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EUROPEAN SEMINAR FOR KINETOGRAPHY

Paper No.11.

Space Measurement Signs Versus Measurement Signs

by Jacqueline Challet-Haas,1990.

At the 14th ICKL Conference held at Brighton (England) in 1985,a motion was raised,and subsequently voted through,to change the meaning of signs: ✕ , ✳ ,(and their variants),which were called "Space measurement signs",into "Measurement signs",thus omitting the word "space". See text of the Conference Proceedings (p.50) below:

1. MEASUREMENT SIGNS

✕ , ✳ ,and their variants (✕̇ , ✻ , ✳̇ ,etc.) shall be known as measurement signs.

1.1 Adoption of the term "measurement signs" allows for the use of the ✕ and ✳ set of signs to refer to quantity in a wider variety of contexts than previously possible (e.g.,time-- "a great deal of time",force-- "a great deal of force").

1.2 This change will not affect the meaning of ✕ and ✳ placed inside other symbols,e.g., ☒ , ⊛ .

Was this a well founded decision? The immediate doubt arises if such general,abstract quantitative notions as "a great deal", "much","little",translated from the verbal language,can be accommodated in this movement notation system. What is more,can such new meanings be ascribed to signs,which already denote quantitative values in spatial terms?

A.Knust in his Dictionary has devoted part L to the "Quantity Signs",where he says: "this technical term (quantity signs) covers all symbols concerned with measurement... The quantity signs indicate how the movement is performed" (DKL p.249). He then distinctly distinguishes the 3 following issues:

- LI: The quantity signs applied to <u>Space</u>,represented by signs x , и ,and their variants (x̲ иı ⨯ K ✱ ⌂).

- LII: The quantity signs applied to <u>Strength</u>, represented by signs: / , 9 and their variants (𝒫 , /) , V .)

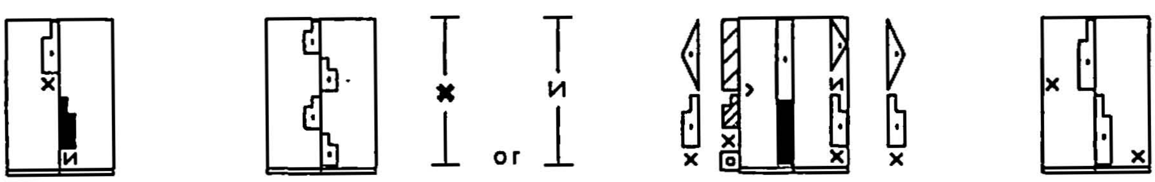
- LIII: The quantity signs applied to <u>Time</u> represented by additional indications of time values,tempi,modifications of tempi.. etc.

A.Hutchinson in her book "Labanotation" does not apply the same clear exposition of these issues and nowhere does she speak about "quantity signs". However,she devotes a whole chapter (Chap.11) to "Distance and Space Measurement" (represented by signs: x , и ,and their variants). The grades of applied strength, called "dynamics",are fleetingly exposed in the last chapter (Chap.28). The "timing indications" are included in chapter 4,where the "Fundamentals of Labanotation" are dealt with.

Let us now briefly examine how "more or less space"
"more or less strength"
"more or less time"
are indicated in the Laban system of movement notation:

I) - <u>More or less space</u>

In his Dictionary,A.Knust writes: "when the shape of the movement is unusually wide or narrow it is indicated by space measurement signs" (DKL 639); "all narrow and wide signs placed in support column,in a path sign,or a turn sign,indicate that the movement should be performed either on a large or a small scale" (DKL 699,704); "these signs (x , и) applied to steps modify the distance covered (DKL 647,652); these signs placed in a gesture column indicate a contracted,bent,spread or extended state; they specify "body narrowness or wideness" (DKL 699,704).

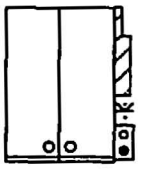


In "Labanotation" (p.158),A.Hutchinson writes:

"The size of the movement in terms of the distance covered, that is,the space measurement,is stated with an additional indication. For supports,this greater or less use of space results in longer or shorter steps. For gestures,greater use of space results in the extension of the limbs and lesser

use of space results in the contraction of the limbs,bending them to draw the extremity closer to the center. For both usages the concept of distance from the center is the same."

