” towards it in the course of establishing the necessary balance in supporting, conditioned by the force of gravity. Therefore as regards to spatial orientation we refer first of all to the ideal *vertical* as **means of reference**.

This universally experienced notion has been applied by Laban as a fundamental in his movement analysis and notation. Movement in the vertical is described by the signs  and  ,  being the centre, which itself remains along the vertical.

The notion of the vertical allows identification of any deviation from it in the stance of the body. For example a movement style may require an avoidance of the ideal vertical to a certain degree (Ex. a) or the vertical may have to be strictly maintained (Ex. b).

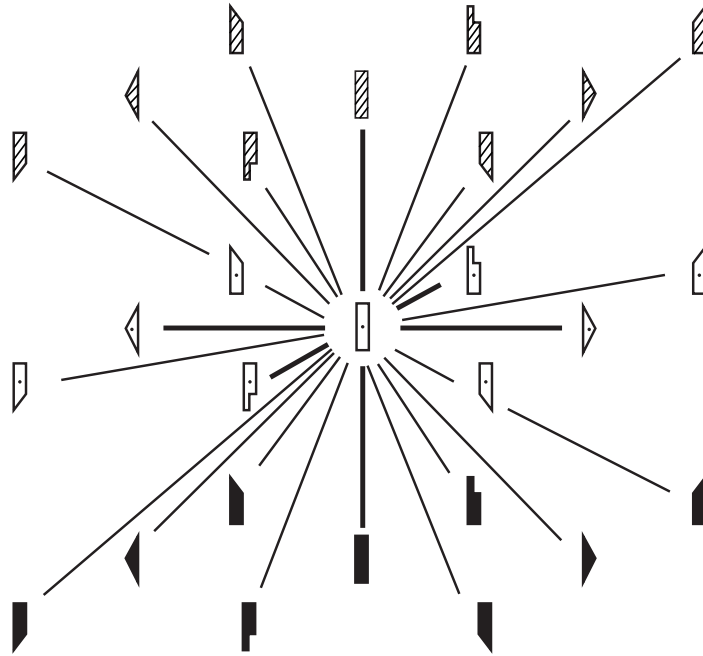


- Ex. a) the torso is leaning slightly forward during the whole dance. Used by Odette Blum in describing the dances of the Lobis (Ghana). (LN)



- Ex. b) the body has to remain in the vertical during the whole dance. Used by Roderyk Lange in describing the dances of Cuiavia (Poland). (KIN)

Similarly all possible directions resulting from the different degrees of going away from the vertical, refer to the **universal** spatial dimensions. The spatial dimensions and the ideal directions intermediately located remind us of the universal spatial model, to which any observable actions will be *related* and possible deviations from it identified and recorded (Ex.c).



Ex. c) The three dimensions and the basic directions of the spatial model.

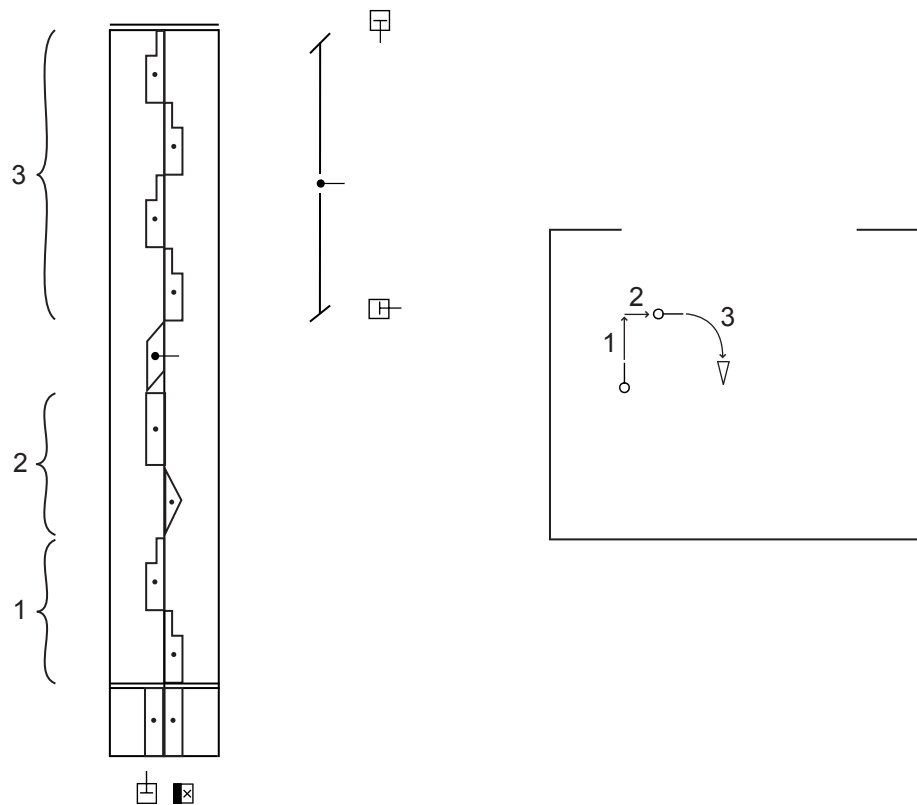
The front

The awareness of the mover's front is based on the way the human being is structured: the eyes are placed on one surface (the "front" surface) of the head and this conditions the way the "forward" expansion is experienced. From this stance man also orientates his "right", "left", and "backward" etc. directions. This is followed up in Laban's movement notation as an analytical principle.


II.

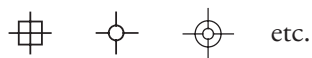
All directions are basically related to the front of the mover.

- a) The shape of the path (floor pattern) results from a person's locomotion in space and will be made up from the successive directions taken by the mover (Ex. d).



