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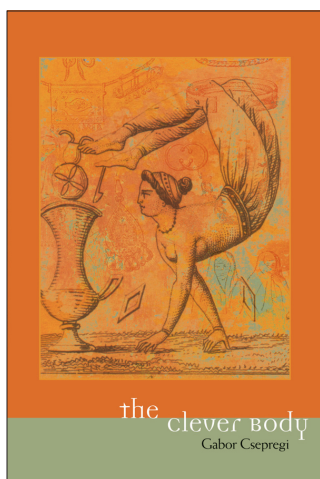
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THE CLEVER BODY

by Gabor Csepregi

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5 | RHYTHM

INTERACTION RHYTHM | The title of this chapter might suggest an analysis of the body's biological rhythms such as the circadian cycle of sleep and wakefulness. Though the periodic physiological processes are fascinating subjects of study, it is not my intention to investigate how the body's inner clock regulates and guides some of our daily activities. These issues have received increased attention in recent years; students of chronobiology and chronotherapy have published important contributions that lead to our understanding of the body's capacity for time keeping and healing.

I intend to address the following questions: How does the body generate rhythmic movements? What are the main characteristics and significance of rhythmic motor performances?

Similar to imitative actions, children execute rhythmic movements from a very young age. Their moving bodies are, in Nicolas Abraham's words, "rhythmizing from the start."¹ The early rhythmic attunement to the mother's voice and movement provides infants with a highly satisfying emotional experience.² Affective communication through sounds and gestures is essential, allowing for the child's learning to take root and steadily progress in the society. Close interaction between vocal expressions, movements, and affectivity continues to play a central role in many subsequent bodily activities such as singing, dancing, and ritual playing. The fundamental desire to adjust to the perceived rhythm will also remain a pivotal feature of many human interactions.

Students of human kinesics – those who explore the role of body movement in human communication – have shown that people interacting with each other display a natural tendency to adopt their partner's rhythm. Either the whole body moves in synchrony or only one of its parts. This "interactive dancing" usually remains unnoticed. If the partners suddenly became aware of the synchronized movements, their communicative behaviour could become disturbed. While, as Edward T. Hall pointed out, the tendency to synchronize the movements is innate, the characteristics of motor rhythm itself are cultural.³ Not only do people of different cultures move faster or slower but they also stress sound and movement segments in a particular manner. Moving from one culture to another brings with it the challenge of manifold learning, one of them being the adaptation to new, subtle rhythmic patterns.

In our everyday life, we share and respond to a great variety of rhythms. We dispose of a repertoire of rhythmic patterns, from which,

in a given situation, we select, often unconsciously, the most appropriate one.⁴ The context, as well as the nature of our activity, provides the script for the suitable rhythmicity. We may become conscious of these ongoing adjustments when we see someone unwilling or unable to “shift rhythmic gear” according to the requirement of the context. Entering a church or a museum, we immediately take up a different behaviour pattern: we move with a slower pace and make frequent stops. Workers, however, called in to repair or replace something, do not alter the rhythm of their walk or speech. They surely move in synchrony with each other, but fail to react to the new circumstances. In a foreign land, those who fail to adopt the local rhythm are immediately recognized as tourists or visitors.

Conversation calls for a continuous adaptation to the demands of a rhythm introduced by the partners.⁵ The rhythm is established and understood not only through the recurrent sound pulses, but also through a great variety of bodily movements such as the nods, smiles, frowns, and slight touches. The chosen rhythm may serve several purposes. It may help to predict what comes next, hold the partner’s attention, display an immediate non-verbal desire or reaction, or strengthen a bond between the speakers. By its nature, a genuine conversation is spontaneous and undetermined, even though it unfolds according to some kind of order. Beyond the selected themes and the partner’s willingness to listen and communicate, it is the commonly adopted rhythm that brings coherence to the exchange of words.

Rhythm is certainly a central element of the communication between individuals making music together, illustrated by a sonata recital. As the musicians interpret the part assigned to their instrument, they might play notes slightly faster or slower, or place more or less stress on them. The freedom of introducing subtle rhythmic variations is, of course, not unlimited. Each player has to take into account not only the composer’s

indication, but also the execution of the co-performer. The interpretation can unfold only if the pianist concurrently foresees what and how the violinist is going to play, and conversely, the violinist anticipates how the music created by the pianist will unfold. It is on the basis of memory of intervals that the players are able to anticipate how the music evolves.

