

Rhythm and Artistic Production

Dorothea Weise

The transmission of musical processes via corresponding movement sequences can be seen as the foundation of Dalcroze Eurhythmics. Accordingly, the sensibility for rhythm and its inherent interplay of tension and relaxation in space and time is significant for the embodied visualisation of music. For creating wider aesthetic experiences and confrontation with the rhythmical structures of music and other artistic expressions—such as visual arts and literature—it can be helpful to take a look at other concepts of rhythm. Recent theories about rhythm from the music theorists Steffen A. Schmidt and Christopher Hasty, as well as the philosophical thoughts about speech from Ludwig Wittgenstein, described as «Saying and Showing», open up additional structures that may enrich the process of artistic creation and performance in eurhythmics.

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A piece of film tape coils down from a spool on a parapet and forms shiny loops on the ground. Its gyrating motion corresponds with the opening bars of the orchestral piece 'Stille und Umkehr' from 1970, one of the last compositions of Bernd Alois Zimmermann who died the same year. A young woman enters the stage from the right. Her steps will create a spacious spiral to the centre of the room and back, following the continuously sounding central note 'd'. Using a backward step pattern, she marks the also constantly occurring sounds of what Zimmermann called a blues-rhythm drum ostinato. Her arms carry out a varying and at times expressively increasing series of gestures, corresponding with soloistic interjections and ornaments of different instrument groups. Despite isolating her limbs whilst fashioning her movement through the room, all the while corresponding to the three layers of the musical work, her body moves fluidly through the almost ten minutes performance. The interaction and synergy of different rhythms, tempi and soundscapes stretches the present in a peculiar way and makes the 'presence of time' (as Zimmermann himself said to another piece from himself) tangible. The choreography follows the perpetuating sound structure strictly. It connects listening and seeing through sparingly used gestures into an oscillating experience in which the complex structure of the musical work seems to become simple and clear. The protagonist on stage is a eurhythmics student and presents her solo movement performance as part of her final examination.

The relationship between music and movement is at the core of artistic eurhythmic compositions¹ The phenomenon rhythm is explored in different categories and becomes effective in preliminary studies and during the performance. If, like in the performance I just outlined, an already existing piece of music is the starting point for a movement composition, there are different levels of congruence to differentiate with respect to the musical parameters and the message, the context and the intended mood of the piece: synchronous, contrapuntal and even aleatoric connections can be created. Consequently, a composition can be made rhythmic on different levels and different layers.

¹ The word composition means in this context movement composition or choreography.

Flowing and Cutting

Translating musical voices into corresponding spatiotemporal body movements can be called the essence of what Émile Jaques-Dalcroze developed as *eurhythmics* at the beginning of the 20th century. Over decades, he refined exercises from music education in order to ‘perfect the strength and the suppleness of muscles in proportion to time and space [...]’ as described in the exercise book ‘Rhythmic Gymnastics’ in 1906 (Jaques-Dalcroze 1906, p. 8). To Jaques-Dalcroze, training the sentience for musical rhythm meant putting the body at the service of the music. Specific exercises for the movement of arms and legs, the breathing, listening and reacting were carried out isolated from one another at first and later connected to a more complex, often spontaneously changing coordination sequence accompanied or initiated by piano playing (Gobbert, 1998, pp. 71). In his brilliant years in Hellerau from 1911 to 1914, Jaques-Dalcroze used this method to develop the *Plastique Animée* as a means for artistic expression, which is today known as *eurhythmics* (Zwiener, 2008). He arranged large-scale choral movement compositions to music from the common practice period (Baroque, Classical and Romantic), which were performed during school festivals. Adolphe Appia designed the stage. He created so called *rhythmic spaces*, which enabled the three-dimensional arrangement of the group choreographies.