And again on p.164,in "using less space the limbs draw in closer to the body,towards the point of attachment;in using more space,the limbs extend away from the body". Further,on p.323.she specifies (applied to a variant of these signs) "the basic sign for "folding" ⊻ is derived from a combination of the concepts of contracting and approaching".



It can be seen from these two major texts,that the spatial aspect attached to these signs (✕ , И) is firmly,strongly established in the system.

These indications (✕ , И) have been used also in conjunction with other signs:

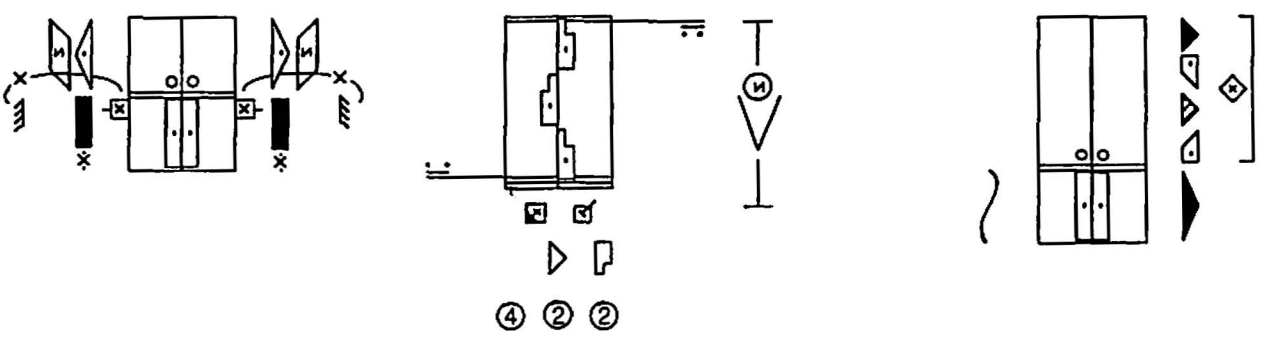
1) within relation signs ()
to indicate touches and grasps by "narrowing or expanding" (DKL 568,A.H. p.339).

2) within small circles (⊗ , Ⓘ)
to specify "body narrowness and wideness" (DKL 700).

3) within small diamonds ()
to indicate movements performed on a "small or large scale" (DKL 699, A.H. p.504).

4) within area signs ( , И)
they specify areas "nearer or farther" from the centre area. (DKL 706, A.H. p.505).

5) inside body part signs ( , )
to mean closer or farther from the centre (DKL 694,A.H. p.500,501)



In all these instances the spatial aspect is inherent.

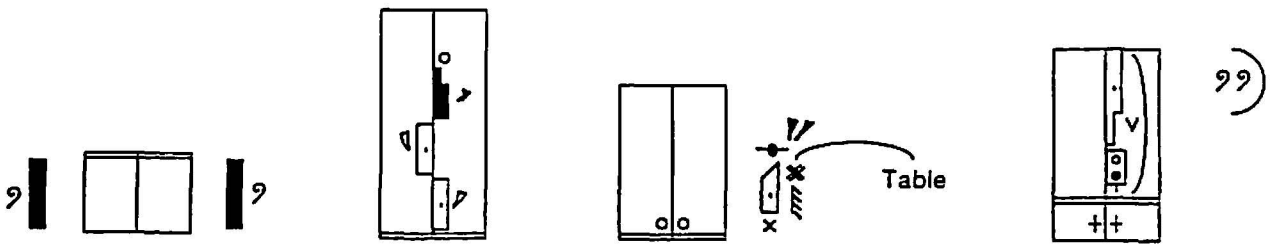
II - More or less strength

Any movement performance necessitates an adequate amount of energy to be spent. This does not need to be notated. Only when the exertion of force is particularly strong or weak,the "strength measurement signs" are applied.

