Ambivalent rhythmic patterns

Rhythm is not something fixed but highly dependent on how we, as performers or listeners, decide what we consider to be meaningful shapes. Many rhythms are ambivalent: if the performer chooses a certain emphasis or grouping, the rhythm changes its gestalt quality. Marianne Steffen-Wittek gives several examples of such ambivalent rhythms in her lecture Rhythm in Eurythmics.[1] See the following excerpt (pp. 19-21):

Generating study material of rhythm in the context of groove

When working with groove in the context of music and movement, it is important to note the difference between rhythmic notation and execution. The notation of the *ten to ten* pattern (Figure 2-3), the Afro-Cuban *tresillo* (Figure 5), the *son clave* (Figure 11) and the *6/8 guideline* (Figure 16), for example, does not reveal the complexity of their various executions in musical practice. A simple-looking notation does not mean that the execution is simple and lacks complexity.[2] London assumes that meters and rhythms do not in themselves require complex execution, but only prove to be complex or less complex in relation to one another: "(…) just as meters do not exist apart from rhythmic surfaces that initiate and sustain them, so too with metric complexity. Whereas we can speak in some ways of the complexity of various tempo-metrical types, the more relevant complexity is that which emerges from the interaction between a metric framework and a rhythmic surface." (London 2012, 196)

Depending on the musical context, the rhythm in Figure 5 requires a different execution (West-European rhythm in 4/4 measure with divisive subdivisions or additive rhythm of 3 – 3 – 2 groupings or swing-rhythm with ternary phrasing, or Afro-Cuban Timeline *tresillo*).

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1 See keyword 'Rhythmising and grooving'

2 "A simple pattern composed of but a few layers of activity, at an extremely fast or extremely slow tempo, will probably prove harder to establish and maintain than a richer and more variegated metrical hierarchy at a moderate tempo. Likewise, maintaining a rich metric hierarchy, even one involving a non-isochronous meter, may be unproblematic if the musical texture articulates each metric level and its organization. By contrast, maintaining a simple isochronous meter, where one needs to constantly interpolate missing beats and discount various kinds of rhythmic noise such as trills or grace notes, may prove far more challenging." (London 2012, 196).

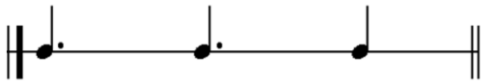

Figure 5 Afro-Cuban Tresillo (3-3-2 pattern)

If we look at the following simple rhythm notation, it is not immediately apparent which different interpretation options are available through different percussive executions (Figure 6). To explore the question of physicality in percussion playing, Claus Raab proposes an experimental arrangement with this rhythm pattern. Although the typeface always suggests one and the same rhythm (Figure 6-10), there is no question for the performer "that these are different rhythms." (Raabe 1991, 116) The author has examined and differentiated the effects of the different hand techniques when executing the patterns of Figure 8 on various parameters: weight perception, grouping by right-left sideness (pendulum), reference unit for the sense of tempo, meter.

Depending on the execution of the hands, the repetition of the same pattern can be understood as a grouping of four (Figure 6) or as another grouping (Figure 7). (See Raab 1991, 121-122)

R = right hand, L = left hand

Figure 6 Grouping of four similar patterns

Figure 7 Grouping of three similar patterns and one pattern

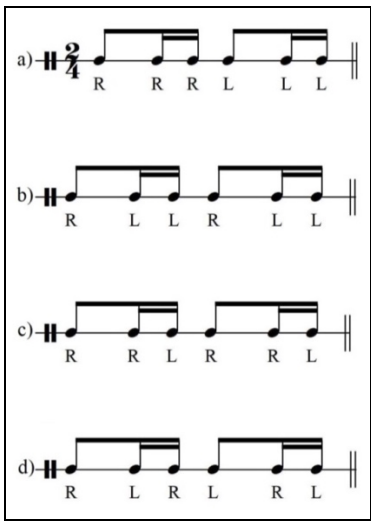

Figure 8 a-d Different hand techniques produce different musical results.

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