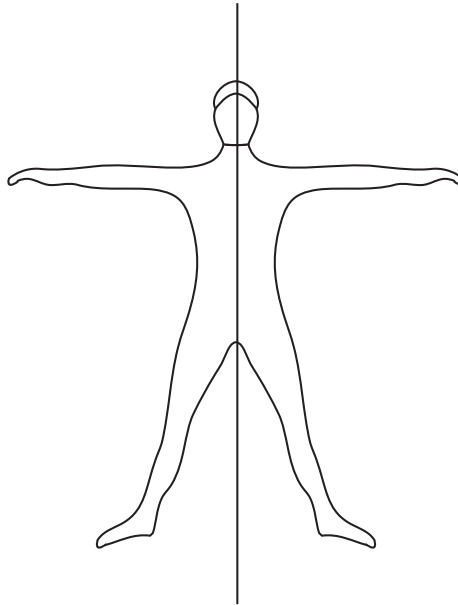
Ex. d)

- b) All directions taken by the mover are related **each time** to *his front*. i.e. to the standard cross of axes, unless another “clef” (KIN) “key” (LN) indicates something else. Therefore, the sign for the standard cross of axes  is used in connection with direction signs only in very exceptional cases.
- c) If a different analytical approach is necessitated, additional systems of coordinates are available. Special signs for the different **crosses of axes** (“clefs”, “keys”) give information as to which of these systems directions and turns should relate, like:



The symmetry of the body

The dividing central line in the notation system corresponds to another universal fact that the human body is symmetrical (Ex. e).



Ex. e) The symmetrical division of the human body

The **anatomy** of the human body dictates particular spatial solutions characteristic for the human being. This is combined with the necessity to keep the body in balance.

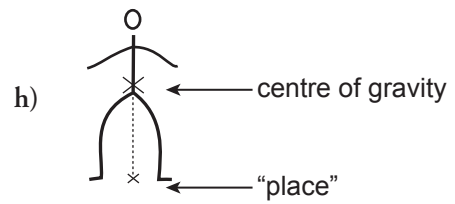
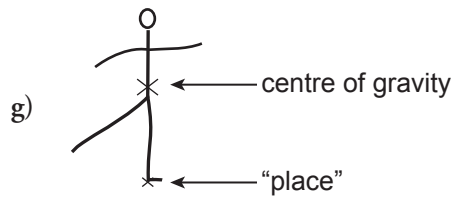
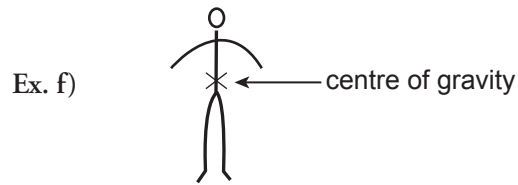
- III. The **symmetrical** build of the body conditions distinctive movement sequences.

The body weight

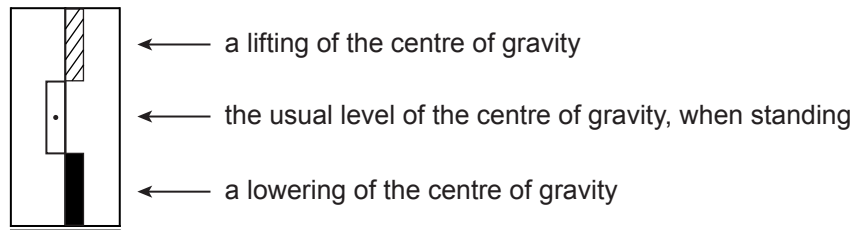
The all – embracing and commonly experienced *force of gravity* checks the body in relation to the supporting base. Therefore :

- IV. The **centre of gravity** is an essential analytical criterion in defining the progression of movements involving the transference of body weight.

The position of the “place” (see further part C).



Levels in stepping



Ex. i)

Each of these four factors (the vertical stance and the spatial model, the front, the body weight) discussed above is essential in the building up of the movement symbols, as these are based primarily on the notion of the instrumental capacities of the human body.

PART C

MOVEMENTS WITH AND WITHOUT TRANSFERENCE OF WEIGHT (SUPPORTS AND GESTURES)

V.

Supports are movements involving the transference of weight.

VI.

Gestures are movements not involving the transference of weight.

- a) “Supports” and “gestures” are two different categories of movement. This is mirrored in the system itself. Therefore with “supports” any notation symbol above the double starting line, will describe the *progression* of the body in the particular direction (motion).
- b) With “gestures” any notation symbol will indicate the *final point* in space where the particular body part has to arrive in order to accomplish the action (destination).
- c) “Supports” and “gestures” are written in separate columns for both right and left body parts.

The concept of “place” and of the “centre”.

The “place” and the “centre” are crucial points of reference in analysing and writing of “supports” and “gestures”.

VII.

The place

“Place” is a spot on the supporting base above or below which, in the vertical, the centre of gravity is located.

- a) In a support on top of the base the centre of gravity is located *above* that point which is “place”.
- b) In a hanging position the centre of gravity is located *below* that point which is “place”.

- c) “Place” is the main point of orientation in analysing and writing “supports”. From each newly established “place” every new direction will be orientated, when moving the weight of the body

VIII.

The centre

The “centre” is the point of relation from which every direction of a body part is judged within the spatial model. The “centre” is the main point of orientation in analysing and writing “gestures”.

SUPPORTS

- a) The basic way of man’s locomotion is combined with the transference of weight from one body part to another, leading to establishing a *new point* of support (the “place”).
- b) When analysing movements involving the transference of weight, one identifies them as movements of the centre of gravity, in the vertical relation to the base. When watching and recording the progress of the centre of gravity in bodily motions, each new support will be identified and with it each new “place”.
- c) The most usual occurrence is stepping. It includes however, also less often applied movements, like walking on all fours or in a handstand, in log rolling, lying down, sitting, kneeling etc.
- d) There can be a release from support for a short time during a *jump*. A return to the supporting base is conditioned by force of gravity. The landing may happen to be on the former point of support or on a new one.