I have already referred to Alfred Schutz's observations on chamber music performance. They make clear that a successful anticipation requires not only the hearing of these intervals between tones but also the seeing of the fellow musician's bodily expressions.

The other's facial expressions, his gestures in handling his instrument, in short all the activities of performing, gear into the outer world and can be grasped by the partner in immediacy. Even if performed without communicative intent, these activities are interpreted by him as indications of what the other is going to do and therefore as suggestions or even commands for his own behavior. Any chamber musician knows how disturbing an arrangement can be that prevents coperformers from seeing each other.⁶

Although not as precise and compelling as the sound, the continuous visual contact contributes significantly to the successful synchronization of an individual interpretation. Seeing the bodily movements allows the musicians to identify with each other, "tune-in" to one another, and generate or follow a particular rhythmic order.

We may compare the musicians' "mutual tuning-in relationship" to the interaction between two dancers: each partner is simultaneously, or successively, leader and follower. Thus the role assumed by one of them is not always obvious. Both may either impose or react to a rhythmic pattern; they move while being moved. This unity of activity and passivity, the expansive and adaptive movements, constitutes the primary

characteristics of all play. Whoever plays is, at the same time, being played. The very first encounter – between the infant’s lips, tongue, and hands and the mother’s body – unfolds according to this very same structure. His subsequent play with a ball is governed by the same complementary dynamics of moving and being moved. Such a structure, comprising the interplay of initiative and adaptation, regulates many other kinds of human activities.⁷

Clearly, we not only send various rhythmic signals, but also adopt the subtle rhythmic suggestions coming from others. We are able to execute synchronized gestures because our rhythmic sensibility consists of identifying ourselves with some temporal sequences and we retrieve them either concretely or in imagination. When we do this, we group together the temporal segments or phases of the movement and emphasize some of their moments. To perceive rhythm we must have the capacity to group recurrent impressions and articulate patterns with an accent. To be effective, this fundamental disposition does not have to be conscious; it functions best if it becomes a motor habit. We perceive a rhythm with our body: we yield to an inner need to respond to this rhythmic pattern with a movement that involves grouping and emphasis. Or we accomplish virtual movements if the perception of rhythm does not provoke in us actual muscular contractions. With or without these contractions, however, the compelling synchronization calls for the anticipation of both impressions and motor responses.⁸

In play or conversation, the rhythmic movements that spring from an inner need concretely illustrate that “the body is essentially an expressive space.”⁹ Indeed, during these activities, we reveal our distinct traits, our unique way of moving, talking, and gesticulating, in short, our style. “Every human being,” writes Kurt Goldstein, “has a rhythm of his own,

which manifests itself in the various performances, but of course in various ways, yet in the same performance always in the same way."¹⁰ The style with which we respond to people and objects is, above all, the consequence of the structure of values that we have personally adopted. Hence there is no style without the capacity of the body to preserve all the values transmitted to us by a social group and acquired through significant experiences.¹¹

AESTHETIC EXPERIENCE OF MOVEMENT | We generate, and respond to, rhythm with our whole being: not only with movements, but also with our emotions. I suspect that, in public places or family circles, people are drawn into a "conversational waltz" because of the pleasurable experience that rhythm induces. Some movements, as most of us know, produce an exhilarating and stimulating feeling. This is not the same state of ecstasy, euphoria, or intoxication in which we might find ourselves while taking part in certain rituals. Expressions such as enchantment, delight, rapture, captivation, excitement, and inspiration seem to more appropriately describe the felt sensations. Oliver Sacks, the well-known writer in the field of clinical neurology, described the unbounded joy he found while walking, thoughtlessly and spontaneously, across a room. His satisfaction derived from the sudden feeling of unity with the "walking's natural, unconscious rhythm and melody," from the awareness of his body that "became music, incarnate solid music."¹²

The joy of sheer doing – its beauty, its simplicity – was a revelation: it was the easiest, most natural thing in the world – and yet beyond the most complex of calculations and programs. Here, in doing, one achieved certainty with one swoop, by a grace which bypassed the most complex mathematics, or perhaps embedded and then transcended

*them. Now, simply, everything felt right, everything was right, with no effort, but with an integral sense of ease – and delight.*¹³

Sacks, giving the reader an eloquent account of his perception of “kinetic beauty” or “musicality of motion,” shows that, under some circumstances, even the simple motion of walking is able to elicit a deeply fulfilling aesthetic experience.

