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A Tentative Notation System for Kashaya Pomo Dances

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DANCE has been ascribed aesthetic and educational functions, has been viewed as communication, and has been interpreted as a means of socialization and group cohesiveness. Until recently, however, the *dance form* itself has seldom received any attention in the anthropological literature.

In some of the better early attempts to document dance, for instance S.A. Barrett's 1917 study of Pomo dances, track drawings were included with the directions that the dancer "danced" in the indicated pattern, but the movement itself remained undefined (Barrett 1917:419-20). More recently, C. Meighan and F. Riddell's description of the Pomo Hindle Dance stated that

[f]or the men dancers the step is a simple raising of alternate feet[;] it is performed with much vigor, however, and the bare-footed dancers stamp the ground with such violence that it looks as if they might injure their feet [;] the body is held in a semi-crouched position [Meighan and Riddell 1972:66].

Though the two foregoing descriptions both characterize Pomo dance to a degree, the dance form is not clearly delineated. The inadequacy of the data on dance is largely due to two factors. In the first place, many anthropologists lack a framework for the observation of dance. In other words, there is a problem in "seeing" the movement. Secondly, once the

movements can be isolated and defined there arises the problem of description, i.e., how is the movement to be communicated to others who are unfamiliar with the dance style?

On occasion, the problem is solved by the use of film. This solution, however, has its drawbacks. Dances, with rare exception, are very difficult to either analyze or reconstruct from film. If an individual dancer is focused on, the group pattern and movements are lost. If the dance is filmed at great enough distance to include all performers, individual movement is hard to see and the spacing between the individual dancers is difficult to determine. Also, in viewing the film at a slower speed for a more refined analysis of the movement, the sense of timing is lost.

Given the inadequacies of narrative description and filming, dance notation is singularly efficient as a mode of recording movement for future analysis. It allows the maximum in clarity and detail with the minimum expenditure of time and energy.

In deciding which of the movement notation systems in current use might be the most practical in recording Kashaya Pomo dances, I found both Labanotation (Hutchinson 1954) and Benesh notation (Benesh and Benesh 1969) to be too complex for my purposes, and the system devised by G. Kurath in her work with the Tewa (Kurath and García 1970) to be too simplified. Therefore, the obvious alternative was to devise a system of my own which

Table 1
BENESH STAFF

_____	Top of head
_____	Top of shoulder
_____	Waist
_____	Knee
_____	Floor

could be especially tailored to Kashaya Pomo dances.

As an aid to "seeing" Kashaya Pomo dance movement and to defining which body parts and specific movements might require symbols in my system, I employed the choreometric movement coding chart devised by Irmgard Bartenieff and Forrestine Paulay under the auspices of Alan Lomax's Cantometrics project (Lomax, Bartenieff, and Paulay 1968:265). Choreometrics is a system of measuring filmed movement on a series of qualitative rating scales to determine the characteristic body attitude and modes of energy use of a given culture. Premised on the concepts of Laban's effort/shape (Laban 1928; Laban and Lawrence 1947), the choreometric criteria, encompassing use of the body parts and the quality of transition and main activity, are not so refined as to prevent the emergence of a clear picture of culturally determined movement patterns.

My choreometric evaluation of Kashaya Pomo dances is based on repeated viewing of the films "Dream Dances of the Kashia Pomo: Women's Dances" (Barrett and Peri 1964) and "Kashia Men's Dances: Southwestern Pomo Indians" (Barrett and Peri 1963) as well as observations of dances performed at recent ceremonies at the Kashia Reservation. Using the movement coding chart as a guide, I determined the most active body parts to be the



















whole arm, the forearm, the shoulders, and whole leg for both men and women. The men also use frequent and strong head movements.

Both Kashaya Pomo men and women treat the torso as a single unit. The women retain the body axis (i.e., the trunk is held as one unit with no emphasis on either height or the width of their stance, and the legs form a narrow base of five to six inches apart). The men utilize a frontal plane, right-left emphasis in which width or a broad base is stressed. Both men and women move unilaterally (i.e., the right arm and right leg and the left arm and left leg move simultaneously rather than in opposition).