GESTURES

- a) The body parts which are free at one end and joined at the other to the trunk or to other sections of the body, can move freely and are analysed in relation to the particular joint of attachment which is its “centre”.
- b) There are however, body parts which are connected at two or more points to the body, like sections of the trunk: ☐ , ● . These parts can be inclined to a limited degree in certain directions. They may be also shifted out of their “usual” situation between the neighbouring parts, and they may be rotated to a certain degree. When they return back to their “usual” situation, these parts are in alignment with the body.

PART D

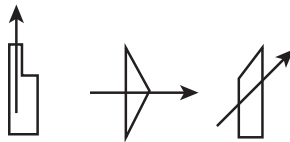
THE GRAPHIC STRUCTURE OF THE LABAN NOTATION SYSTEM

There are two basic occurrences in movement actions: moving along and rotation.

IX.

The shape and the shading of the direction signs describe the **progression of movement three-dimensionally**.

- a) The **direction** of the movement is indicated by the *shape* of the signs.
The direction signs appear as stylised arrows and can describe the movement only two-dimensionally.



- b) The **third dimension** along the high-low axis (movement along the vertical), the level, is indicated by the *shading* of direction signs.

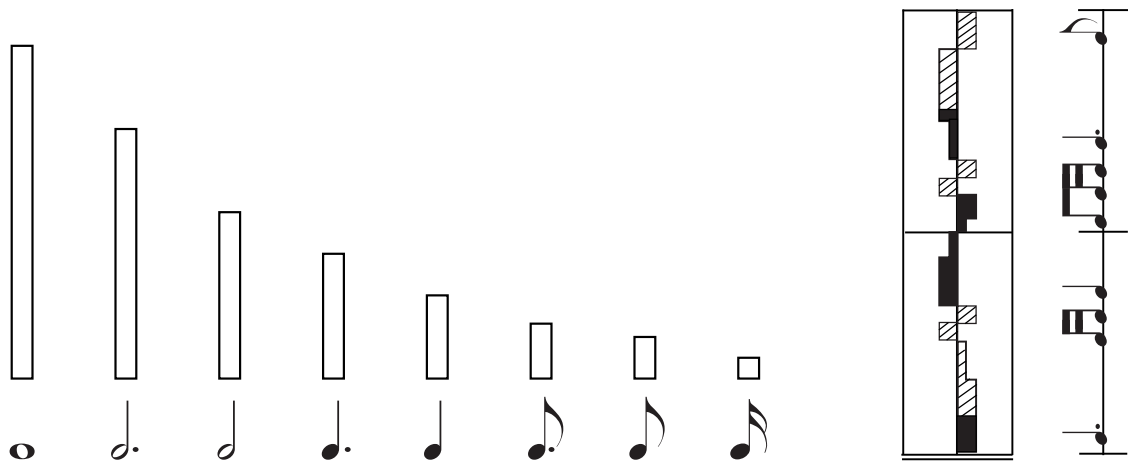


- c) The **rotations** and their direction are indicated by the shape of the *rotation signs* (and their derivatives).



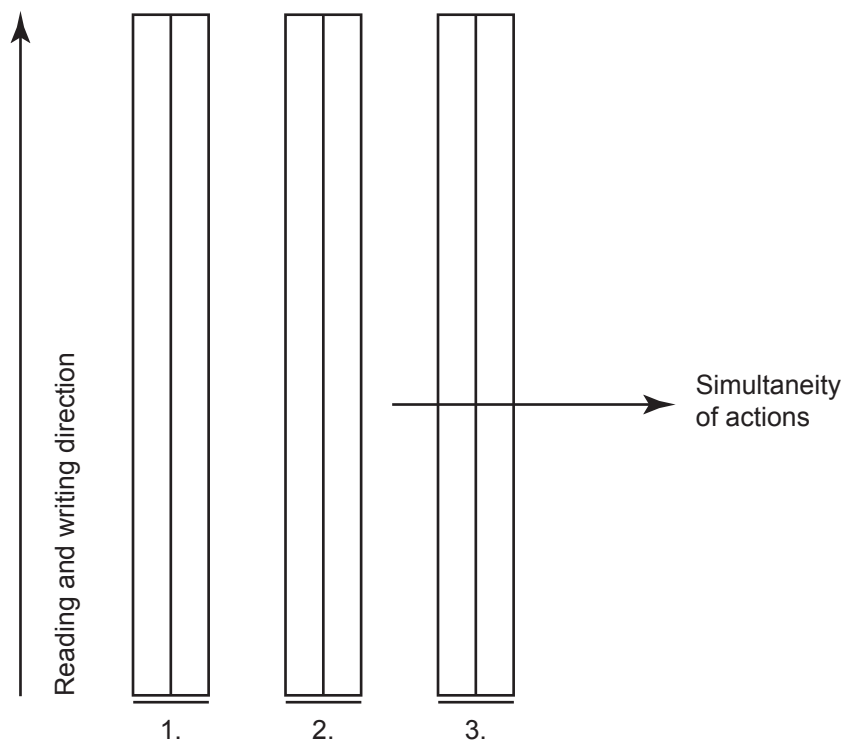
X.

The **duration** is indicated by the proportional length of a movement sign.



XI.

The symbols written vertically up the staff denote the **succession** of movements. Symbols written laterally, across the staff, denote **simultaneity** of movements.