To Sacks, it was the sense of organization and instant co-ordination of the movement that conveyed the feeling of “heavenly ease.” He suddenly realized that, without conscious calculation, he was able to give himself to the “activity’s own tempo, pulsion and rhythm.” Yet such a feeling of getting into the rhythm did not at all take away the awareness of walking with style – a style that was “inimitably my own,” as he put it. The legs felt “alive, and real, and mine.” The sources of his aesthetic delight were both the awareness of a rhythmic order and the opportunity to consider the movement truly his own.

Following the illuminating analysis of Sacks, I would like to further focus my attention on the role that the rhythmically tuned body plays in an aesthetic motor experience. What gives the movement an aesthetic value? What are the qualities and determinants of the motor behaviour that induce a sense of contentment? The various authors, each being inspired by a particular philosophical option, advance diverse answers to these questions.¹⁴

Some consider beauty or grace to be the primary characteristic of the movement endowed with an aesthetic value.¹⁵ A movement is beautiful or graceful when an idea, an intention, a meaning, an excellence, an inner unity and wholeness, or something “transcendent” and “inexhaustible,” becomes manifest in a sensuous and dynamic form. Our aesthetic

experience consists of the perception of irreducible excess, superabundance, and plenitude in a technically flawless motor performance. Technical perfection consists, above all, of harmonic order and inner unity.

Others prefer to pay attention to the formal qualities of motor behaviour.¹⁶ Here the aesthetic value is in the successful realization of previously identified criteria such as rhythmic order, regularity, symmetry, balance, proportion, precision, harmony, versatility, surprise, and difficulty. Even though the motor form is not subordinated to external and pragmatic goals, it nevertheless remains bound to some "immanent laws" and principles. Empirical observations allow us to analyze and compare these principles and to recognize their communicative significance. Our aesthetic enjoyment springs from the perception of a correspondence between subjective performance abilities, and fixed, standardized movement possibilities.

The third approach considers movements from a subjective point of view.¹⁷ Here the aesthetic is not merely a matter of adapting movements to objective qualities, but derives from the production of a dynamic form that on the one hand expresses ideas, conceptions, emotions, fantasies, and on the other elicits an awareness of total bodily involvement. To relate personal meanings to movements means to go beyond the factual, efficient, and useful and to place the movement in a context where expression is valued over performance. The deployment of symbolic figures and illusory appearances produces an aesthetic delight and, consequently, sustains or reshapes feelings. Both the figurative transformation and the refinement of feelings happen without adaptation to a conscious purpose; they are spontaneous processes since they originate in the primary need for the embodiment of inner life and from the "impulse toward symbolic formulation."¹⁸

Let us briefly consider the characteristics of movement within the third perspective, because it places great emphasis on the body's creative abilities and the affective component of the aesthetic perception. The aesthetic delight does not depend on the physiological or muscular processes alone, but rather on how we perceive ourselves in relation to the movement and a particular space. We experience a feeling of lightness and ease as we move with unusual dexterity and alertness and trust our own bodily capabilities. We do not perceive the swimming pool or the playing-field as a space to confront and conquer, but as a support and source of the body's dynamic impulses.

A fundamental prerequisite of aesthetic satisfaction is our ability to smoothly and correctly co-ordinate a great number of partial movements. The movement must exhibit an order, a structure in which the different segments obtain their unity and cohesion. When an adequate mastery of certain techniques is not acquired, the various elements follow each other without accentuation, articulation, or synchronization, making the movement devoid of internal coherence or "kinetic melody," to quote Paul Guillaume.¹⁹

However important it is, the rhythmic "melodic flow" alone is insufficient to produce an aesthetic value. What is needed is authenticity and expressiveness. The aesthetic enjoyment also arises from the expression of a momentary mood (of celebration), thought (of thankfulness), or desire (of stability) through original and harmonious movements. These achievements can neither be brought into existence on command nor narrowed down to stabilized and measurable patterns. They occur and develop, without any conscious planning and control, through the unconcerned variation of the symbolic structure, the playful improvisation of a kinetic theme, and the qualitative use of motor options.