What Jaques-Dalcroze criticised about classical ballet was the artificial manner in which the dancer moved from pose to pose, whereby emphasising the static elements rather than the flow of the music. Contrary to this, he wanted to break up the flow of movement only with a holding posture in which either the preceding move is still noticeable or the following move is prepared. Listening and moving as a kinaesthetic experience or ‘as something like a three-dimensional melody’ (Jaques-Dalcroze, 1907 in Zwiener, 2008, p. 237) were meant to unite the musical rhythms with the sensation of the passage of time. Thereby a pause is ‘nothing more but a mere interruption of the tonal life or to put it differently, a transmission of feelings from the outer to the inner ear.’ (ibid., 241)

The synchronicity of *flowing* as a variable stream of musical events within different intensities of suspense and *marking* of rhythmic shapes or elements is like looking at something from two different perspectives at the same time. Musicologist Steffen A. Schmidt differentiates between vertical and horizontal cuts in rhythm composition. Vertical cuts are usually connected with the metre of the pace-setting structure. They can often be identified by the bar line. Schmidt calls them ‘vertical-metric cuts’ (Schmidt, 1999, p. 70). The emphasis is usually easily detected in metric music but in odd metres of higher orders, after a change of

metre or in metric-free music determining the vertical cuts becomes a challenge. Horizontal cuts result from the tonal, dynamic or rhythmic phrasing which does not necessarily match the metric emphasis structure. In polyphonic music one has to consider that the different parts can swap, overlay or shift their identities, thus creating an interaction between different time structures. This concept, which Schmidt calls ‘approaches to an integral functional theory of musical rhythm’ (ibid.), comes close to Jaques-Dalcroze’s understanding of rhythm: ‘Continuity and temporal nuancing are two key elements of rhythm [...]. Their measured forms develop a sense for metrics; their accents, ”crescendi” and ”diminuendi” train the feeling for ”dynamics”’ (Jaques-Dalcroze in: Gobbert, 1998, p. 45). These words highlight the interplay between dividing (cutting) elements and those that horizontally shape the passage of time (flowing).

In processes of creating a choreography, often improvisational approaches that can be described as *kinaesthetic listening*, are the beginning of an intense examination of a piece of music. Categories like *flowing* and *cutting* can steer the perceptual process into different directions, reveal individual listening habits and differentiate them.

“Saying and Showing”

If you consider an artistic creation the result of individual realities and fantasy, questions arise considering the choice of means and their arrangement, as well as the transmission of the product through execution and interpretation. In the case of the performance I mentioned at the beginning, the decision to have a high degree of congruence between the music and the movement was made early in the process. I perceived the student as being almost apologetic about using such a as she put it ‘traditional approach’.

An obvious interpretation of this would be to say that her form of transmission is more of a technical work rather than an individual artistic piece. Whether this is true or not, eurhythmic students often discuss the significance of a choreography along this separation: the display of technical skill (such as in a *réalisation*) on one hand and the originality of an artistic statement on the other. As if a decision between the two had to be made. In fact, both aspects should be seen as poles of a tension structure that diversifies through a ‘sensitivity for surprises and new discoveries, resistance and confrontation’ (Schroedter, 2012, p. 48) and thus broadens the ‘horizon of expectations and aesthetics’ (ibid.).

Embodying a piece of music always includes the process of transforming it into another medium of expression where space, energy and form have different effects. Inevitable this means making decisions about the style of movement, the arrangement of musical phrases within the space, whether to embody characters or work abstract, to have a plot or use a

conceptual form play. Most of these choices occur intuitively during a phase of improvisation at the beginning of rehearsals and have to be critically re-evaluated as the performance matures. In eurhythmics, working in groups is very common and every group member's individual listening habit and movement repertoire together with their associations and ways of contextualising brings many intuitions productively together. The most elaborate ideas to create the choreography have to be filtered out from this diverse pool of thought. Since the students work independently and democratically and all of them have different aesthetic ideas, this usually takes some time. Once a start has been made, the process becomes smoother. Questions arise about the need to differentiate certain movements related to the flow of the music and the intended message either from group members or from rehearsal supervisors. Depending on whether the music was chosen first, picked to match a given subject or added later to fit an already existing part of the choreography, the level of creative scope varies between music, message and movement. Overstating the case and without neglecting the manifold nuances of the creative leeway, the discussion boils down to the question if the movement should be conducive to the message or to the music.

