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RHYTHM – A WORLD LANGUAGE?
Reflections on Movement-Oriented Cultural Analysis

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The article explores the idea and practice of rhythm as a subject as well as a perspective of cultural analysis that points to the physical dimension of culture, the social effects of bodily movements. Against holistic (and essentialist) conceptualisations of rhythm, the paper argues for a more detailed, multi-perspective approach, facing concrete phenomena in their specific and larger contexts, their functions and content and not least their interrelations and cross-references. The focus here is on a popular as well as questionable theoretical and practical model in a key area of rhythmic expressions: the model of rhythm as a (musical) "world language". It can be shown how different, even (supposedly) competing concepts of rhythm are affiliated, how explicit and subliminal models and practices are adjoined by further meaning, and, finally, how they develop culture-constituting qualities.

Keywords: rhythm, bodily movement, physical figuration, resonance, disruption

In the 7 January 2008 edition of the German weekly magazine *Der Spiegel* there was a report on the Democratic Party caucuses in the last presidential election in the USA. More specifically it was about the climactic duel between the long-time undisputed favourite candidate, Hillary Clinton and the current president, Barack Obama. The article begins with the following snapshot:[1]

> In the moment in which Barack Obama, 46, knew that he had won the Iowa caucus, he sent drummers to the Hy-Vee Hall in the centre of the state capital Des Moines. They were to boost the atmosphere before he held his victory speech.
>
> It is an experiment – and it is risky: In the almost exclusively white agrarian state of Iowa, there are few who have the ability to dance to African rhythms, but the hall dances. On the screens over the stage Hillary Clinton's speech is being broadcast. One can see her but she can no longer be heard. (Hujer & Meyer 2008: 102)

By accentuating this almost incidental scene, the article provides an atmospheric approach to election reporting, noteworthy with regard to the symbolic repertoire and dramaturgy of major political events and, at the same time, instructive for cultural analysis – as it points to the physical dimension of culture, to cultural effects of bodily movements and in particular to the potential of rhythm as a specific but

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also ubiquitous figure of both thought and movement alike.[2] The rhythms in the Obama election campaign, their perception and distribution in the media are not a singular phenomenon in this perspective; on the contrary, rhythm seems to affect all areas of society. Whether in sports, music, working activities, health, ceremonial rituals or daily routines, urban life or experiences of nature – in the most different of contexts – all of them heterogeneously connotated – recourse to the idea of rhythm becomes apparent in everyday, media and academic communication. Moreover, "the rhythmic" seems to be omnipresent as practice and physical figuration, which – for the most part unquestioned but obviously effective – connects core areas of society like (human) biology, economy and art with each other.

The aim of this paper is to explore rhythm in its cultural analytical qualities, that is, not only as a subject, but also as a perspective of cultural analysis. The focus here is on a popular – and questionable – theoretical and practical model in a key area of rhythmic expressions (music and dance): the model of a (musical) "world-language rhythm", which is resonated in the introductory quotation from the Obama campaign and which is first and foremost associated with percussion music and performance. Going beyond musicological interest and preoccupations,[3] the following suggestions deliberately adopt a broader cultural analytical approach, focusing on rhythm as an activity model, and an analytical as well as an experience model, particularly in its specific realisations, its inscriptions and ascriptions (also – and above all – in their cross-references). In doing so, against the "usual path" of scientific engagement, the often discussed and just as frequently criticised lack of conceptual clarity in rhythm[4] shall not be overcome by definitional ambition,[5] but harnessed as an analytically fruitful challenge, as an approach to guiding epistemological importance for cultural analysis. Finally, the following considerations are intended to sound out and capture the potentials of dealing with rhythm as it pertains to movement-oriented cultural analysis and to bring together existing traces in an interdisciplinary perspective.