RHYTHMICALLY ORGANIZED MOVEMENT | What are the organizing factors that endow a motor form with a desired unity and cohesion? How do we bring together the different segments of the movement and succeed in producing a harmonious form? But first, how does our body understand and play the “kinetic melody”? Primary motor abilities (endurance, strength, speed, flexibility, agility, and skill) and proper execution of the movement are essential elements of a harmonious form. We understand a movement when we perceive and feel it as an articulated and dynamic form that comprises some dominant elements. “To understand the movement,” says Paul Guillaume, “is to organize its perception.”²⁰ In fact, during the period of learning, it is our perception that guides our movement – the perception of a global form, not a detailed one. When, for instance, we learn to tie our shoelace, our movement is organized according to the salient moments of the schema. At the same time, the articulated outline becomes a dynamic structure, a virtual movement, and an anticipation of the way we will co-ordinate the main elements of the movement. We discern this kind of dynamic characteristic when we try to master a difficult movement pattern (turning while skiing); it intervenes as a facilitating and guiding link between our intention to move and the actual motor performance.²¹

Even if we successfully internalize the “kinetic melody,” we are still unable to reproduce it as a harmonious whole without some familiarity with the material and spatial characteristics of the situation. It is essential, at least during the period of learning, that we experience the resistance of water, snow, or turf. We cannot, it is evident, learn to swim outside water or to ski without gliding on the snow surface.

Beyond the necessary motor abilities and the guiding perception of form, a movement receives its coherence and organization from the

body's propensity to apprehend and produce rhythmic patterns.²² Rhythm is the pivotal shaping factor that co-ordinates the movement's temporal segments into a harmonious form. When a rhythmic order is in place, the movement sequences are perceived as a unified and controlled reality and we then find delight and sureness in the elementary experience of accord between our intention and the actual motor performance: we can do what we proposed to do.

To move rhythmically means to repeat similar movements or motor elements. Such a repetition occurs when, for example, we swim breast-stroke. Here an accelerating pull (outwards and backwards) of the arms is followed by their forward push, and a powerful frog-like kick of the legs alternates with their recovery through the bending of the knees. We repeat not merely a particular form of movement, but what Paul Souriau calls a "real rhythmic phrase."²³ This phrase usually comprises three elements: preparation, accent, and echo. The discus throw, or the basic parallel turn in skiing, illustrates quite well how the preparatory and echoing movements complement the decisive principal phase, and together constitute, as it were, a rhythm within a rhythm.

The elements of a rhythmic sequence are in a reciprocal and complementary relationship. Continuous movements such as rowing or skiing require the successful grouping of these elements. The overall meaning of the movement determines the value and function of each of its components. The specific articulation of the parts not only organizes a movement in time but also endows the form with an unmistakable character. Variations in speed affect our experience of the movement's intensity and quality.

Another fundamental feature of the rhythmic form is the emphasis or accent placed on certain motor components. It is the accent that endows

the movement with a subjective character. By establishing a qualitative difference between accented and unaccented parts, we perceive the rhythmic structure as a "product" or "extension" of our bodily capabilities, namely our sense of rhythm, and not merely as the outcome of our passive and mechanical adaptation to a series of uniform pulses. We are captivated! We rejoice at being the author of our global motor experience. Beyond the sheer pleasure of reaching a goal through the movement and the already mentioned experience of accord between the idea or desire and its realization, it is the awareness of our body's dynamic possibilities, and of our subjective way of using them, that awakens a singular contentment in us. Thus, as we actively separate motor components, the movement becomes not only more harmonious and precise, but also emotionally appropriated. Because of our emotional identification with the focal points of the rhythm, the movement holds us in its spell and invites us to uphold its dynamic flow.

Some, however, place less emphasis on the body's potential to generate rhythm and contend that conscious intention presides over the ordered emergence of motor forms. The body's natural rhythms are merely "materials" that have to be consciously recognized and modified. To them a specific temporal organization and its variation are not the outcome of organic processes. They require a "will to form," an "inner activity," a conscious control over the process of co-ordinating the motor segments. "The rhythm of a movement," as Peter R othig sums up, "has its centre in the psychological-mental experiential sphere."²⁴

In numerous situations, the conscious ordering of motor elements is indeed required. However, there are instances when our body's endogenous sense of rhythm plays a much greater role in the articulation and accentuation of movement than do conscious planning and controlling.