The shape of the transition or the point which links phrases of movement in Kashaya Pomo dance is predominantly one of simple reversal, retracing the primary line of movement. Sometimes the transition is vague and difficult to characterize. The shape of the main dance activity is predominantly directional, that is line-like or one-dimensional, and, less frequently, indefinite, with no clear stress on direction.

For men the energy of the main activity is prolonged, the movement begins with and maintains a single energy level. Whereas for women, though the energy is predominantly prolonged, there is often observed a fleeting quality, or one of slight or diminished emphasis on a given movement. Men's dances display an emphasis on strength and tend to be, on the

Table 2
BODY PLACEMENT AND STEPS

	Level with line of the body		
	In front of line of the body		
	Behind line of the body		
	Full weight on foot		
	Weight on ball of foot		
	Foot slightly off floor		
	Slight flexion		Torso twist to right
	Deep flexion		Torso twist to left
	Head right		Torso bent forward from hip
	Head left		Stamp of whole foot (immediately lifted again)
	Head up		Stamp on half toe (immediately lifted again)
	Head down		Hop










whole, slightly faster than women's. Both sexes, however, dance to reveal a quality of energy use which rates intermediate on a scale from jerky to smooth.

Kashaya Pomo dance movement retains the quality of the main activity through the transition and shows no clear variation in either effort or shape throughout a given









dance. The energy of a movement spreads simultaneously through the body, causing all body parts to move as one unit. At the same time the energy remains peripheral: the torso is held in opposition to movement in the extremities.

From the perspective afforded me by the movement coding chart, I determined which

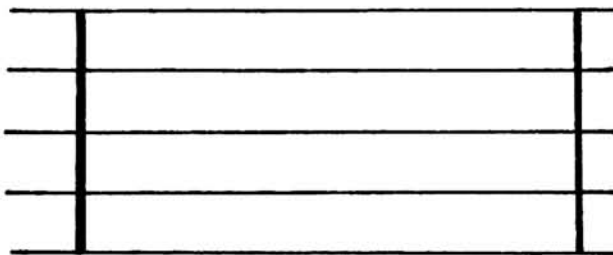
**Table 3
GESTURES**

	Right hand down, left up
	Left hand down, right up
	Both hands down in front
	Both hands up in front
	Right arm across body, left out at side
	Left arm across body, right out at side
	Right hand to left shoulder, left out to side
	Left hand to right shoulder, right out to side
	Hands on hips



**Table 4
DIRECTION INDICATORS**



	Movement to right
	Movement to left
	Movement forward
	Movement backward
	Body facing line of direction
	Body facing 90° right of line of direction
	Half turn to left
	Full turn to right

**Table 5
DYNAMICS AND PHRASING**



Area between bars indicates one measure of movement relating to one measure of music.

	Forceful
	Normal

	Step of relatively short duration
	Step of relatively longer duration

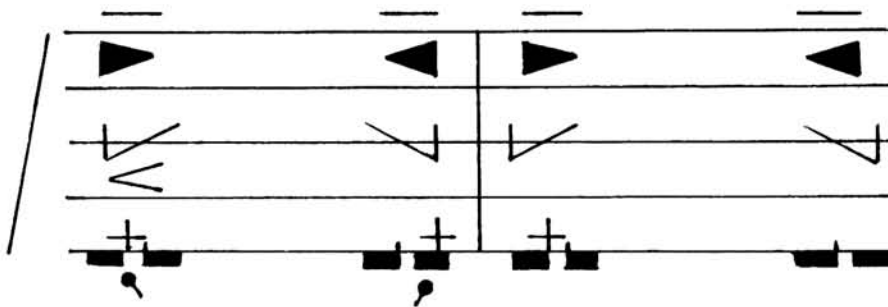
elements of the Benesh notation system and which of Kurath's would be most useful to me. Individual symbols from each have been either borrowed outright or modified and used in conjunction with symbols of my own. Table 1 shows the Benesh staff, which I borrowed

directly (Benesh and Benesh 1969:13).

