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# Rhythmanalysis in Gymnastics and Dance: Rudolf Bode and Rudolf Laban

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## Abstract

The translation of Rudolf Bode's *Rhythm and its Importance for Education* and Rudolf Laban's 'Eurhythmie and kakorhythmie in art and education' aims at unearthing rhythm-related discourses in the Germany of the 1920s. If for most of the English-speaking world the translation of Henri Lefebvre's *Rhythmanalysis: Space, Time and Everyday Life* marks the moment in which rhythm descends into the theoretical arena, these texts, seen in their connection with other sources, express, instead, the degree to which rhythm was omnipresent in philosophical, artistic, socio-economical and psychological discourses at the turn of the 20th century. Some commentators, such as Lubkoll, have recently highlighted the centrality of rhythm in Modernity, lamenting a lack of scholarship focusing on this phenomenon. This is arguably due to a lack of access to sources accentuated by the language barrier; if, indeed, the 'rhythmanalysis' of the turn of the century is not an exclusively Teutonic phenomenon, it is also true that a copious amount of material on rhythm of this period is written in German and remains untranslated. In this sense, then, this translation aims at contributing to the project of a cultural history of rhythm.

## Keywords

1920, body, cultural history, dance, Germany, gymnastics

The translation of Rudolf Bode's *Rhythm and its Importance for Education* (1920) and Rudolf Laban's 'Eurhythmie and kakorhythmie in art and education' (1921) aims at unearthing rhythm-related

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discourses in the Germany of the 1920s. Bode and Laban were renowned exponents of German body-culture (*Koerperkultur*) and German expressionist dance (*Ausdrucktanz*), respectively, and they influenced in far-reaching ways subsequent developments in these fields. The texts here translated show how rhythm was central to their philosophies and their practices and also, more generally, to discourses evolving around new conceptions of education, aesthetics, psychology and economics in Germany before and during the advent of National Socialism. As is evident in the texts, rhythm was, however, far from being a clear-cut concept or phenomenon. Indeed, Bode and Laban differ in their definition of rhythm – the former stressing its irrational, undivided nature, the latter its polyrhythmic and polymorphous one. However, they both see it primarily as a corporeal, material phenomenon, something that positions them in line with later (Lefebvre, 2004) and contemporary (Hamilton, 2007; Henriques, 2010) bodily approaches to rhythm.

If for most of the English-speaking world the translation of Henri Lefebvre's *Rhythmanalysis: Space, Time and Everyday Life* (2004) marks the moment in which rhythm descends into the theoretical arena, these texts, seen in their connection with other sources, express, instead, the degree to which rhythm was omnipresent in philosophical, artistic, socio-economic, political and psychological discourses already at the turn of the 20th century in Germany. Some commentators have recently highlighted the centrality of rhythm in Modernity, lamenting a lack of scholarship focusing on this phenomenon (Lubkoll, 2002). This is arguably due to a difficulty in accessing sources which is accentuated by the language barrier; if, indeed, the 'rhythmanalysis' of the turn of the 20th century is not an exclusively Teutonic phenomenon, it is also true that a copious amount of material on rhythm of that period is written in German and remains untranslated. In this sense, then, this translation contributes to the project of a cultural history of rhythm.

Rhythm is normally defined as 'a strong, regular repeated pattern of movement or sound' (*OED*), yet a closer look discloses the degree to which it eludes straightforward explanations. What characterizes rhythm, it seems, is an inherent ambiguity. Lefebvre famously expressed this by arguing rhythm to be that which 'reunites quantitative . . . and qualitative aspects and elements'; 'rhythm', he continues:

appears as regulated time, governed by rational laws, but in contact with what is least rational in human being: the lived, the carnal, the body. (2004: 9)

A similar remark is found in Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's discussion of rhythm and the refrain in *A Thousand Plateaus* (2004). '[R]hythm', they argue:

is never the same as measure. . . . There is indeed such a thing as measured, cadenced rhythm, relating to the coursing of a river between its banks or to the form of a striated space; but there is also a rhythm without measure, which relates to the upswell of a flow, in other words, to the manner in which a fluid occupies a smooth space. (2004: 401)

In the texts here presented rhythm's blurriness is expressed by Bode in the opposition of *Takt*<sup>1</sup> (measure) and rhythm, and by Laban in what may be called a polyrhythmic approach. Besides epitomizing rhythm's ambiguity, the difference between Bode's and Laban's approaches sheds further light on the reasons for their antipathy, which, played out at a political and professional level, was foreshadowed in their early writings and dips its roots, arguably, precisely in the understanding of rhythm.