Due to their relative independence from particular goals and directions, expressive movements do not seem to require a concentration on numbers and measures. Their frame of reference is neither a specific distance nor a location and limit, but the movement as it is related to a friendly context or a pleasantly absorbing challenge. In the temporal structuring of movement it is more important to experience the spatial and material qualities than it is to be aware of our voluntary intentions and efforts.

A handicraft activity could be one of these instances. Because of the intense sensorimotor involvement in the making of furniture, ceramics, or musical instruments, craftsmanship is considered to be a highly rewarding human activity. Lewis Mumford pointed out that one of the beneficial effects of craftsmanship is the intensification of the body's "natural organic processes."²⁵ The violinmaker, stone mason, and ceramist set and adjust the hand's rhythm according to the properties of the materials dealt with. While, at the same time, obeying the natural rhythm of their hands, they experiment, try out different solutions, and, above all, enjoy the "privilege of handling" (*privilège de manier*) wood, clay, or stone.²⁶

DANCE | Dance also illustrates how the "nondirected and non-limited" movements mobilize some of the indwelling capabilities of the body. I have mentioned, in an earlier paragraph, Straus's analysis of the complex and subtle relationship between movement and space. "Expressive movement cannot be produced apart from the immediate experience of which it forms an integral part. The immediate experience and the movement in which it actualizes its meaning are indivisible."²⁷ In dancing, Straus tells us, we do not move "through" space, from one point to another; we move "within" a space, where we are no longer guided by a system of axes and directions. Our movements are responsive to a

spatial structure, and here the topical preferences have been abolished. In such a "homogenized space," we neither seek to reach practical goals nor produce any change, but merely enter into it as participants and surrender ourselves to an activity freed of direction and limit. Because the dance itself has its own intrinsic value and is determined by the symbolic and non-practical qualities of space, the movements are performed with facility and delight. Forward or backward, the movement is carried out with equal ease. Whereas, in our practical life, the turning and backward movements are disagreeable and provoke discomforts (dizziness and fear), in dance, their unfolding yields to the pleasant sensation of rapture and sometimes even of ecstasy.²⁸

We experience our whole body in a similar manner: we perceive it with a sense of unity and not as an object that we have to guide and control. What fosters such an inner consciousness of the body is the transposition of the ego or "I" relative to our unreflective bodily schema. In the phenomenological sense, the "I" of the active person is located somewhere in the region of the eyes. Since the trunk's activity becomes dominant in dancing, our "I" moves from the eyes to the trunk. The purposive consciousness pulls out, so to speak, and allows the abilities of lived body to form the movement. "The crescendo of motor activity in the trunk accentuates the functions of our vital being at the expense of those which serve knowledge and practical action."²⁹

Rudolf Arnheim agrees with the claim that such a shift from the head to the torso triggers the temporary leave from conscious control in favour of the spontaneous and instinctive impulses. Dance requires the giving up of the "safe control of reason and modesty" and the trustful surrender to the vitality of the body. "This paganism of dance accounts

for its wholesome therapeutic effect on emotionally inhibited people."³⁰ We surely experience some restorative pleasure of self-expression while we skilfully control our rotating movements. But to feel a truly healing terpsichorean effect, we have to move without the guidance of our purposive consciousness.

The expressive movement that leads to an aesthetic enjoyment, and dance, are similar in many respects. Yet the former is broader in scope than the latter. Specific cultural principles, qualities, and costumes shape a particular dance. They provide its grammar. According to Judith Lynne Hanna "a grammar (syntax) of a dance language, a socially shared means for expressing ideas and emotions, is a set of rules specifying the manner in which movement can be meaningfully combined."³¹ Expressive movements are generally neither planned nor produced on command; they occur, unexpectedly, when the body is allowed to exhibit its tendency to produce exploratory and non-functional motions and express, through this rich and surprising spectrum of movement compositions, momentary feelings, ideas, and fantasies.

As I have said before, both dance and expressive movements are "out-of-the-ordinary" activities, in which the adequate rhythmic structuring plays an important role. Time and again, the movements themselves suggest or dictate a specific rhythmic order. How does this happen? The movement, as previously stated, is made up of sequences and phases that are connected together by "points of junction" (*Knotenpunkte*), to cite Arnold Gehlen.³² The whole movement is held together by these "joints," because, in a sense, it is only through their successful co-ordination that the correct execution becomes possible. Arnold Gehlen speaks of the "symbolic structure of the movement" because these pivotal points not

only hold together, but also represent, the entire movement phrase. For instance, when we attempt to execute a difficult motor combination, we merely have to focus on these “crucial moments” and come to accomplish, automatically, the so-called in-between phases.