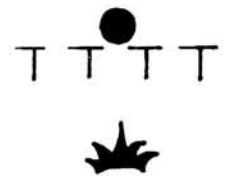
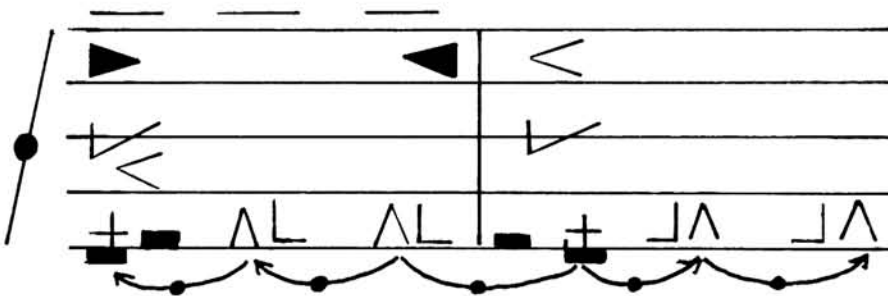
My vocabulary of notational elements for body placement, gestures, and steps is to be placed on the Benesh staff relative to the area of the body concerned. Table 2 shows the symbols for movement in line with the body, in

Table 6
KASHAYA POMO MEN'S DANCES

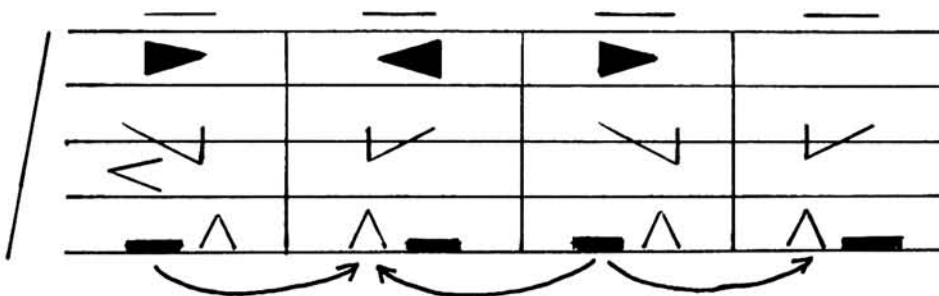
Feather Dance — example of steps in 2/4 time (in place)



Feather Dance — examples of steps performed in 3/4 time



Bighead Dance — performed in 3/4 time



front of and behind the line of the body; for weight full on the whole foot, on the ball of the foot, and for lifting the foot slightly off the floor; symbols for slight and deep flexion of the limbs, head placement to the right, the left, up or down; a twist of the torso to either side and a bend forward from the hips. Steps other than walking are hops, stamps of the whole foot, and stamps on half toe immediately lifted again.

The gesture symbols in Table 3 reflect common arm movement patterns, some of which are determined by the use of props. For instance, the men frequently use the position of both hands down in front, or both hands up in front when holding a split stick rattle with both hands. Other movements are modified by the use of props, as when women dance holding a scarf in both hands. The length of the scarf determines the size and shape of the possible arm movements.

The most common arm movement patterns are sequences of right hand down, left up, left hand down, right up; or of left arm across the body, right out to the side, right arm across the body, left out to the side; and of left hand to the right shoulder, right out to the side, right hand to the left shoulder, left out to the side. All notational elements in Table 3 are to be read as elbows bent unless there is a slash (/) through the symbol.

The direction of the movement (e.g., Table 4) is shown in two types of symbols, both of which are placed beneath the staff. The direction the movement carries the body, to the right, the left, forward or backward, is notated in reference to the position of the body in relationship to the line of direction. Turns are also notated below the staff according to degree and direction.

Dynamics (Table 5) are indicated at the beginning of the staff. Kashaya Pomo dance movement ranges from normal to forceful. The forceful movement is more characteristic of the men. Bar lines on the staff indicate one measure of movement relating to one measure

of music. Ideally, the movement notation score will be correlated with a musical score placed below the movement staff. Until this correlation can be established, I am using symbols of relative duration for each frame of movement within a phrase. The symbols, long lines for movement of relatively longer duration and short lines for movement of shorter duration, are placed above the staff.

Diagrams of the floor plans of the sequence are included beside each line of the movement score to locate the dancers in relation to one another.

Table 6 illustrates excerpts of the Kashaya Pomo men's dances, and Table 7 shows the women's dances. The floor plans to the side of each line of notation show the dance area between the centerpost of the dance house, represented by the large dots, and the fire.