In order to contextualize the translations, this introduction begins by presenting the authors, their influence and what has survived of the historical evidence of their conflict. A brief account of rhythm-related discourses in Germany at the turn of the 20th century and up to the 1930s is then meant to set the scene for the two texts. This introduction can only sketch out a map of the complex web of discourses surrounding rhythm in Modernity in relation to the texts. It focuses on the consideration that interest in rhythm in Modernity (and, arguably, also nowadays) went hand in hand with a renewed interest in the body, in vitalist philosophies and in the kinaesthetic (see also Reynolds, 2007).

### **Rudolf Laban and Rudolf Bode**

During the first decades of the 20th century, when Bode and Laban were at the peak of their careers, a plethora of different performing-related schools of thought arose, all originating from the idea of a return to nature and all focusing on the body (see Carter and

Fensham, 2011; Graeser, 1927; Segel, 1998). The ‘life reform’ movement in Germany was linked to a variety of practices and to groups such as those subsumed under *Koerperkultur*. Described as ‘a central concept of the consciousness of Modernity’ (Wedemeyer-Kolwe, 2004: 13; my translation), *Koerperkultur* was a vast and heterogeneous phenomenon bringing together under its umbrella different practices. In an issue of the *Koerperkultur* journal dated 1909 the movement is described as comprising:

the most diverse attempts, made by singular individuals and whole groups of people to introduce new and unconventional conditions in their whole lifestyle, attire, alimentation, etc., because they feel they cannot tolerate the old way any longer. (quoted in Wedemeyer-Kolwe, 2004: 13; my translation)

*Koerperkultur* was also seen as a way to reform life and society in general and give birth to a ‘higher *Mensch*’ whose ‘duty’ was ‘to consider the body as a sacred temple’ (Wedemeyer-Kolwe, 2004: 13; my translation). It is in this setting that Laban and Bode were operating.

Rudolf Laban (1879–1958), a Hungarian-born dancer, choreographer and movement theoretician started his training initially as an artist at the École des Beaux Arts in Paris. He focused his interest very early, however, on dance, the nascent modernist art *par excellence*, to the shaping of which he contributed. Among his major achievements are the invention of *Ausdrucksanz* (Expressionist dance), the creation of one of the most widely used systems of movement notation, and a thorough and predominantly overlooked wealth of studies on movement, rhythm, body and space, most of which were carried out in the last 20 years of his life in England and documented by the material found in the National Research Centre for Dance in Surrey. Moreover, Laban’s ‘effort theory’, mostly concerned with the study of bodily rhythm in space, was later developed into what is nowadays known as Laban Movement Analysis. The Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance in London and the Labanotation Bureau in New York testify to Laban’s importance in the field of movement studies and education world-wide.

Rudolf Bode’s (1881–1970) influence was more circumscribed, but as the initiator of Rhythmic Gymnastics he enjoyed success during his life both as a theoretician and as a practitioner. After having studied with Emile Jaques-Dalcroze, the influential inventor of

*Eurhythmics*, in 1911 Bode founded his own school of gymnastics in Munich, where it can still be found today. Bode's ideas on rhythm as exemplified in the text presented here are still widely considered as the foundation of rhythmic gymnastics in general.

To give a sense of Laban's and Bode's influence during the Weimar Republic, it should be mentioned that in 1925 Bode's courses of gymnastics were taught in 130 different cities in Germany and that in the same period Laban had founded between 35 and 100 of his own schools of movement in the country (Wedemeyer-Kolwe, 2004: 28).

Moreover, Rudolf Laban and Rudolf Bode, together with graphologist Ludwig Klages and music pedagogue Emile Jaques-Dalcroze, formed the core of the 'Rhythmus movement' (Karina and Kant, 2004: 66). Connected in different ways throughout their lives by their interests and aspirations, Bode is reported to have been 'one of Laban's bitterest foes' (Doerr, 2008: 165) and Laban Bode's 'most pernicious rival' (Toepfer, 1997: 128). In 1925 Laban became an associate of the Deutsche Gymnastikbund (German Gymnastics Association), of which Rudolf Bode was already an influential member. Although apparently coinciding with the main line of thought expressed in the Bund, Laban's approaches to movement soon proved to be rather different. As he stated in his *Gymnastik und Tanz* (Gymnastics and Dance) (1926) Laban made a clear distinction between *turnen* or gymnastics needing equipment, and dance, with its focus on the 'means of expression for the communication of the hidden secrets of the world' (quoted in McCaw, 2011: 90). This methodological and theoretical distinction led to an internal war of gymnasts against dancers, each claiming to represent 'the whole modern pedagogy of movement' (Doerr, 2008: 165). As the Deutsche Gymnastikbund evolved, after the seizure of power by the Nazis in 1933, into an enterprise at the service of the regime, this disagreement developed into the clash between the education-oriented Militant League for German Culture, presided over by Alfred Rosenberg and led by Bode until 1935, and the Ministry of Culture, directed by Goebbels and under which Laban was operating in several guises between 1933 and 1936. As explained by a commentator:

[a]lthough both Bode and Laban positioned their art forms in the service of the National Socialist ideology, they each proposed – despite

their similar tones regarding racial politics – different concepts of movement, based on gymnastics or dance respectively, as the foundation for NS policy regarding the body. (Doerr, 2008: 165)

The different concepts of movement focused, then, on Bode's conception of bodily movement as purely corporeal and, on the other hand, on Laban's integrated and holistic body–mind–soul approach to it. These different views on movement also entailed different approaches to rhythm, which are expressed in the earlier texts presented here. If in Bode's text the chiasm between *Takt* and rhythm is definite and unresolved, in Laban's we come closer to defining a polyrhythmic approach. Bode's irrational, undivided, unbounded wave or flow of rhythm presents striking differences from Laban's harmonic, eurhythmic and polyrhythmic one. Bode's insistence on the incapacity of the intellect to grasp the flowing nature of rhythm and his dualistic uncompromising view with regard to the latter is at odds with Laban's harmonious triangulation of eurhythm, kakorhythm and Ur-rhythm.

### **Body, Movement, Rhythm**

Also present in the Romantic philosophy of Friedrich Shelling and re-introduced in Germany by Friedrich Nietzsche, rhythm's Apollonian and Dionysian aspects were expressed by its being at the same time synonymous with 'order', 'harmony' and 'measure'; and with 'chaos', 'disharmony' and, generally, 'flow'. In a seminal text, French semiotician Emile Benveniste analyses the etymology of the word 'rhythm' in the Greek language, asserting that its usual connection to the verb *reo* ('to flow') and to the coming and going of the waves was just a later development. Benveniste explains how one of the earliest uses of *rhythmòs* is made by Aristotle in his account of the philosophies of the atomists Leucippus and Democritus. In this occasion, *rhythmòs* means 'form', intended as 'the characteristic arrangement of the parts in the whole' (Benveniste, 1971: 283). However, the form that rhythm designates is not a rigid frame, but:

the form in the instant that it is assumed by what is moving, mobile and fluid, the form of that which does not have organic consistency; it fits the pattern of a fluid element . . . . It is the form as improvised, momentary, changeable. (Benveniste, 1971: 286)

The duality of meaning and the etymological confusion surrounding rhythm is highlighted also by classicist and art historian J.J. Politt. 'Modern scholars have fallen into two basic camps', he explains:

those who derive *rhythmòs* from 'reo', 'flow' . . . and those who connect it with 'èrùo' and related words, either in the sense of 'draw' or in the sense of 'protect, guard, hold in honour'. (1974: 221)

In this double sense rhythm served well both the rationalistic inclination which so typically epitomizes Modernity and its opposite tendency towards unreason, something that will be explored further below. A similar tendency was also present in relation to the body, whose importance in Modernity has been highlighted in numerous studies (Graeser, 1927; Rabinbach, 1992; Reynolds, 2007; Segel, 1998; Toepfer, 1997). From materialism to Taylorism, from the *Koerperkultur* movement to the birth of modern dance and somatic practices, from the philosophical influence of Nietzsche to experimental psychology, the body gains a new place in culture in the years between the 1880s and 1930s but finds itself entangled in-between a systematic approach to it and a vitalist reactionary one. The body becomes at the same time the source of an anti-intellectualistic revenge against industrialization and the very cornerstone of the latter.

The relation between Modernity and rationalization was famously highlighted by Horkheimer and Adorno in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (2002). Here the nature of the Enlightenment, which the authors find expressed in the motto 'anything which cannot be resolved to numbers, and ultimately into one, is illusion' (Horkheimer and Adorno, 2002: 4), is seen as connected to industrialization, positivism and capitalist society with its often-stressed focus on the quantifiable. Related to the burgeoning role of capitalism, the outburst of rationalization which Europe experienced at the turn of the 20th century was also coupled with an efficiency imperative and, in terms of production, was given shape by the project of Friedrich Taylor.