More important perhaps, due to their “points of junction,” movement phrases themselves suggest a particular temporal configuration. There will be a variation of all subsequent rhythmic patterns even if we slightly change our manner of executing these fertile elements. Here the change pertains to the intensity of an accent and not so much to the emphasis within a movement sequence. A stronger accent placed on the pivotal point of a turning movement could easily affect its outcome; it could, for instance, prompt our body to execute a jump rather than another step or turn. When we alter the tempo of our stride or switch from walking to skipping, the rhythmic configuration of the movement derives also from the particular way we place an accent on some “points of junction.” The unique “tensional quality” of the movement itself is the determining factor, not the conscious representation. We allow our body, in Ursula Fritsch’s telling words, “to think by means of the movement.”³³

Maxine Sheets-Johnson, in her analysis of the nature of rhythm in dance, also believes that the “dynamic line” of the dance movement itself suggests a specific temporal flow: “Because time is not a thing which pre-exists and awaits carving up by the dancer, because it is something created by the dance itself, it exists specifically only in relation to a specific movement within the dance.”³⁴ Merce Cunningham put forward a similar opinion: “You have to get the idea that movement comes from something, not from something expressive but from some momentum or energy, and it has to be clear in order for the next movement to happen. Unless you can begin to see that way, you don’t get a progression in the movement,

a going from one movement to the other, which seems logical. By logic I don't mean reasoning but a logic of movement."³⁵ Each movement has, as both Sheet-Johnson and Cunningham have pointed out, an intensity and force and these either induce reinforcement or prepare a qualitative change – from weak to vigorous, from gentle to aggressive, or from contractible to expansive. Moving according to a kinetic logic does not consist of repeating familiar rhythmic patterns but of allowing the unfolding of rhythmic structures to be dictated by the dynamic flow of the movement itself.

Reflecting on how the movement operates, how a dancer gets from one movement to the next, Merce Cunningham introduced another term: *eloquence*. This term refers to the movements' expressive power – expressive in the sense that a movement “wants” to unfold in a certain way, independently of the dancer's conscious desire to articulate an emotion or a meaning. Endowed with thrust and force, movements do not merely “seek” to represent something but also indicate, show, and project possible qualitative changes – especially a change in their rhythmic configuration.

In a different context, Arnold Gehlen rightly considers the ability to execute and co-ordinate “intelligent movements” as one of the most important features of human life.³⁶ Human movements are intelligent because, on the one hand, the subtle variations of the rhythmic pattern, tempo, form, co-ordination, and function can be produced, without any conscious representation, as motor responses to the movements themselves. On the other hand, these bodily achievements develop in parallel to some thought processes such as counting, restarting the count, combining previously unrelated ideas, or suggesting solutions. Intelligent movements are neither the results nor the conditions of thought

processes. Thought and movement, nevertheless, seem to become more articulate and refined in conjunction and thus exert a beneficial influence on each other.

The execution of polyrhythmic movements is also made possible by the body's capacity to act in an intelligent manner.³⁷ Concentrate on the hands of a virtuoso and pay no attention whatsoever to the sounds, advises Paul Valéry.³⁸ Do this and you might come to view the hands as dancers who follow two sorts of rhythmic order. Move your arms and legs according to different rhythmic patterns and produce similar counter-rhythms. Here again, the source of this complex motor performance seems to be the body's ability to generate muscular impulses and not the representation of a rhythmic scheme.

SURRENDER TO THE BODY | Dance, music-making, and aesthetic movement experiences imply an attitude that may be called *renunciation*: a relaxed and trustful surrender to our bodily impulses and intentions. The movements are not only upshots of specific intentions, but also responses arising from the formative powers of our body. As we move easily and effortlessly, we abandon ourselves to the body's sense of rhythm that, without purposeful pre-assessment or planning, introduces new patterns, and responds appropriately to the demands of the motor situation. Merce Cunningham stresses the importance of confidently relying on the resources of the body. Dance, as he put it, is "the play of bodies in space – and time" and not "the product of *my* will." "But the feeling I have when I compose in this way is that I am in touch with a natural resource far greater than my own personal inventiveness could ever be, much more universally human than the particular habits of my own practice, and organically rising out of common pools of motor impulses."³⁹

When Cunningham invents surprising and unusual rhythmic patterns, he allows his body to “think by means of movement,” remain attentive, open to the suggestions of the movement.