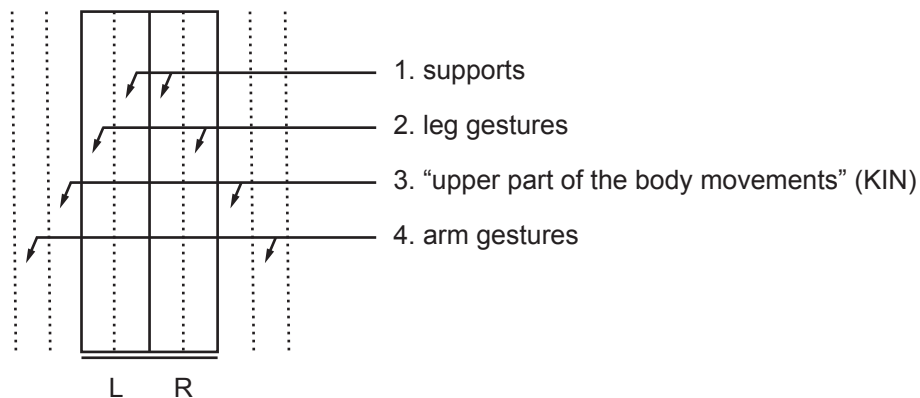


- All movements written one beside another within the columns (which form the staff) - occur at the same time.
- All movements written along the reading direction, one above the other, occur one after the other.

- c) When recording movement, direction signs always describe progression. Starting positions etc. are therefore written below the “start”, before the movement starts. They do not contain any time indications.
- d) The staves in a score are arranged from left to the right.

XII.

The location of the symbols in the columns within the staves or in the columns which are added to a stave at its right or left side, indicates **which part of the body** will perform the given movement.



- a) The middle line of the stave represents in this connection the symmetry axis of the body which divides the body into the right and left half.
Everything which is written at the right side of the middle line is basically relating to a body part of the right side and everything which is written at the left of that line is relating to a body part of the left side.
- b) The content of the kinetogram is organised and written out gradually from the central line of the stave to the right and left, observing basically the structural order of the body parts.
- c) There are exceptions to this order of placing symbols in columns, particularly for the unpaired body parts, like the head, the chest and the trunk. The respective symbol is then placed on one side of the stave only.
- d) The same will apply to symbols without any specific directional indications like for example, the ‘straight path’ (KIN), ‘any path’ (LN).
- e) Additional indication placed underneath a stave defines *who* is performing the particular sequence, *where* it is being performed in case of a defined area, or, if placed underneath a column, that the particular column has been taken over for a *detailed body part*.

PART E

THE CHANGE OF A STATE

1. Gradual Change and its Duration.

Mouvement signs as indicators of gradual change

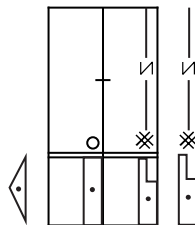
XIII.

Gradual change is indicated by all basic movement signs i.e. the direction, rotation and path signs. The duration of the change is indicated by the proportional length of these signs. Any contractions and expansions of the body parts which are indicated by × and ∨ respectively, will be written into the length of the particular movement signs.

In cases where the duration of a transition from one state into another cannot be characterised by the length of a symbol, special signs were adopted.

a) *The duration line.*

In LN a vertical line, the **duration line** is used to indicate gradual change.



Ex. a)

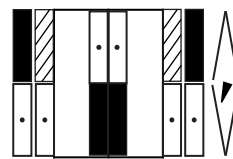
b) *The “crescendo” and “decrescendo” signs.*

In KIN signs derived from the “crescendo” and “decrescendo” signs of music writing indicate gradual change, a gradual transition from one state into another.



Ex.

b)



c)

2. The Definite and the Passing Change of a State.

Definite change

The concept of a **definite change** is based on the notion that a gap between two movements (as visualised graphically in the score) **means a retention**, and no retention sign will be written. (Gesture columns).

XIV.

The result of a **definite transition** into a new state is maintained until a new movement indication changes it.

Definite transitions are written with:

- a) **Basic movement signs** (i.e. direction, rotation and path signs).



Ex. a)

- b) **Wide and narrow signs placed above a body sign or in a gesture column.** (transition into a stretched or flexed state).



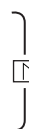
Ex. b)

- c) **Strength measurement signs placed in an addition bracket.** (The indicated state is maintained as long as the result of the main movement to which this indication belongs).



Ex. c)

- d) **A body sign placed in an inclusion bow.** (The result of the participation of this body part in the main movement lasts as long as the result of the main movement).

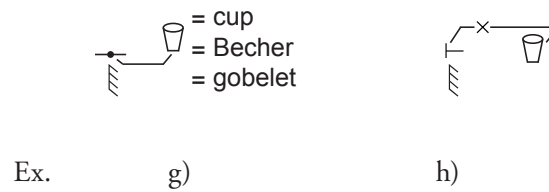


Ex. d)

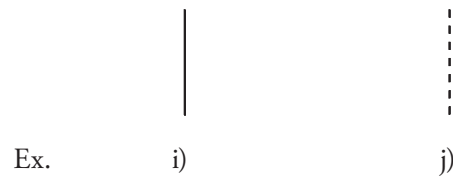
- e) ***“Back to normal” indication***, the return to “normal” carriage sign.



- f) ***Sign for carrying or holding an object.***



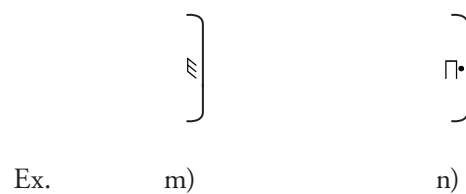
- g) An ***action stroke*** or sign for ***passive or resulting movement***.



- h) An ***isolated pin sign*** \perp or a pin sign with added indication for gradual change.



- i) A ***body sign***, or a sign for the surface or edge of a body part, in an ***inclusion bow***. (“Leading” the movement. The result of this is maintained as long as the result of the main movement is maintained).



Passing change

XV.