Taylorism's distinctive feature was a focus on maximising time and effort expenditure for the factory workers through careful studies of their movements in the assembly lines in the factories. Under the advent of Taylorism, as explained by Rabinbach, the body starts to be seen as a 'human motor'. The equation of body and machine was

aided by the concept of *Kraft* (energy), which arose in the second half of the 19th century. Following scientific discoveries, energy began to be considered to be omnipresent in matter, so as to allow Gaston Bachelard to call this scientific paradigm ‘dematerialised materialism’ (quoted in Rabinbach, 1992: 48). ‘The discovery of energy as the quintessential element of all experience, both organic and inorganic’, points out Rabinbach:

made society and nature virtually indistinguishable. Society was assimilated to an image of nature powered by protean energy, perpetually renewed, indestructible, and infinitely malleable. The pioneers of energy conservation viewed the transformation of mechanical energy into heat, and subsequently, the transformation of all natural forces as manifestations of a single *Kraft*. (Rabinbach, 1992: 46)

The discovery of *Kraft* and its laws was to be quickly coupled with the subsequent discovery of the second law of thermodynamics. In the realm of physics, this meant that what von Helmholtz baptized as ‘labour power’ could not be maintained perpetually in a system, but was subject to entropy, dissipation. The consequence in the human realm was that the human body could not be considered as a perpetual machine: a science of work was needed to fight the effects of fatigue threatening the foundations of industrial production. Moreover, for scientists the omnipresent *Kraft* was thought to pulsate rhythmically, as testified by writings of authors such as Ernst Haeckel, Hermann von Helmholtz and Herbert Spencer (Schall, 1989: 80–4).

However, as a reaction to the systematic view of the body, in Germany a series of initiatives adhering to the ‘life reform’ movement were looking at the body as the foundation of the resistance to industrialization itself. ‘By making the body a material sign of modernity’, argues Karl Toepfer:

the body culture revealed that modernism was itself a surge of irrationality, not, as often supposed, a grand assertion of rationalist abstraction and consequent liberation from ancient, pathological anxieties over the flesh. (1997: 384)

This modern ambivalence towards the body, exemplified by the rational/irrational way in which it was approached, found its counterpart, as we have seen, in the reception and theorization of rhythm in a

universe, the modern one, that looked at reality as a continuous flux, which rhythm was either expressing or shaping.

Modernity's fascination with the idea of a newly discovered universe in movement has received scholarly attention (Giedion, 1948; Schwartz, 1992). 'Movement is "the cry of the being to be", the I AM of the human organism' would be said in the years around 1920 by a professor of childhood education (quoted in Schwartz, 1992: 87). This 'new kinaesthetic of the 20th century' (Schwartz, 1992), inaugurated by modern dancers such as Isadora Duncan and Rudolf Laban, had wide-ranging consequences in several different aspects of western culture. Neither Isadora Duncan nor Laban disguised their debt to the philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche and the influence of the latter's thought on the artistic, intellectual and political milieu has been underscored in different studies. The focus on 'becoming', on the flowing nature of reality, the attack on the 'molarity' of the conception of Being, all themes deriving from Nietzsche's *oeuvre*, were very much ingrained in Germany's avant-garde and counterculture, especially as a response to the rise of positivism. For instance, a Nietzsche commentator proclaimed from the lines of the influential artistic journal *Der Sturm* in 1911:

All Being is 'illusion'; all 'becoming' is 'reality' and is only reality in so far as it is movement. (Zerbst, 1911: 612; my translation)

To defend this claim, in the first section of three of an article entitled 'Movement: Foundations of a new vision of the world', Zerbst exposes the shortcomings of a substance-related theory of physics and highlights the way in which, in the ultimate analysis, the atom also seems to be characterized by 'movement qualities' such as 'the forces of attraction and repulsion', which ultimately act as 'primae causae' (Zerbst, 1911: 612; my translation). The new vision of the world brings about an uncompromising assault on the 'tyranny of "Being"' (Zerbst, 1911: 613; my translation) in the name of movement:

It is obvious that our world of sensations and representations is nothing else but a system of movement [*Bewegungssystem*], a combination of moving forms and moving relations closely or loosely connected to other combinations and types of movement . . . from which derives the reality of perception and cognition as a whole. The fundamental division between 'mind' and 'body' becomes then automatically obsolete;

both are just states of movement and both go back to the same primordial fact [*Urtatsache*]: Movement. (1911: 629; my translation)

The task of the ‘science of the future’ would then be:

to dissolve all ‘substance’ completely into ‘movement’ in order to allow us to understand that underneath all appearance of ‘being’ the truth is ‘becoming’. (1911: 630; my translation)

Zerbst, in Nietzschean terms, also argues that if so far all powerful core values of western society were based on the belief in substance, unity, god, freedom of the will, eternity and space:

the new big movement turn will result in the most tremendous revolution which ever took place in the intellectual life of mankind. (1911: 631; my translation)

Strictly connected to movement and to the ‘forces of attraction and repulsion’ which were thought to animate not only the atom, as Zerbst mentions above, but nature in general, rhythm gives birth to debates such as the ones exemplified by Bode’s and Laban’s texts and which were felt in psychological and artistic milieus too.