Basic Rhythm and Creation of Community

At the beginning of 1997, an issue of the Swiss cultural magazine *du* dealt with *Die Trommel* ("The Drum") – its programmatic subtitle was *Weltsprache Rhythmus* ("World Language Rhythm"). This issue shall serve as an access point to my considerations. In the magazine there are contributions about instruments and musicians from different countries and epochs, from the mythical blueprints of the first drum in the shamanic melodies of the Himalayas to the drummers of the Central African Pygmies and the Amazon region to the Shrovetide drumming in Basel and the sound cosmology of modern jazz. The frame drummer Glen Valez was chosen for its cover. He is not just a star of the international drumming scene, but also a cosmopolitan US-American of Mexican descent who describes himself as a composer and musician who works with so-called "cross-cultural ensembles". He seems to be able to move effortlessly across the world and has mastered specialist Irish, Brazilian, Azerbaijanian, Arabian and North African percussion instruments.[6] Glen Valez represents an ideal, and embodies the basic assertion and concern of the issue: rhythm, here paradigmatically condensed in the sound of drums, acts as a cultural technique connecting continents. Despite the "endless variety" (Bachmann 1997: 13) of shapes of instruments and types of beat, the rhythm of drums represents a possibility for intercommunication which crosses geographic and cultural boundaries, because, according to the editorial: "Whether Asia, Africa, North and South America: the drum was and is found on almost every continent" (Bachmann 1997: 13).[7]

Although the addressed perceptions and practices deviate from each other and thus also dissociate, the subtitle of the *du* issue suggests that, nevertheless, in the case of rhythmic sounds and movements, a seemingly global cultural constant (in thought and practice) could be identified: a generally valid principle, a basal model of human experience and expression. The generalising idea of musical rhythm as a *lingua universalis* is taken and exemplified in several articles of the *du* magazine, particularly impressive in one of the central texts which tellingly

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deals with the continent of Africa, which is not only considered to be the area where the drum originated (Bachmann 1997: 13),[8] but is commonly recognised as the "cradle of humanity".[9] The article is written by the ethnomusicologist and sociologist John Miller Chernoff, who is well respected for his book *African Rhythm and African Sensibility* (1979),[10] in which he published the results of longstanding field research, above all in Ghana. In the *du* article he addresses the phenomenon of polyrhythm, one of the main characteristics of African music: differing, even opposed rhythms and accentuations are simultaneously performed and held together and anchored by dancers or by (dancing) drummers. According to Chernoff, the emerging "dynamic interrelation" of rhythms poses a special challenge for "the ears of western listeners" (Chernoff 1997: 31). "But", he then asks, "is this music really so complex and inaccessible? After all, in Africa even school children drum, and even the smallest African village could come up with a remarkable drumming ensemble. And how can music that people dance to have more than a basic meter?" (Chernoff 1997: 31). It is due to this "basic meter", this "pulse beat" (Chernoff 1997: 32), which is sensed by everyone, that African music is "after a surprisingly short period of familiarisation … not in the least foreign" (Chernoff 1997: 31) to Europeans and North Americans – even more, it has had a decisive influence on all styles of western popular music.

John Miller Chernoff conceives a trans-ethnic model of musical rhythm that on the one hand is linked back to physical-motor skills and on the other plays a significant role in building community. Inside and outside Africa, African music invites participation. It sets feelings free and encourages people to move (Chernoff 1997: 31). Artists and audiences are not separated from one another, they merge with one another. Moreover, the aesthetic of African music develops through physical movement, through which it then develops social significance. The clapping of hands and stamping of feet, the swaying and self-rocking strengthen the sense of community, they build and stabilise society. Rhythms structure the interaction of individuals and therefore engender a feeling of belonging which includes not only the musicians involved but also the dancers and listeners, who "through a kind of kinetic perception keep time with the base rhythm" (Chernoff 1997: 32):[11] "Beyond the obvious, that is beyond the sound, the music points to a broader field, to different kinds of perception and expression" (Chernoff 1997: 31). Chernoff's suggestions are pertinent to cultural analysis, but need – in this respect – further theorisation. Some helpful ideas are provided by a social analytically informed approach to (human) movement which shall be drawn upon in the following sections.