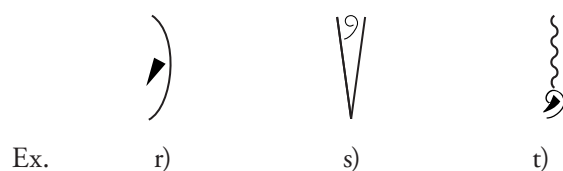
A passing change of a state is valid only for the time it is being indicated.

The passing changes indicated by relevant symbols start at the bottom point of the symbol and cease to be valid at its top point. This applies to the instances when the following signs are used:

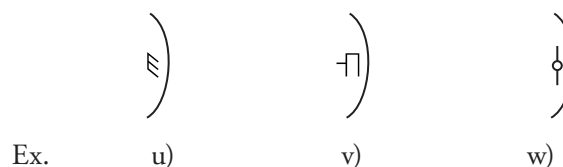
- a) **Isolated strength measurement signs, as accent signs.** They indicate a sudden exertion, a sudden relaxation and a sudden elasticity.



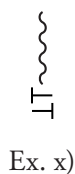
- b) **Strength measurement signs placed in vertical brackets**), in increase signs, and vibration signs. When these signs end, the usual tension is regained.



- c) **Any other indication consisting of a vertical bow) and containing a symbol.**



- d) **High frequency movement signs.** After a small change of situation the performing body part returns to its usual situation.



- e) **Straight path signs containing strength measurement signs or space measurement signs.**



PART F

THE CONTINUATION AND CESSATION OF A STATE

Movement is change.

In the kinetogram *changes* are written and not *positions*. It is only in the starting position graph, which is written below the double bar, that the same symbols which indicate movements in the actual kinetogram, indicate positions.

1. The Continuation of a State.

The concept of a retention

XVI.

A **retention** means that a state is being continued.

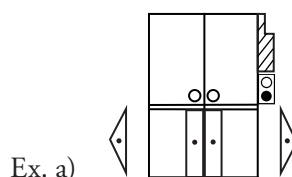
By the word “state” a variety of facts are meant.

- a) A state can be the situation which a body part has reached by a gesture: it can be a point of support which the body has occupied by a transference of the weight; or it can also be a new front which one has reached by a turn.
- b) It can be a special state of the muscles such as a tension or relaxation, or a special position which a body part has acquired by bending or stretching, by spreading out or contracting.
- c) It can be the fact that a specific relation to a partner or an object was established such as a touch, a grasp, a surrounding grasp, a penetrating touch, an addressing, or the relation of one’s front to a partner, when meeting, or to an object.

The various kinds of retentions

a) *The situation of a body part is kept. (Standard retention).*

Within the actual kinetogram, that is above the double line (above the starting position), every symbol with the exception of the retention sign means that something new happens, that a change takes place. The absence of symbols i.e. a void in one of the gesture columns means that nothing new happens and therefore it means a retention for that particular body part, which remains in the acquired situation. Therefore, as a matter of fact, special retention signs are needed. The voids in the various columns mean retentions and the length of the voids between two symbols expresses the duration of the retention in the same way as the length of the symbols expresses the duration of a change i.e. a movement.

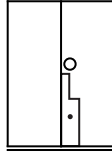


b) *A support is kept.*

A void in both support columns means a jump. Therefore a retention sign is needed to indicate that there is no jump.

A retention sign written in a support column always means that a body part keeps supporting.

Ex. b)



c) *The special retention ideas.*

In addition to the two kinds of retentions which have been dealt with above i.e. keeping the situation of a body part and keeping a support, some other kinds of retentions are used in which there occurs a change in one respect while at the same time in some other respect a state is kept.

1. *Retention in the body.* ○

A body retention means that a body part keeps the same relation to another part in respect to the angle which exists between them, and that in the joint where the two parts are linked together, no movement occurs.

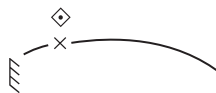
2. *Retention in space.* ◇

A space retention means that a body part keeps its inclination or direction – towards a compass direction or towards the fixed axes of a room, while the body as a whole or its part changes the front or its direction.

3. *Retention at a spot.* ◇

A spot retention means that a body part stays at the same spot while the rest of the body or one body part which is connected with the first by a joint, moves into another situation.

4. *Retention on the spot of relation.*



The spot retention symbol has a special meaning when it is placed above a relation sign, that is above a sign for a touch, a grasp, a penetrating grasp, for carrying, holding (and above the addressing sign, KIN). For in these cases it means that a retention occurs on the spot of relation. This spot is understood to be that spot at the body of a partner, or at one's own body, or at an object to which the relation has been established.



Ex.



c)



d)



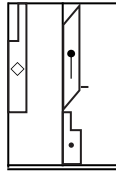
e)



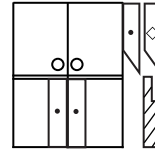
5. Undeviating movements.

Sometimes the space retention or spot retention is applied while the body part concerned moves at the same time. In such cases the technical term “undeviating movement” is used and such a movement is characterised by placing the retention sign within the movement sign.

Ex. f)



g)



2. Cessation of a State.

All those changes which are written with movement signs, i.e. with direction signs, rotation signs and path signs, as well as all contractions and expansions of body parts which are indicated by narrow and wide signs, represent **definite transitions** into a new state. This means that the states which are acquired by these movements are kept until *another indication explicitly cancels them*. This follows up consequently the notion that voids in a gesture column indicate a retention.

Passing changes last only for the duration indicated by the appropriate signs.

In special cases **cancellation signs** are used.

XVII.

General cancellation means that a body part which has been involved in a particular situation returns to its “usual” alignment.

a) *General cancellation signs.*

Ex.



a)



b)

LN



c)

KIN

b) *Release signs* indicate the release of contact, for instance a touch, a grasp, carrying, holding etc.



Ex. d)

c) *The cancellation of a retention in space.*



Ex. e)

d) *The return to unrotated state* indicates the return of a body part to its “usual”, untwisted situation. The combined rotation sign belongs also to cancellation signs.