Gustav Theodor Fechner’s *Vorschule der Aesthetik* (1876) may be seen as a starting point for the New Aesthetic turn in Germany (Ceilik, 2007). ‘The double way in which human knowledge strives to root and develop itself’, affirms Fechner, ‘is to be recognized also in the realm of the Aesthetic’ (1876: 1; my translation). This ‘double way’ is epitomized by an ‘aesthetic from above’ and an ‘aesthetic from below’. The former, coming from the German philosophical tradition of Schelling, Hegel and Kant, departs from general ideas and concepts to analyse the particular; the latter, allegedly proposed by ‘the English’, that is, the British empiricists (Fechner, 1876: 3), looks at the particular to infer the general. The two go together, as one could not be complete without the other, but Fechner dedicates the rest of his book, which will constitute the foundation of psychophysics, to the description of the method ‘from below’. What was truly new about Fechner’s approach was his eudemonistic principle (*Lustprinzip*): contrary to Kant’s celebrated sublime as ultimate ethical and aesthetic truth, the eudemonistic principle stated that pleasure and displeasure (both coming from the body) would be the determinant factors in aesthetic appreciation. The body becomes, then, the

foundation from which a new aesthetic and a new society may develop. Fechner's studies were published almost at the same time as Nietzsche's, and like the latter Fechner's eudemonistic principle turned away from the Enlightenment's focus on the intellect by bringing aesthetic appreciation back to a bodily substratum.

As shown by architecture historian Zeynep Ceilik's study of the New Aesthetic movement in Germany, the aesthetic paradigm was intimately connected with political reform. Contrary to the idea of *Bildung* inherited from the 19th century, the New Aesthetic movement and its focus on the body, effects (*Wirkungen*) and kinaesthesia was promoting the possibility of a widespread appreciation of art that was not dependent on a unitary, middle-class, white, male self. Indeed, this approach:

started defining a self that was no longer autonomous and indivisible but was amenable to the influence of the environment. (Ceilik, 2007: 45)

The case of kinaesthesia exemplifies the interconnection between movement, body and rhythm. Kinaesthesia, the 'sixth sense' dedicated to the perception of movement, was officially introduced in medical history in 1826 by physician Charles Bell, who first thought of our muscles as an organ of sense. Subsequently, physiologist Henry Charlton Bastian in the 1880s developed these insights and produced a theory for the sense of movement, which was called kinaesthesia (from the Greek '*kine*', movement and '*aesthesis*', perception). Kinaesthesia became of central importance for the nascent discipline of experimental psychology, considering its physical substratum. Indeed, in a study of 1913, psychologist G.V.N. Dearborn concludes that:

Kinaesthesia is about...to come into its own as the primary and essential sense...The very meaning of protoplasm, physically speaking, is motion. (quoted in Schwartz, 1992: 81–2)

Kinaesthesia brought about a revolution in terms of theories of perception and representation, because it highlighted the immediacy of response:

there was no longer any trace of the 'reflection' or association found in empiricist theories... Experience in the discourse of kinaesthesia was neither an indiscriminate registering nor a careful filtering of

sensations; instead experience was theorised as the ‘enjoyment’ (*Genuss*) of the immediate effect felt on the body’s musculature. . . . Kinaesthesia, understood as a uniquely corporeal self-consciousness, was the only kind of reflection possible in this model of experience. (Ceilik, 2007: 44; italics in the original)

Kinaesthesia became, then, the ‘training ground of modern selfhood’ (Ceilik, 2007: 37), a selfhood that was permeable in regard to the environment and which put together vitalist philosophies and rhythm.