The notation system I am proposing offers a means for the Kashaya Pomo to record in written form their dances for posterity. It also is potentially useful as a teaching aid. It is flexible and simple enough to be expanded if necessary to encompass future changes in the Kashaya Pomo dance style. It is also flexible enough to be modified for use with the dance styles of other groups who share the Kashaya Pomo body attitude.

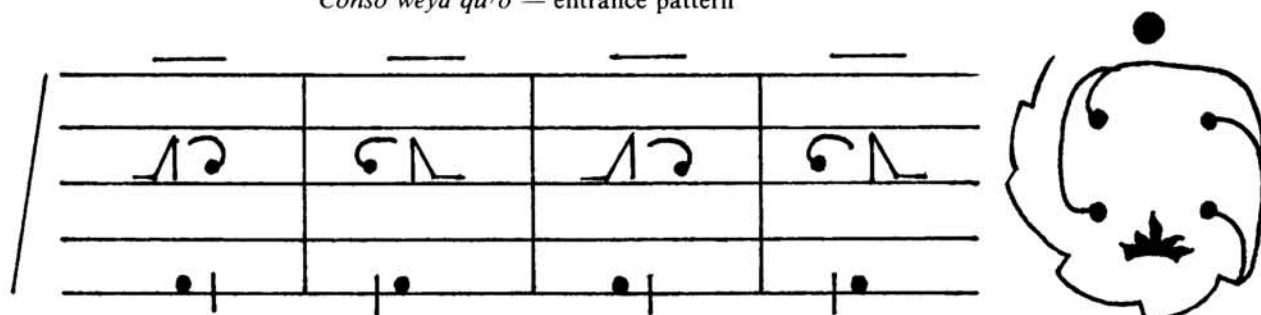
I hope to have stressed in this paper the advantage of using movement notation. For clarity and precision, it is much superior to narrative description. Notation is also an invaluable supplement to film over and above the fact that it is an efficient tool when used by itself. An analysis of dance requires a breakdown of the flow of movement into easily perceivable segments as well as an overall picture of the pattern formed by the dancers in relationship to one another. So far these requirements are best served by movement notation.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

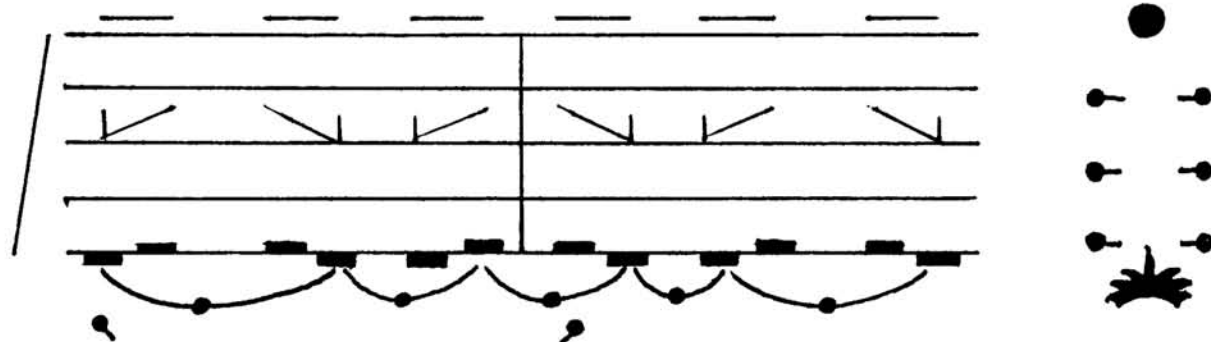
The research for this paper was carried out

Table 7
KASHAYA POMO WOMEN'S DANCES

Cohso weya qu'o — entrance pattern



Feather Dance — 3/4 time



as part of the work of the Kashaya Pomo Language in Culture Project (Dr. Shirley Silver, principal investigator), which was supported by a grant from the Education Programs Division of the National Endowment for the Humanities (Grant Number EH-20095-74-381). A preliminary version of this paper appeared as Working Paper Number 22, Kashaya Pomo Language in Culture Project, Department of Anthropology, California State College, Sonoma, and was also presented at the 1976 meetings of the Southwestern Anthropological Association. The graphics were prepared by Otis Parrish, to whom I am indebted.

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