Ex. f)

e) *The return of a stretched or flexed body part to its “usual” situation.*

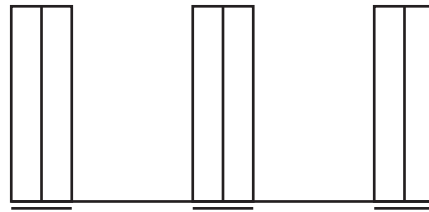


Ex. g)

PART G

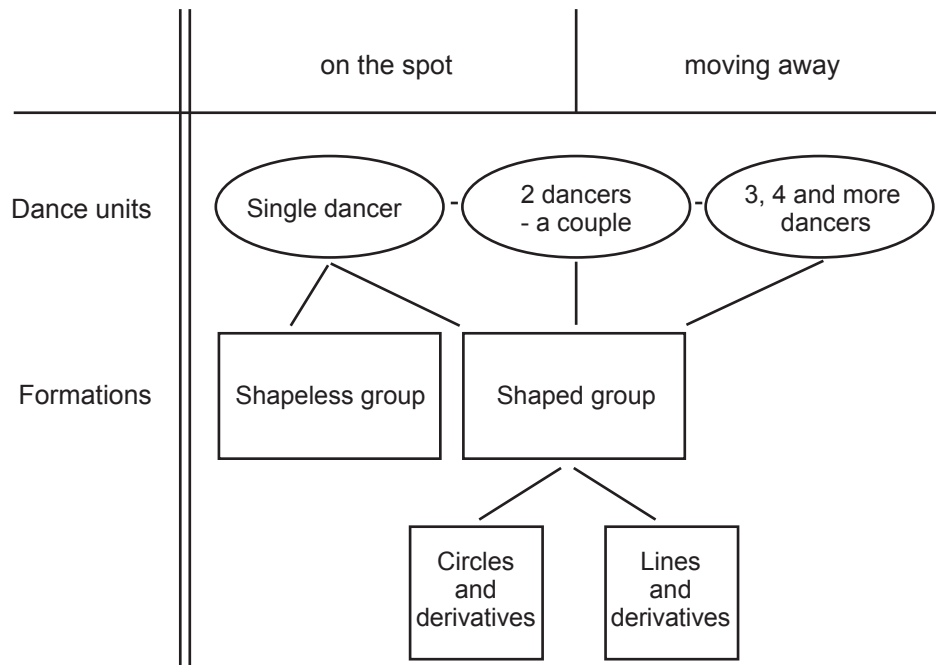
MOVEMENTS IN A GROUP SITUATION

In group movements single parts merge into a composite whole. This is mirrored graphically in the score, as the particular staves for single parts are connected by the **score line**. This line signifies that all parts are being performed concurrently.



Ex. a)

There are, though, certain regularities in the way a group of people may be arranged. These possibilities are universal and may be found in dance and group **formations** in very diverse cultures and in different periods. The **formations** are based on the *line*, the *circle*, and their derivatives (see Ex. b).



Ex. b) Basic Group Formations

Similarly, as in the case of a single person's movements, there are certain motoric principles underlying the way **group formations** function. The analytical principles thus derived are at the basis of the following concepts and ways of writing group movements.

Basic concepts and principles of group movement notation.

1) “Group movements” and “Group paths”

XVIII. If a number of people move concurrently, in varying or in identical sequences, these actions are identified as **group movements**.

- Group movements are written within the columns of the stave (directions signs) and outside the stave (path signs).

XIX. The resulting **group paths** are performed by the group as a unit.

- The various paths performed by the individual participants blend into a common pattern.
- There may be the case in which each group member can perform a path on his own. This is then identified as “individual path”.

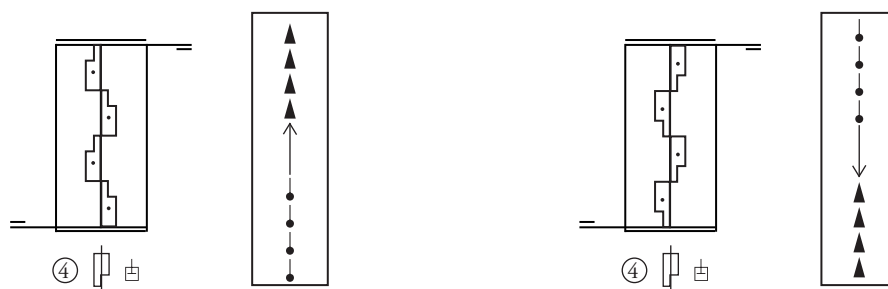
2) “Following” and “parallel paths”

The basic concept of *group movement analysis* are revealed by the movements of a group arranged in the basic formation of files and ranks (“group column”).

Following.

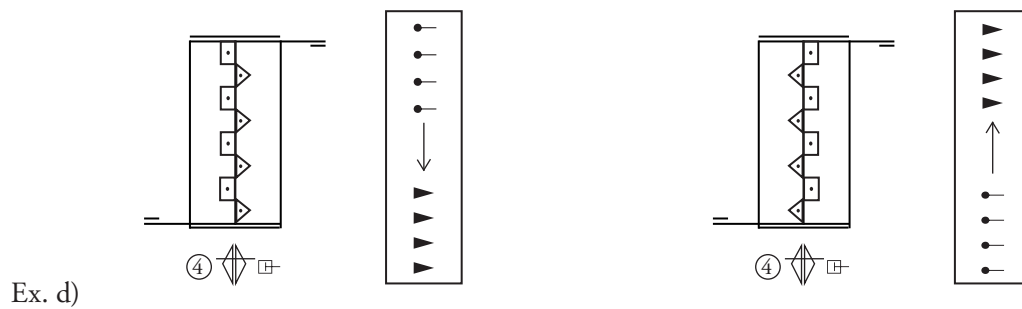
XX. When a group of people moves together along the lines of the movement progression, **following** occurs.