The strength measurement is basically denoted by two sets of signs:

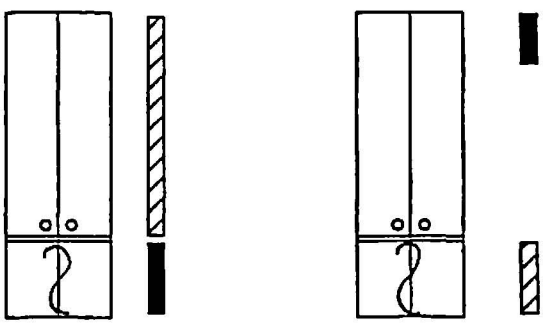
the strong signs: 𝆑 , 𝆏
the weak signs: 𝆒 , 𝆐

A further arrangement is available,to express: "lightness" (𝆑 , 𝆒), or "heaviness" (𝆏 , 𝆐) in movement which can be identified with the notion of "more or less" strength. The degree of intensity can be further stressed by multiplying the signs (𝆒𝆒, 𝆏𝆏 , 𝆏𝆏𝆏). (DKL 717, A.H. p.478). Does it not already answer the demand for a "great deal of force",as voiced in the ICKL proposal?



III - More or less time

Is it really necessary to remind ourselves that in this system of notation the time element is indicated by the proportional length of the main signs (direction,turn,and path signs)? Within this scale "less time" will be accordingly represented by shorter signs,and "more time" by longer signs.



If the applied scale has to be enlarged or diminished,this will be written at the left of the staff: e.g. 𝅘𝅥𝅯 = 𝅗𝅥 , and the proportional arrangement of signs again indicates the respective time values.

If the speed of the movements is exceptionally fast or slow, above or below the normal exertion,an additional indication will be given: e.g. ♩ = 106 ,thus defining it in measurable terms.

Was then the indication of "more" or "less" not already available? Why was it necessary to tamper with the adequately working means of quantitative description?

At the same ICKL Conference (1985) a paper about "The Use of and ⅄ ⋊ as Pre-signs" was presented by A.Hutchinson. There she writes: "The K signs are not space measurement signs,as they are not related to measurement of distance" (1.21) and further:

> 1.25 Because of the spatial description of movement which we inherited from Laban,the idea of near and far space was important,the limbs bent to achieve near space and stretched to reach out for far space. The physical action of flexion as an anatomical movement was not given importance. We came to give the meaning of 'contracting' (a form of flexion) for the limbs,but this was not the basic meaning of the sign and problems have arisen.
>
> 1.26 Folding and unfolding are understood to be body activities; it is time we had a sign for the body activity of contracting which is not tied to space or a spatial origin.

At that same conference (1985) J.v.Zile produced a communication entitled "Measurement signs",where she writes: "Referring to the ✕ , ⋀ sets of signs as "measurement signs" would provide a general terminology that could be more specific in individual contexts"... (p.1.,2.4). Is it really only a question of "changing the terminology"? This proposal in fact involves a definite change of meaning of these symbols.

One of the basic analytical criteria of this movement notation system is the <u>spatial element</u>. The variations of distance are specified by additional signs: ✕ ⋀ . . When applied to gestures,the "effect" is a shortening/contraction or extension/elongation; this includes also the "folding activity" (⊼ ⩛ ⅄),as it brings the extremity of the limb closer to the point of attachment.

The time aspect is represented by the length of the main signs;the length contains the specific information of more or less time used. Any variations in the organisation of time within the course of movements,need to be indicated accordingly.

There is no doubt that some new graphic indications representing particular time occurences are needed. This,however,applies mainly to <u>tempo</u> variations like "accelerando", "adagio","allegro","relative speed" between participants, "ad lib" timing etc.