Interest in rhythm and its connection with mind and body is traceable also in the experimental psychology literature of the turn of the 20th century. Psychology’s interest in rhythm focused primarily on its relation to muscular tension, kinaesthesia and consciousness. In an influential study on the relation between rhythm and kinaesthesia written in 1913, Christian Ruckmich concludes that:

whatever was the material presented for rhythmisation . . . kinaesthesia was essential for the establishment of a rhythmical perception. (1913: 359)

Psychology’s assumed mind–body parallelism allowed scientists to infer mental states by observing bodily ones. One of the phenomena which interested the initiator of experimental psychology Wilhelm Wundt and his disciples was rhythm. Wundt describes the relation of rhythm to consciousness as follows:

Consciousness is rhythmically disposed, because the whole organism is rhythmically disposed. The movements of the heart, of breathing, of walking, take place rhythmically. . . . Above all, the movements of walking form a very clear and recognisable background to our consciousness. (quoted in Ruckmich, 1913: 308)

Wundt’s concern with the relationship between bodily and psychic rhythms is something that would influence subsequent research in the psychological field and it was the starting point for studies looking at ways in which, triggering muscular action, rhythm could be seen to ‘play’ the body. Understanding how external rhythms could influence internal ones, that is, how to manipulate both body and mind of the individual, became then *en vogue* in conjunction with the nascent science of crowd control initiated by Gustave Le Bon. The idea

that every body and every nation had different (bodily) rhythms was sinisterly popular among intellectuals such as Friedrich Nietzsche, Richard Wagner, Oswald Spengler and Carl Jung (Golston, 1996), and it emerges also in the approach to 'the primitive' and its relation to rhythm which resonates in both Bode's and Laban's texts. The 'primitive' and the '*Naturmensch*' are here characterized by their presumed lack of cultural sophistication – as for example in Laban's text, something that highlights the biased socio-evolutionary western-centred approach to 'primitive societies' of the time; at the same time, however, as is evident in Bode's text, primitivism is also 'romanticized' for its promise of eluding industrialized modern life and therefore fulfilling the vitalist-*volkisch* ideal of a 'return to nature'. The contrasting reception of 'the primitive' was directly linked with the theorization of rhythm and fed also into the National Socialists' 'blood and soil' propaganda. Indeed the 'Rhythmikers', argues a commentator, 'mixing *Körperkultur* with the concept of "Ur-rhythm", aimed at revitalising society by creating a new man' (Wedemeyer-Kolwe, 2004: 100; my translation). The definition of a 'German rhythm' was in fact something the Nazi regime was striving to come to terms with. Indeed, experts on rhythm, among whom were Bode and Laban, were called upon to define German rhythm. In 1935, Laban himself was asked by the Ministry of Popular Enlightenment and Propaganda to describe the elements of German dance: '[It] is necessary to observe', he wrote:

that racial characteristics stamp themselves in the movements, especially in the rhythm, in the posture of the body, and the use of the body parts. (quoted in Karina and Kant, 2004: 171)

Rudolf Bode also saw rhythm in connection to national propaganda and supported the promulgation of a German rhythm to fight the effect of the English capitalistic rhythm (Wedemeyer-Kolwe, 2004: 114).

Contrary to Bode's front-line activism in support of the National Socialist regime, Laban's position is debatable. Commentators are divided, but, although a deeper engagement with Laban's work shows the extent to which, in his private life, he was genuinely against any political affiliation, it is also difficult to overlook archival and historical evidence which exposes him as a Nazi collaborator and a sympathizer between 1933 and 1936. It was in 1936, indeed, that

Laban fell out of favour with the regime, the reason being his ideation of the choreography for a piece to be performed the night before the official opening of the Olympic Games as the inauguration of the Dietrich Eckhart stage. The piece did not meet with Goebbels' approval: after the final rehearsal, which Hitler himself attended, Goebbels wrote in his diary that Laban's creation was 'too intellectual' and that it didn't comply with the party's propaganda (quoted in Doerr, 2008: 169).<sup>2</sup> It was the end of Laban's career in Germany, which he was forced to leave shortly after.

Without wanting to undermine the importance of Laban's and Bode's collaboration with National Socialism, it must be made clear, as other commentators have noted, that aspects of National Socialist propaganda were present in discourses at the turn of the 20th century independently from the later use made of them, and that is the case for rhythm, which was central to the philosophies of both Laban and Bode.

## The Texts

The two texts should be seen as in dialogue with each other and also as part of a wider ongoing discussion about rhythm, society and education which was facilitated mainly by the journal *Die Tat* under the direction of Eugen Diederichs (Toepfer, 1997: 126–7). A somewhat forgotten figure, Diederichs was well known and highly influential in the intellectual milieu in Germany at the beginning of the 20th century (see Mosse, 1981 [1964]: 52–66). Diederichs' nationalistic, mystical, vitalist and *volkisch* ideals found expression in his publishing choices: besides being the first to translate and publish Henri Bergson's writings in Germany, he was the main point of reference for the 'Rhythmikers' and those exponents of *Koerperkultur* with philosophical inclinations, such as Bode and Laban.