- a) If for instance a group is arranged in a file formation, “following” will occur when moving forwards and backwards:



Ex. c)

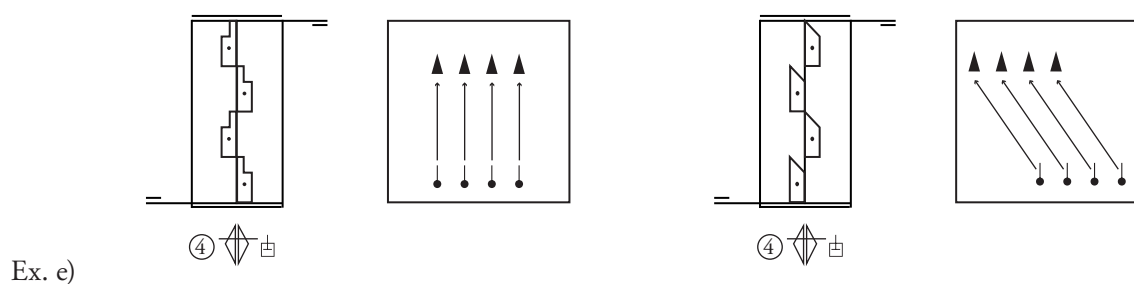
- The person who is placed in the group arrangement at the top, according to the direction of the progression, is the *obvious leader* of the path. Therefore when stepping forwards the person at the front of the file will be the leader, and when stepping backwards, the rear one will be the leader.
- b) When a line moves to the right the person at the right end of the rank will be the leader, and when moving to the left, the person at the left will be the leader:



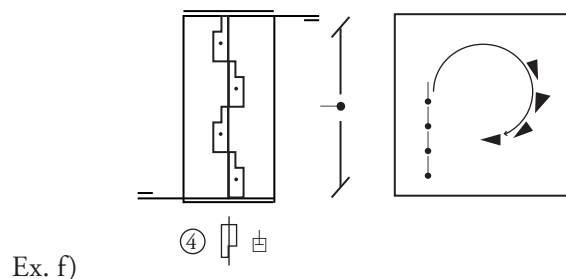
Parallel paths.

XXI.

When a group of people moves along lines which happen at a right angle or diagonally in respect of the movement progression, **parallel paths** result.

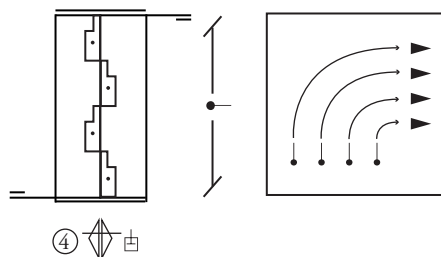


- a) In a group which is arranged along a straight line and in the direction of the progression, only the leader of the path will start to walk on the circular path at the moment which is signified by the beginning of the path sign; the other participants who start to walk at the same time will only then enter the curved path, when they arrive at the point where the leader started to walk on the curve:



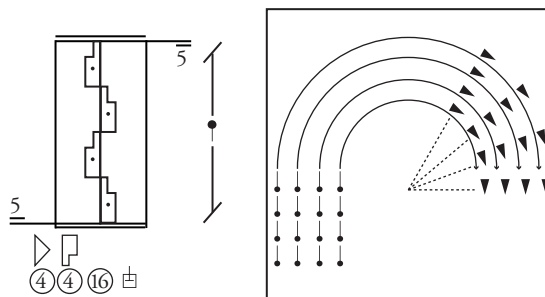
One follows here the concept that the group movements which are written in the columns of the stave, are performed by all participants at the same time; as soon as the “path” appears, the participants have to perform their relevant parts.

- b) With a compact group on a circular path, concentric circles occur and the principle of the “parallel paths” is followed. In these concentric circles the lines across in relation to the direction of the progression keep their arrangement unchanged; as a result the lines **wheel**. At all times all the participants of these lines keep to the same radius.
- c) The obvious leader of the **wheeling** is the person who is the furthest away from the centre of the circular path. The length of the leader’s steps is that indicated in the kinetogram. All other participants have to reduce their step lengths according to how far each of them is away from the centre of the path:



Ex. g)

- d) When an ordinary circular path sign is written for a “group column” **following** as well as **wheeling** will occur simultaneously, i.e. the beginning of the path sign shows the moment when the rank, which is facing the direction of the progression (the first line across) will start wheeling; the other ranks will follow up and only then will they start to wheel when they come to the spot where the first line started the “wheeling”:

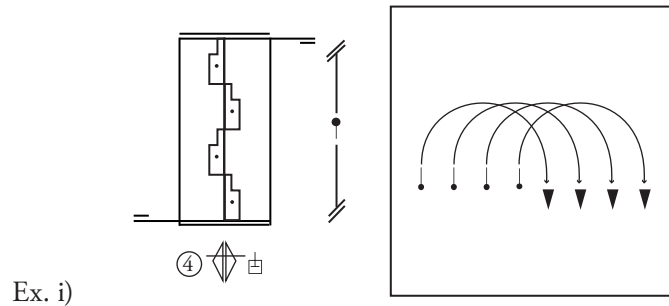


Ex. h)

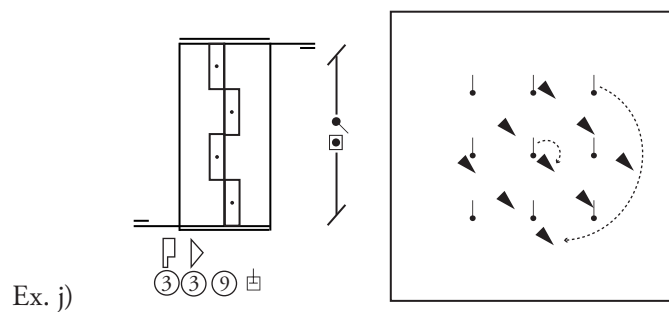
3) *The group path signs.*

- a) The ordinary circular path sign always indicates a group movement. It means also that all participants perform a circular path around a common centre. It means finally, according to the principle of the “following” and that of the “parallel paths”, that the participants according to their placement within the group arrangement will lead, follow or participate in a “wheeling”.