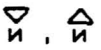
In her paper on "Time Signs" (ICKL,1985); M.Szentpál specifies on the first page,under i): "The time signs are additional time related phenomena and not a change of the basic principle: the length of a symbol equals duration". However, in contradiction to this statement sets of symbols are proposed for variations in duration,rhythm,and in tempo. Among them were the following signs,where the use of × , и was introduced, to specify the notion of "quantity":

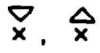
 "large amount" of duration

 "small amount" of duration

 "large tempo" = quick tempo (p.6)

 "small tempo" = slow tempo (p.6)

 "big amount" of accelerando/rallentando

 "small amount" of accelerando/rallentando

It is evident at the first glance that there is a contradiction inherent in the two applied terms (large/quick),and that the length of the symbols has no time value any more. See Ex.I,(Ex.2d in her paper).

How is one going to evaluate the "amount of duration" within such indications as those given in Ex.II (2c in her paper),where additional aims have to be stated? On top of that the visuality of inter- related rhythms is completely lost (see also Ex.I).

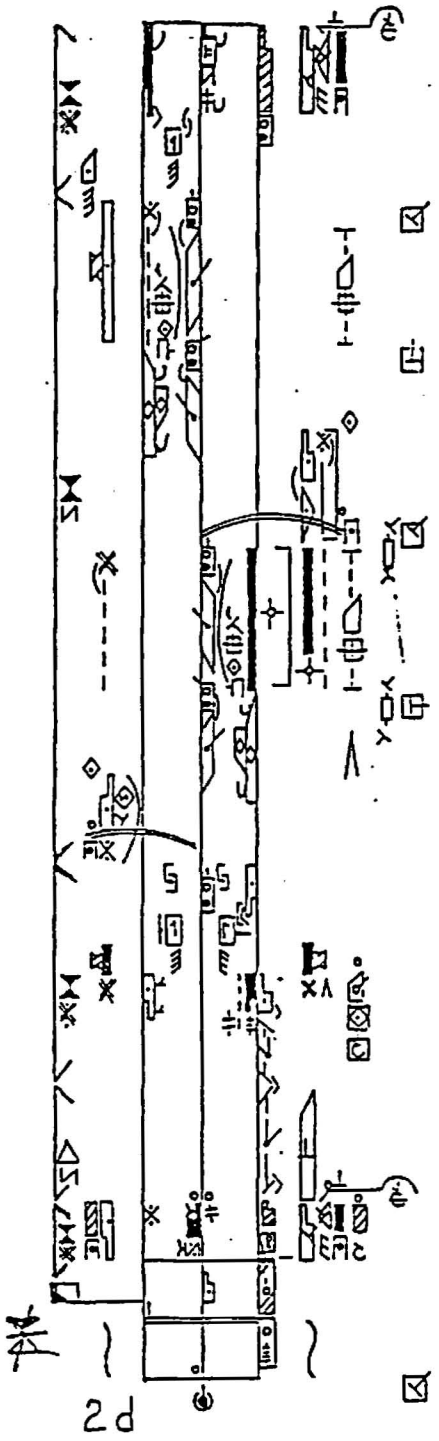
A clash occurs between the notion of "large",when applied to a time occurrence,as it results in a quick movement (which is normally written with shorter signs !):see Ex.III (Ex.3g in her paper),where the authoress herself recognises it as misleading in this particular context!:

> 3.28 In ex.3g from "Arden Court" the indication used is  (quick tempo) for dancers C and E, and (slow tempo) for the dancers G and B.
>
> As the symbol was placed near to the 1/4 individual circling,it is not clear how the performance should be understood. .....it indicates for MS that it is not a question of speed but that of a smaller/larger radius of the 1/4 circle which is a spatial aspect rather than a time aspect.

Not only is the association of signs  , + × , и a pure misconception in itself,in regard to the meaning given to these signs within the Laban system,but how can one accept the set of  to mean a "large amount of duration", together with the set of to mean a "quick tempo",without questionning its congruity?