Based loosely on Ludwig Wittgenstein's thoughts, those two aspects can be described as 'saying and showing' (Sagen und Zeigen). In simplified terms, *showing* is understood to express something that is identical in enunciation and structure to what is being shown, to make what is shown visible or audible. *Saying* is understood to signify an assumption about or an interpretation of something. Translated to embodying music, it can mean the change of the music structure through the already mentioned means of composition of movement.

If *showing* is the main objective, movement compositions have a high degree of synchronicity with the music. If *saying* has priority, manifold variations in the relationship between the music and the body develop and new interpretive approaches bring about new images and narratives. Staying with Wittgenstein, *saying and showing* are the two elements of every meaningful sentence: '...no saying can replace the showing' (Kienzler, 2015). But in the case of the interplay between music, body and message, the emphasis and the degree of reciprocity between those elements can vary greatly.

Choreographies that primarily try to visualise or illustrate musical structures differ fundamentally from those that attempt to venture into the inner, hidden kinetics of the music and engage in a dialogue with it (albeit using visual ideas as an aid). (Schroedter, 2012, p. 95).

Showing as a 'direct correspondence' (ibid., p. 84) between movement and music can have very different results especially with regards to the kinaesthetic penetration of the sound characteristics and the structural elements of the piece of music. The level of differentiation of the *showing* has a direct effect on how these physical energies are transformed, how they interact with the music and how they can be physically and emotionally experienced by the viewer and listener. This can also be conceived as a form of *saying* from an outsider's perspective.

Saying can also be given priority but it always needs *showing* as its counterpart. One eurhythmics student's solo movement composition staged for an interim examination had the Latin-looking filler text 'Lorem ipsum' as its subject. This dummy text has no meaning and is widely used to layout texts. The music for the choreography was self-composed and consisted of a collage of overlaying electronic sounds and repetitive language sequences. The stage was designed to look like an austere writing room with a chaise longue, a mirror and a wooden desk occupying the centre front. In it, a determined writer, condemned by his own dourness, was trying to write but couldn't produce anything but empty phrases. Rolling over the desk, repeating meaningless dance moves, swaying his pigtail from left to right over the writing surface which culminated in wild swings with his upper body held upside down, he showed his stoicism and despair in both a painful and funny way. Occasionally, the performance would correspond with the rhythm or the meaning of the scraps of words, oscillating between the physical delight of the energy of the pointless movements, the exhaustion and the will to pull oneself up again. The structured changes from one element of the composition to the next, carefully balancing predictable and surprising articulations and phrasings, can be labelled as *meaningful saying*.

Excursion

A complete decoupling of music and movement is almost unthinkable and could at most be done as an experiment to prove the opposite. Merce Cunningham and John Cage's collaborations dealing with the autonomy of dance and music is an example of the least possible congruence. The coexistence of both means of expression was held together only through minimal scheduling of isolated encounters of rhythmic events. In their joint productions from the 1940s to the 1960s, Cage and Cunningham often only determined the overall length and

division of time within a work.² Since the music and the movement did not coincide anymore, they took away the possibility for the viewers to orientate themselves and thereby gave priority to the ‘coexistence of difference’ (Naumann, 2005, p. 137). ‘Staging a subjective penetration of the artistic material is not the main focus but letting go the subject-oriented art of dance and music that understood itself as a representation and interpretation of displayed subjectivity’ (ibid., p. 131). Could pointing out the independence of music-time and dance-time in their brief encounters of endings and beginnings be a *double showing*? Naumann seems to agree and disagree at the same time.

If this dance form develops an evident rhythmic reference pattern and this reference pattern reveals itself to the viewer, wonderfully revealing itself, as I'm inclined to saying, it is because of the dynamic potential of the body that expresses itself in these figures. (ibid., p. 130).