- b) When a different group development is wanted the path sign must contain appropriate additions. For instance the diagonal top and bottom lines of the circular path signs are doubled in order to express “individual paths” in which every participant moves by himself around an individual focal point:



- c) The symbol for the centre of the group is placed in the path in order to express that the arrangement of the group is kept strictly in its original shape, during the execution of the circular path:

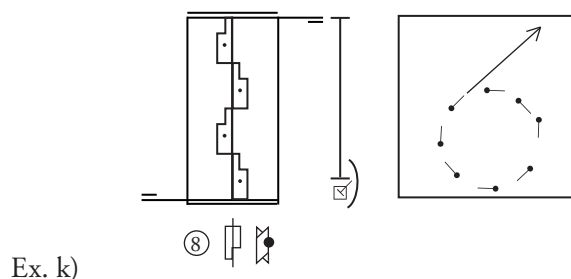


The remarkable fact in this circular group path is that the centre around which the group rotates, can in certain cases, be situated within the group.

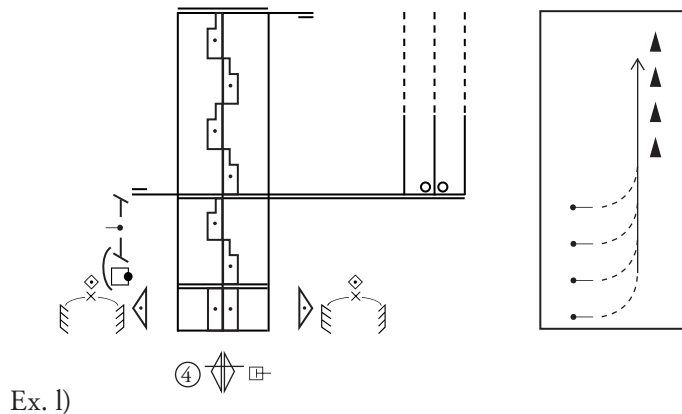
4) *The nomination of a leader.*

The nomination of a path leader is necessary in the description of certain group developments if there is either no obvious leader of the path, or if the prospective leader is not obviously qualified by the group arrangement.

- a) The first necessity arises if, as in the example, there is an arrangement on a closed circular line which has to be dissolved by progressing in a straight line:



- b) The second necessity arises if the line is required to follow a leader on his path, although the direction of steps, in relation to his position within the group, does not qualify him as a leader of a following file or rank. In the example, a rank will follow the person who is at the right end of the line. When stepping forwards he passes along the rank. The consequence of this group path is that the arrangement of the group will change gradually, the rank arrangement will change into a file:



5) *Group turns.*

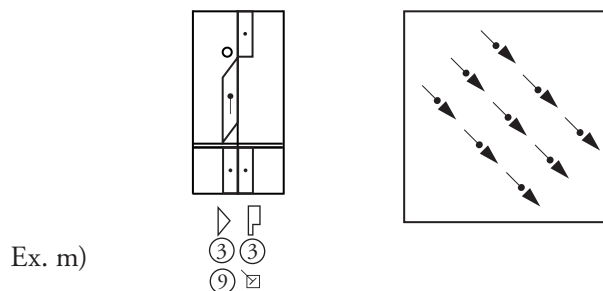
The ordinary turn signs, with the indication of the degree of turn, are written within the stave and therefore they belong to the group movements.

XXII.

If all participants of a group turn at the same time, in the same way, or turn to achieve the same result, group turns occur.

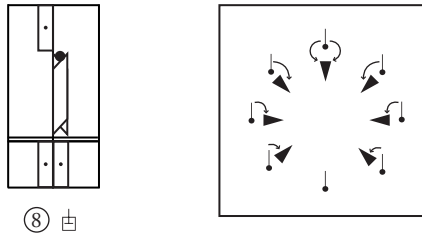
As a result during the turn, the relations between the single participants are constantly changing and a different arrangement arises within the group, with the exception of full turns.

- a) In our example after executing half a turn, those people who were before the turn in the rear line, will now be in the front line. Those who were placed at first on the right side of the group, will find themselves on the left side afterwards:



In addition to these standard turns there are in group movements two more kinds of turns:

b)

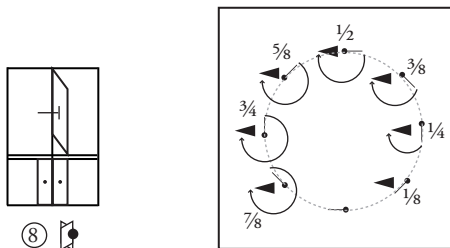


Ex. n)

The example shows a group turn **in relation to the centre of the circle**. A group is arranged in a circular line, and each member faces the foreground. They turn to the right or to the left until they face the focal point. The group faces now “inwards”. If nothing else is stated, the focal point is identical with the centre of the group.

Also, all participants perform the turn at the same time. However, because of the diversified task not all do it in the same way; some turn to the right and some turn to the left - some have to perform a larger degree of turn than the others. It is, however, obvious that everybody takes the shortest and most convenient way.

- c) The turn **in relation to the axes of the room** is the counterpart of the turn dealt with above. With this turn the group acquires the same front for all participants, as everybody faces the same side of the room. In the example, everyone turns to the right until the left side of the room is in front. The starting arrangement is on a circular line with the right side of each person towards the focal point. From the sketch, one can see which turns the individuals must perform. One person does not turn because he already has the desired front.



Ex. o)

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