Energetic Tension and Bodily Presence

John Miller Chernoff's rhythmic model of cultural organisation and configuration corresponds with social theoretical considerations proposed by the sociologist and human movement researcher Gabriele Klein with initial regard to a quite different phenomenon in "world music". In her postdoctoral thesis, *Electronic Vibration: Pop Kultur Theorie* (Electronic Vibration: Pop Culture Theory, first published in 1999), she deals with a musical phenotype of globalisation par excellence: the predominantly urban techno-cult of the last decades, which she, in agreement with interviewed ravers and DJs, identifies as close to African music and dance culture both in musical style and in experiential qualities. The "physical experience" is correspondingly based on an "energetic tension of rhythm, baselines, room and body" (Klein 2004a: 164f.), "the relationship between upper and lower body reminds one of African dance traditions" (Klein 2004a: 165), the "vibrant group experience" (Klein 2004a: 163)[12] can lead to trance and can create "a social ritual that ravers like to compare with shamanistic dance" (Klein 2004a: 165; cf. Schlicke 2000; St John 2008).

Gabriele Klein not only – on the basis of her source material – throws light upon forms and figurations of rhythm, but her research also provides theoretical insights for movement-oriented social science, thereby opening the way for important approaches to the cultural analytical examination of rhythmic phenomena. On the basis of Pierre Bourdieu's habitus concept and the theoretical model of *Sens*

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pratique (Bourdieu 1980) as well as the interpretive model of social mimesis,[13] Klein proposes a body and movement-oriented social science approach that understands the "adoption of culture" as a "sensuous process" "which cannot be explained solely with regard to theories of learning or socialisation or cognitive psychology, but through the body" (Klein 2004a: 244). "Cultural everyday practice", according to Gabriele Klein, "is physical, sensuous – and aesthetic. It must be lived and experienced. That is, it is a field of experience that demands bodily presence" (Klein 2004a: 274; cf. Klein 2004b), and bodily presence is realised through following sequences of movement. In her programmatic outline "*Bewegung denken: Ein soziologischer Entwurf*" (Thinking Movement: A Sociological Approach, 2004) she points out that explorations of human movement should "not mainly focus on motives or intentions to act or on functions of action, but on performativity, on practice of action" (Klein 2004: 133) and, at the same time, that they should "exceed approved anthropological and naturalising analysis of movement concepts by a sociological perspective" (Klein 2004: 133).[14]

Approaches like Klein's deserve credit for examining movement practices and experience with regard to interdependencies in superordinate social organisation. She contributes a socio-cultural perspective that is not limited to the "analysis of symbols – their constitution, meaning and significance" (Klein 2004a: 275), but makes obvious that linguistic communication merely demonstrates "*one* special case" of social communication (Shepherd 1992: 56; emphasis added S.W.). The rhythmically organised and realised physical-dance dialogue serves to stabilise and dynamise cultural structures. As a form of cultural acquisition and transfer it is at the same time ambivalent and reveals a "power-oriented, forceful and destructive side" (Klein 2004a: 248). This applies to the monotone techno-rhythms of the "4 to the floor" bass drum (as Klein examined) and must also be assumed with regard to enculturation processes by means of African rhythms. Accordingly, John Miller Chernoff's harmonic-romantic universal draft of "body oriented social experience" (Wicke 1998: 277) in this regard needs a differentiating and contextualising approach – as need other phenomena connected with the "world-language rhythm" model, which must also be investigated in the face of conflicting qualities and dimensions.