### **Rudolf Bode's *Rhythm and its Importance for Education* (1920)**

Bode's text, besides being aimed at laying down the foundations of Rhythmic Gymnastics, is primarily a critique of the 'mechanistic' view of rhythm represented by the Jaques-Dalcroze method. Emile Jaques-Dalcroze famously delivered his teachings, meant to reform society as a whole, in Hellerau (Germany). Even though the school itself was short-lived (1910–14), the influence of his method

was widespread all over Europe at the turn of the century.<sup>3</sup> Bode, however, who studied with the master in 1910 and 1911, identified Dalcroze's theorization of rhythm with a social order which did not represent the future of the new Germany to come. Bode's philosophical approach, as he goes to great lengths to explain, derives from that of Ludwig Klages. The latter was an influential thinker at the turn of the century in Germany and his arguments for the separation of *Geist* (intellect) and *Seele* (soul), *Takt* (measure) and rhythm, rational and irrational were highly popular in the *Koerperkultur* milieu (Lubkoll, 2002: 90–3). It has been argued that by counterpoising the continuity of rhythm to the staccato of *Takt* Klages, and with him Bode, followed and re-interpreted the Bergsonian differentiation between *temps* and *durée* (Lubkoll, 2002: 87–90), giving birth to a philosophy of rhythm exemplified by Klages' affirmation: 'Takt repeats, rhythm renews' (1934: 33).<sup>4</sup> Moreover, the core of Dalcroze's method was the subjection of the body to the power of the intellect. Against this rationalistic-voluntaristic stance, which he also identifies as the cornerstone of the nascent experimental psychology of his time, Bode campaigns for the ungraspable and undivided nature of consciousness, and with it experience.

The second target of Bode's critique is the economist and musicologist Karl Buecher, whose monograph *Arbeit und Rhythmus* (1899) was one of the most influential studies published on rhythm at the time (see Rabinbach, 1992: 174, 348). Indeed, Georg Simmel drew on Buecher's study, published a few years earlier, in the rhythm-related chapter of his masterpiece *The Philosophy of Money* (2004 [1900]; see also Simmel, 1897). Simmel's definition of rhythm as a 'rationalistic-systematic principle' (2004 [1900]: 495) which annihilates human spontaneity, and his idea that work performed in the factory 'brings about a deadening of the sense of rhythm as such' (2004 [1900]: 497), is reminiscent of Buecher's earlier work. Through a meticulous study of songs accompanying the work of tribal communities, Buecher shows how rhythm comes from the bodily movement of labour and how, with modernization and the changes to bodily activity in the factories, rhythm also changes. The artificially standardized rhythm of the machines upset the natural unrestrained rhythms of the body: capitalism's quantification won over rhythm's qualitative nuances. Rather than a longing to re-instate the original condition, however, and here we find the kernel of Bode's critique,

Buecher hoped for a fruitful synchronization between human and machine rhythm.<sup>5</sup>

Bode's last statements are concerned with laying down the basic structure of Rhythmic Gymnastics, which departs from the natural flow of the rhythms of the body in will-less effort.

### **Rudolf Laban's 'Eurhythmie and kakorhythmie in art and education' (1921)**

Laban's text, like most of his writings, does not directly refer to any of his contemporaries in the field of dance or gymnastics, nor does he mention here or elsewhere, apart from very few exceptions, any of his theoretical influences.<sup>6</sup> Laban's style of writing, as many commentators have pointed out, is also sometimes obscure. Nevertheless, this text exemplifies quite clearly what may be called Laban's 'poly-rhythmic ontology'. Laban's 'rhythmanalysis' is indeed vibrating in the very text, where the phenomenon of rhythm takes shape in manifold ways. The author starts by positing a fundamental co-dependency between rhythm and movement; the latter is not only a phenomenon whose study, as we have seen, characterized Modernity, but it is also what became Laban's life-long object of research. In terms echoing Zerbst's described above, Laban explains how reality is a constant process where stasis is only an illusion, where forms are in constant movement and unroll following an original Ur-rhythm. For this reason, rhythm is traceable everywhere, in the shapes created in movement and in the bodily movement that gives birth to rhythmic resonances. The study of the shapes traced by the human body in space is what Laban called 'Choreutics' and to which he dedicated a posthumously published manuscript with the same name. However, as indicated by his motto '[s]pace is a hidden feature of movement and movement is a visible aspect of space' (Laban, 1966: 4), the relation between space and movement, and therefore rhythm, is one of interdependency, exemplified by the belief that 'empty space does not exist' (Laban, 1966: 3).