This bodily potential, through which a “strangely spontaneous and strangely contrived” rhythmic organization occurs, is also brought to our attention by Paul Valéry. The dancing body “assumes a fairly simple periodicity that seems to maintain itself automatically; it seems endowed with a superior elasticity which retrieves the impulse of every movement and at once renews it. One is reminded of a top, standing on its point and reacting so sensitively to the slightest shock.”⁴⁰ Elsewhere, speaking of the temporality of dance, Valéry expresses the same idea:

*By Time I mean organic time, such as exists in the ordering of all the alternating and fundamental functions of life. Each of these is affected by a series of muscular acts which reproduces itself, as if the end or fulfilment of each series brought about the beginning of the next. On this pattern, our limbs can carry out a set of figures that are all interlinked, and whose repetition brings about a kind of exhilaration, ranging from languor to delirium, from a sort of hypnotic abandonment to a sort of frenzy. In this way the condition of dancing (état de dance) is created.*⁴¹

What is this *état de dance*? It is a state that we could call, following the insights of Straus and Buytendijk, pathic.⁴² While dancing, it is the rhythmic series of forms that energize, stimulate, and even compel the dancers to execute movements. Like the musical tones, the “eloquence” of movements affects them, draws them further into the experience and, at the same time, evokes in them a feeling of freedom and power. It produces the rhythm and triggers its variation. At the same time, it gives us the sense of being carried along. “For rhythm,” says Carl E. Seashore, “is

never rhythm unless one feels that he himself is acting it, or, what may seem contradictory, that he is even carried by his own action.⁴⁴³ While walking, swimming, or dancing, we all have been captivated by our ability to produce rhythm; the feeling of elation, soaring, and ease, the disappearance of tensions and confrontations, prompted us to go along and further a pleasant experience. We perceived in the rhythm a playful interaction between a call from, and a response to, a motor event.⁴⁴

Such a rhythmizing experience is suitable to convey a feeling of time – a feeling of personally adopted temporal order.⁴⁵ The more we execute and practice rhythmic figures – in dance, gymnastics, or music-making – the more we feel at ease to introduce variations in the tempo of an activity. We develop in ourselves the sense of intensity. Rhythmical exercises help us to become aware of all sorts of temporal ordering and thus to successfully manage the various tasks of our daily life.

Doubtless, a movement impulse is not the only determining factor for the rhythmic configuration. Musical sounds or atmospheric impressions sometimes exert a more formative influence on us than the movement itself. The degree of rhythmic variation of our swimming strokes significantly depends on the characteristics of the concrete aquatic area: every swimmer knows that an agitated sea elicits very different motions than a calm lake.

Rhythm may also spring from the subtle interplay of muscular contraction and release, tension and relaxation.⁴⁶ The body then expresses its own pulsating life, recurrently placing accents on certain parts of the movement. Thus Paul Souriau explains motor rhythmicity by the “law of compensation.”⁴⁷ In numerous forms of bodily performance, an expenditure of energy is followed by the sensation of fatigue and the need

of recuperation. The interplay of periods of intense effort and compensatory calm generate the alternation of strong and weak beats. Such a rhythmic unfolding of an activity cannot occur without the effort necessary for its execution. Movements have their cost and must be balanced by an appropriate recovery.

Certain feelings such as embarrassment, boredom, or timidity easily yield to rhythmic movements. They serve to free us from an unwelcome situation. The urge to move is closely bound to the need to find release from the weight of a particular feeling. Because the movements themselves exert an attraction on us, we start to play with them and, in this manner, make an attempt to overcome our unpleasant feelings.⁴⁸ Thus rhythmic movements are able to "correct" an emotional state or elicit further feelings, particularly the agreeable "feeling of being alive."⁴⁹ It is for this reason perhaps that physical education and sport could play a very positive role in our lives. If sport is freed from the exclusively utilitarian and rationalized perspective, it could lead to the elementary "enjoyment of existence" (Buytendijk), to an alert receptivity to our bodily resonances.⁵⁰