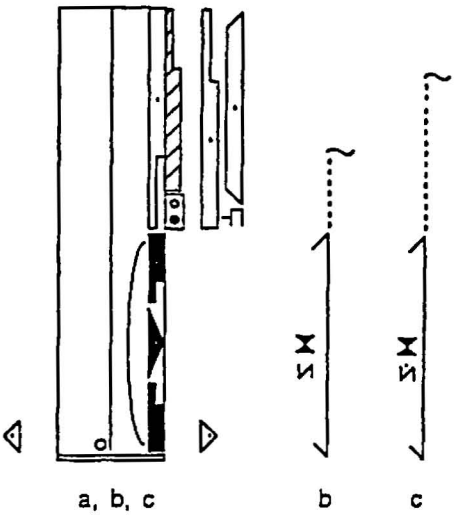
Ex.I. was taken from:
Tancjeliras Laban Kinetografia
by M.Szentpál Vol.III.Ex.12,p.42,
N.P.I. Budapest 1976.

I.



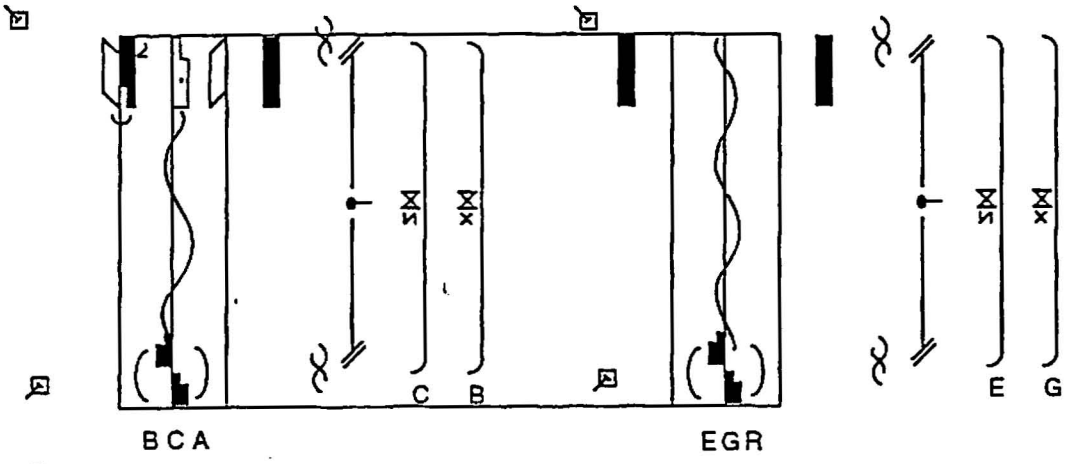
2d

II.



2c

III.



3g

CONCLUSION

In the light of this survey it appears that the spatial aspect of signs  is inherent in all instances,wherever they are already used. Can a hastily arranged 'change of terminology' modify these facts? The change of the term "space measurement signs" to "measurement signs" was probably motivated by the need to approve the newly invented time signs. And it became soon clear that it was a semantic error to use a distance measurement,when referring to a time occurrence (as presented by J.v.Zile in her paper,p.1).

To envisage the use of signs  in conjunction with dynamic signs,as was suggested in the ICKL proposal,would be equally incorrect.

The Laban movement notation is comparable to a phonetic script (Principles Paper,p.12),and not to a language. It serves to write down the non-verbal idiom of movement. The tendency to translate some verbal indications into kinetographic signs leads to misconceptions. The abstract notions like "less","much","a great deal",denote meanings,which cannot be equated to the functionally analysed movement manifestations. Signs which denote spatial distances,cannot be used to denote the abstract notions of unspecified quantities within the same system! The confusion which does result will only lead to further complications within this system of notation.

Instead of proposing,and adopting without thorough investigation such a "change of terminology",which in fact induces a change of basic meanings,it would have been much wiser to investigate time signs as graphic indications of variables of tempi,instead of mixing various categories of notions (Principles paper p.3,where R.Lange pinpoints clearly this fact). There is no doubt that the present tendency to get "rid of the spatial element" contained in the body activity of contracting/expanding, has also dangerously influenced this decision.

This system is simply not geared to describe movement in anatomical terms. It is irresponsible to envisage other concepts than those derived from spatial analysis,to be introduced into this system concurrently.

The Space Measurement Signs are a logically established category of spatial indications within this notation system, and should not be tampered with indiscriminately.