Whatever attributions are given or seem meaningful, creating or referring back to already existing categories of thought helps to analyse compositions and to reflect during their process of formation. One might ask why go through the trouble of applying a philosophical concept to the idea of rhythmic structure? With regards to the theory of mutually dependent polarities, *saying and showing* can be applied as poles in this concept of rhythmisation.

Gestalt and Creation

American music theorist and composer Christopher Hasty describes rhythm ‘...as a form of constant attention...’ in his thought collection *Rhythm Experiments* ‘in which holding on and moving come together – holding on of present and happening events and the movement between them’ (Hasty in Grüny/Nanni, 2014, p. 155). Hasty understands rhythm as a continuous form of attentiveness, as a, like he calls it, *sensed* act of feeling change. For Hasty, sensing is not passive. Rhythm is considered ‘a continuous creation of newly sensed events’ (ibid., p. 158). These experience-events, one could also call them experience-Gestalten, occur through repetition and comparison.

² Merce Cunningham describes their method like this: “What was involved was a macro-microcosmic rhythmic structure in which the large parts were related to the small parts in divisions of time. [...] This use of a time structure allowed us to work separately, Cage not having to be with the dance except at structural points, and I was free to make the phrases and movements within the phrases vary their speeds and accents without reference to a musical beat, [...]” (Gena, P., Brent, J. (1982). *A John Cage Reader*, p. 107)

An example: Whilst seeing a dance composition and listening to the accompanying music, a certain movement motif becomes distinct and connected with the corresponding gesture in the music. Next time the musical gesture occurs, one expects the same movement motif but it is conducted by another body part, thus only fulfilling the expectation partly. Seeing the movement might trigger an association that leads the thoughts away from the current happenings. The awareness reconnects at a later point with the original performance, maybe with a changed perception due to the mental wandering in between.

These shifts in the focus of the attention are all part of the rhythmic process. Hasty considers the constant creation of references on different levels as a characteristic of *continuity* in making connections between multiple experiences. Hence, articulation and flow are not opposites but reinforce each other to create a complex and subtle mix of different qualities of connectedness. In Hasty's opinion 'complex experiences have to have a mix of being connected and being unconnected and this mix is fluid, especially in those experiences we call "rhythmic"' (ibid., p. 167).

In eurhythmics, getting physically and sensually connected with materials and movements, whether they are one's own or another's, as well as with works of music, fine art and literature, are key components to developing aesthetic experiences. Actively examining and reflecting these connections leads to a 'search motion' (Rittelmeyer, 2014, p. 160) in the interplay of receptivity, spontaneity and cognitive understanding. Cultivating the perceptivity as a matter of coming into connection and into exchange with the materials of perception needs sensitivity and openness. Furthermore, developing movement compositions requires giving form to the various experiences made.

How these choreographies are perceived when performed in a public setting does not solely depend on the openness of the viewer. A eurhythmic movement composition can invite responses in various ways:

- by visualising music precisely, the audience can be let into a spontaneous process of empathy originally intended by Jaques-Dalcroze in which one can 'enjoy the music and enjoy oneself in the music' (Zwiener, 2008, p. 244);
- as a structured event that presents itself as multi-layered in its articulation and phrasing as well as in its differentiation between *cutting* and *flowing*;
- by bringing out the rich variety of meaning through *saying* and *showing*, which in turn opens up imaginative spaces, the perception of the viewer can oscillate between what is happening on stage and the creation of individual experiences.

All these reflections refer to the ‘classic’ realm of eurhythmics - music and movement. When taking into account digital media, new fields of temporal and rhythmic composition open up that enable multiple variations of interactions. The fleetingness of movement and music is translated through auditory and visual traces, fragmented and spatiotemporally shifted. Rhythms of perception of memorising, erasing, forgetting and anticipating interlock through all senses. Developing new hybrid performative forms and formats based on the mentioned rhythmic constellations needs to be a part of contemporary eurhythmics artwork.

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