Disruptions, Collisions, "Wrong Beat"

While numerous publications in music education highlight the potentials of the "world-language rhythm" concept, understood as a mode of intercultural exchange and understanding, a musicological examination from a critical standpoint has long since been established, which not only traces "the myth of music as a universal language" in the history of ideas (Kopiez 2004), but also – in keeping with the outlined, power- and ruling-sensitive perspective – questions its hegemonial dimensions. The US-American ethnomusicologist Steven Feld in his "Notes on 'World Beat'" (Feld 1994) points out the issue of power relations involved in intercultural musical enjoyment, and of the commercial aspects of the global circulation of African rhythms. According to Feld, there is without doubt a fascination with the musical styles of other continents, which is expressed in both reciprocal influences and musical projects that span cultures. Yet precisely this reveals – as Feld showed, impressively, with the example of Paul Simon's bestselling album *Graceland* (1986) – a blatant asymmetry as regards the awarding of copyrights and the distribution of economic profit to the benefit of the participating western musicians, producers and record labels.[15] As an economic project, a "signum for the universal exchange of goods" (Erlmann 1995: 14), "world music" represents the "unified product of a worldwide, Western-oriented 'musical-electrical Esperanto'" (Baumann 1992: 154).

However, in addition to this view of the concomitant effects in economic, political and cultural power structures (together with a seeming homogenisation of differences on the musical level[16]), there is need for a direct observation of the dissonant effects of rhythmic motion patterns on a pre-reflexive, somatic level, as will be made clear in the following example. On the occasion of a conference by the Commission for Song, Music and Dance Research of

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the *Deutsche Gesellschaft für Volkskunde* in Vienna from 7 to 11 October 1998 – the conference subject was "*Musik kennt keine Grenzen*" (Music Knows No Borders) – the Salzburg music ethnologist Manfred Bartmann gave a provocative lecture entitled "*Musik ist keine Weltsprache*" (Music Is Not a World Language; Bartmann 2001).[17] He began with a snapshot of a failed cultural encounter:

> In August 1972, in a Vienna jazz club, a concert by the Kachama Brothers' Band from Malawi immediately shook the legs of the local audience, though not in the way expected by the band front man, Daniel Kachamba. Due to the unfamiliar movement of the public he had difficulty trying to hold his band together. Moreover when the dancers began to clap, it was over. Daniel Kachamba had to interrupt the concert. The musical act came to a standstill because the reaction of the audience was not compatible with the intention of the musicians. (Bartmann 2001: 11)

The reason for the irritation was, as Bartmann calls it, a cultural misunderstanding. The audience heard the rhythmic reference points of the music in the incorrect place (for the musicians) and accordingly incorrectly accentuated these through their movements. A "subtle element of tension" (Bartmann 2001: 11) developed in the room, which could no longer be absorbed by the musicians. In this case the supposed intention of "world-language rhythm" even worked against its virtual intention and caused dissociation and the rattling of identities. Situations like this, which are experienced as and deemed a disturbance, misunderstanding and failure by the participants, unlock in a particular way physical motions for cultural analytic investigation.

The music ethnologist Bartmann takes this episode of disappointment and failure – after all they wanted "to dance, to move and feel free" and had "paid for it" (Bartmann 2001: 11) – as a reason to think about the meaning of such dissonances for music mediation. These dissonances, according to Bartmann, pose an important impulse for a critical questioning of music pedagogues' almighty fantasy of borderlessness reflected in the conference theme. His conclusion is that one must bid farewell to the idea of a "musical universal competence – of whichever kind – beneath any historical specification" (Bartmann 2001: 19). But on the other hand, the awareness of the eventuality of misunderstanding (as an outcome of the confrontational experience) may in turn lead to sensitisation and rapprochement. The disruption of previously unquestioned and probably subconscious motion patterns makes their diversity knowable. It points to – and in this respect the aforementioned example gains almost paradigmatic value – powerful culture grounding qualities of bodily movements and their specific moulding.

