

Design Drawing on the Ceiling

Submitted to ICKL by Lynne Weber, 2013

In 1975, “Design Drawing” was acknowledged as a feature of the notation system by the International Council of Kinetography Laban (ICKL). Its use is outlined in Volume 1, Part 2 of the Advanced Labanotation series edited by Ann Hutchinson Guest, titled *Shape, Design, Trace Patterns* written by Ann Hutchinson Guest and Rob Van Haarst. I will reference this as “the text” in this paper.

“Design Drawing” is an important feature of Labanotation that I have used in a number of scores. I have also taught this material to Advanced Labanotation classes and have read scores that incorporate design drawing. I commend the considerable work and analysis that has been done in Labanotation texts, and I wholeheartedly agree with nearly all of the analysis that has been done in using design drawing. However, I have one issue with its use: the standard orientation of the pattern on the page when using design drawing on a place high surface (the ceiling).

Page 24 of the text, section 11.9 states:

“To understand the idea of ‘surface’ on which the design is ‘drawn’, many people find the image of a sheet of paper with the design on it helpful. By holding this sheet up in the appropriate location they can see the surface and how the design takes place on it.”

11.10 continues:

“As the sheet is moved around, its placement in relation to the performer changes. Ex. 11i illustrates the possible placement of the sheet in front of the performer, above the head (as if on the ceiling), on the floor, and at the intermediate situations of forward high and forward low.”

The illustration (Ex. 11i) on page 25 shows a continuous movement of the sheet of paper from place low, forward, and to place high along the kinesphere. It is illustrated more explicitly on page 37, illustration 17a, in which a painter is painting an “M” on the ceiling, having moved it from the forward middle position.

Draw an “M” on a sheet of paper and trace the pattern in each of the positions from place low, to forward low, to forward middle, to forward high, to place high, with the paper moving along your kinesphere, as illustrated in the text. When you trace the pattern on the floor (place low surface), you start the movement drawing the “M” by moving the hand forward. When you trace the pattern on the ceiling (place high surface), according to the text, you start the same “M” movement by moving the hand backward. On the notation page, the symbol showing the pattern that moves forward must be read as a backward movement.

Page 36 of the text starts the chapter titled, “Determining Surface Behind the Body.” If one is to do design drawing on a surface behind the body, moving the paper in a sagittal

direction, the paper flips 180 degrees in order to maintain up being written as up and down to be written as down. The text states, “the natural inclination is to direct the eyes comfortably toward the surface of the design, rather than to bend backwards or trace without looking.” In this way, upward movement is written on the page showing symbols going upward. Downward movement is written on the page showing symbols going downward.

Page 38, section 17.6 describes the relation between the ‘front’ and ‘back’ surfaces. It states, “a design which appears to be on a back surface can just as well be drawn on the front surface, performed like a mirror image.” It can be illustrated by allowing the piece of paper to travel continuously from forward middle to side middle to back middle.

Page 64, section 33.8, has a description of two notation examples shown on page 65.

Both are notations of the same movement. 33i shows the design drawing example of a spiral drawn on a place high surface. Example 33j uses pins. The intent of the movement is much clearer using design drawing; however, I would not intuitively read the two to be the same.

This symmetry can be easily illustrated by trying the following exercise. Work with a partner who holds a piece of paper whose front and back surfaces will be traced with right and left hands, respectively. Mark each side of the paper with north, south, east, and west and put an "R" on one side and an "L" on the other. Your right hand will trace the pattern on the "R" side; your left hand will trace the surface on the "L" side.. Draw on both surfaces of the paper the same straight line going from south to north on the paper with the circle at the south end (the starting point of your design that you will draw in space). First, have the partner hold the paper in front of you with the north side toward the ceiling and the east direction of side "R" oriented forward middle. Trace the pattern with both hands. They will be mirror images. These would be drawn the same on the Labanotation score. Now rotate the paper on its vertical axis orienting it so side "R" has north upward and east to the right. Again, trace the pattern. All of these are shown on the score the same way. Any degree of rotation on the vertical axis will result in the same notation on the Labanotation page, even with different surfaces. The Labanotation page will have the same drawing as the page being traced.

Now, reorient the "R" side of the page with north upward, east to the right (vertical plane in front). Trace the pattern, as before. Rotate the top of the page forward 45 degrees along the paper's horizontal axis. It will now trace the pattern. The Labanotation pattern will be the same for right and left hands, showing a forward motion. Go back to vertical. Now tip the top of the paper backward 45 degrees. Trace the pattern. Again, the design pattern in the Labanotation for the right and left hands will be the same, though they are now showing backward motion.. A change occurs when the orientation of the paper has one surface as the ceiling, one as the floor. Reorient the page vertically, again. Tip the top of the page forward, rotating on the horizontal axis again, until it is at 90 degrees. Trace the pattern. The Labanotation for the right hand will be the opposite of that for the left hand. Despite both hands tracing a pattern going from south to north on the paper moving in a forward direction away from the body, the right hand will be written in the

Labanotation score moving forward on the Labanotation page (on a floor surface), and the left hand will be written (according to current rules for the ceiling surface) as going backward on the Labanotation page. Tipping the page another 45 degrees, the two hands will again be written the same way, both showing backward movement.

Try other rotations of the paper, in any combination. The only placement that has a discontinuity of right and left hands when written in design drawing on a Labanotation score is one having a ceiling and floor orientation.

Readers of notation scores, even some who are very experienced, mis-read patterns when drawn "on the ceiling" using the rules as outlined in the text. (They read symbols moving forward on the score as "forward movement" by mistake.) Drawing patterns that go in a backward direction to represent movement in a forward direction can be counterintuitive.

I contend that the standard position of designs drawn on the ceiling (place high) should be a mirror-image of those drawn on the floor, just as every other pair of opposition points on the kinesphere have mirror image drawings. I contend that the notation should graphically represent forward movement drawn on the ceiling by designs showing forward, not backward, motion. I contend that the discontinuity, flipping the paper, should occur half way through the kinesphere showing the symmetry that is true in other parts of the LN system (so place high is oriented with the "behind the body" symbols) rather than the current standard of 'flipping the paper' for less than 50% of the kinesphere, only including back low, back middle, and back high but not place high. This change would make the notation more consistent with other parts of the Labanotation system. The symmetry described for motion from forward middle to side and to back middle would be consistent with moving a piece of paper from place low to the side to place high (without reorienting high and low). All other parts of the text would remain the same, and would be applied the same way. The change would only affect the way the notation on the ceiling is drawn.