Rhythm is in Laban's text also the gateway to a socio-ethical dimension: it is a well-ordered free rhythmic life that it is sought, not one where boundaries and rules impede the expression of what Laban postulates to be the individual's rhythm, nor an 'extreme' one where irrationality reigns. Finally, it is in the *Festkultur* (Festival or

‘celebration’; see McCaw, 2011: 16) that Laban finds the ultimate expression of rhythmic education. *Festkultur* is related, in Laban’s practice, to his movement-choirs, which were composed of lay dancers and performed in large-scale projects such as carnivals and national celebrations. Laban’s vision for movement choirs was for them to express the *volkisch* ideal of a communal experiencing of a higher mystical truth, which is here expressed as the eurhythmic.<sup>7</sup>

Laban’s mystical inclination, something that derives both from his affiliation to the Rosicrucians and from his adherence to the *volkisch* subculture, is counterbalanced by his rationalistic approach, evident in both his project of systematization of dance and in his methodology, which, as exemplified by this text, consists in reducing multiplicity to simplicity, in analysing the irrational not through a mechanistic quantitative method, as he states, but by utilizing, it seems, an in-between, ‘an exact yet rigorous’ approach. The divide between eurhythm and kakorhythm, between rationality and irrationality, between cosmos and chaos, between movement and form is difficult to discern: it is a delicate balance; this seems to be, for Laban, the nature of the rhythm phenomenon. In this sense, Laban and his project can be said to overcome the dichotomy *Takt*/rhythm in a way that anticipates later treatments of rhythm, such as Lefebvre’s.

### Notes on the Translations

The translation of Rudolf Bode’s text presented no particular impediments in terms of language. Klages’ differentiation of *Geist* (intellect) and *Seele* (soul), which Bode reintroduces and which appears in different guises throughout Bode’s text, has been maintained. The text, which was made available through Inter-Library loan by the University of Heidelberg library, was translated and published with the kind permission of Ulrich Bode.

Laban’s text, instead, proved to be challenging: Laban’s style, especially in this period, is particularly complex and illustrates the degree to which Laban’s use of the German language was, to borrow a previous translator’s definition, ‘unorthodox’ (McCaw, 2011: 18). For this reason I have left the German words in parentheses alongside my translation when encountering unusual wording. The text, which

was retrieved through the British Library, was translated and published with the kind permission of Laura Laban and Max Hofer.

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## Notes

1. In line with other commentators (Cowan, 2007: 245) I decided to leave the German *Takt* (measure) untranslated.
2. The piece was meant to be performed by 1000 lay dancers and it was created by using Laban's movement notation (Labanotation).
3. The Bauhaus architect Appia, for example, was famously inspired by Dalcroze's eurhythmics and constructed the edifice in which the pedagogue would teach in Hellerau. In general, however, eurhythmics can be said to have been 'the most comprehensive, as well as the most influential, programme for the implementation of rhythm in social, political and educational policy' (Golston, 1996).
4. Félix Guattari quotes Ludwig Klages in relation to rhythm and the refrain in his *The Machinic Unconscious* (2011 [1979]: 350). The extent to which Klages, Bode and Laban may be said to have directly influenced subsequent theorizations of rhythm, such as those of Lefebvre, Deleuze and Guattari, is unclear and demands further research.
5. When he left Germany in 1936 and finally migrated to the UK in 1938, Laban developed with businessman Lawrence his 'Eukinetics' theories in the post-Second World War factories (Laban and Lawrence, 1947). Here effort, which was thought to be expressed by the rhythm of the human body, so that it can be argued to be rhythm itself (see also Maletic, 1987), was analysed graphically and put in relation to the machinery in the factory with the aim of harmonizing the two. Laban's project can then be seen as a continuation of Buecher's. On Laban's knowledge of Buecher and utilization of his theories see Doerr (2008: 32). Although it is not possible to develop this line of enquiry here, it could constitute a further perspective from which to analyse the relation of Bode's and Laban's projects to industrialization in general and rhythm in particular.
6. The only exception to this are Laban's unpublished notes and a short list of bibliographical references found at the end of his first book *Die Welt des Taenzers* (1920) where, among others, he mentions Wilhelm Wundt and Carl Jung.

7. Commentators have noticed both the way in which movement-choirs, as assembled organized movement, connected Laban to the Nazi ideology, and, on the contrary, how Laban's insistence on expressing, in his communal works, the tension between the community and the individual set him apart (Doerr, 2008; Kew, 1999).

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