Semanticisation and Sensitivities

However, the events in the Vienna jazz club have further cultural analytic potential. The corresponding content of the scene reveals itself further, if one complements Bartmann's narration with the detailed eyewitness account he draws upon. This was delivered by Gerhard Kubik, a scholar in comparative African studies, music ethnologist, musician and himself on stage as a band member during the performance by the Kachamba Brothers' Band in the Viennese Club Electronic. In his report, Kubik documented the disruption of the concert, which – as he puts it – provoked a "battle of words" (Kubik 1983: 313) between Daniel Kachamba and the audience. Thus, the request to stop clapping along was perceived by the audience as an "outrageous constraint on their need for expression" (Kubik 1983: 313). Following the restarted concert Kachamba then was asked by a woman: "You say you don't like the people here to clap hands to your music. But why is it that you allow a white man [i.e. Gerhard Kubick; S.W.] to play in your band?" (Kubik 1983: 313).

This comment reveals the inventory of emotional expressions rhythmic practice brings to the surface. In addition to disappointment, a fundamental, identity-related slight is felt, which then accesses questions of existential orientation. In the excitement, a semanticisation of body motion is articulated, one which is firmly anchored in the history of ideas and

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is at the very least still subliminally virulent today. The paradigm of an ethnic-racial differentiation of rhythmic skills runs through the rhythm discourse of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (cf. Zollna 1994a, 1994b; Golston 1996; Browning 1998; Dinerstein 2003)[18] and was constantly instrumentalised in various directions of political ideology. It often corresponds with another ideologeme of rhythmic conception: the naturalisation of cultural techniques and their varied characteristics (cf. Windmüller 2006: 68–71; 2007: 124f.).

This nexus is also virulent in the context of courses and workshops on "African Dance" (i.e. in more or less institutionalised settings[19]) offered in European cities, in whose discourse the idea and term of "world-language rhythm" is eye-catchingly prominent. Surveys of participants and teachers within a framework of empirical-ethnographic studies in, for example, Stockholm (Sawyer 2003), Berlin (Sieveking 2002, 2006) or Stuttgart/Tübingen (Wedel 1998) allow the fixed idea of "an African sense of community" (Wedel 1998: 96), connected with ideas of "nativeness", "connection with the earth" (Wedel 1998: 93; Sieveking 2002: 157) or "naturalness" of "African motion patterns" (and accordingly "African corporeality"; Sieveking 2002, 2006) to appear, which emerge in the dancers' dialogue with the drums and – in the concrete performance – can be brought into a relation with one's own dance experience (Sieveking 2002: 158).

In the same line of argumentation one finds numerous references to the naturalising dimension of "rhythm as a universal language" – as a conflation of individual feelings and rhythmic styles (bonded to the body) ("all rhythmic patterns have some commonality that crosses all kinds of boundaries"; Helm 2000: 27) – in drum and percussion literature. And almost en passant, corresponding accents are set in the *du* periodical on *The Drum* when, for instance, John Miller Chernoff in his aforementioned article dissects a two-bar basic rhythm, which he then links back to biological rhythms – in this case the motion sequence of human feet. Or when it says in a thematically fitting advertisement of a Zürich "World Music Shop": "The rhythm of the heart is the same for all people…": and in considerably smaller type, "but each culture has a different form of expressing it. The entire variety of instruments, from all cultures in the world, can be discovered here" (Weltmusikladen 1997). The editorial also takes up this line of semanticisation by referring to a drum feeling, that "adds a second pulse to one's own and ... in the best of cases – with it – binds with the world beat and [becomes] one with the heartbeat of the cosmos" (Bachmann 1997: 15).

Rhythmic Control – Physical Composition and Arrangement

As a further example from another music and dance tradition, dance pedagogic projects are worth examining, here especially the showcase project of the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra under the leadership of the principal conductor Sir Simon Rattle, which has become known far beyond the borders of Germany through the documentary film, *Rhythm Is It! You Can Change Your Life in a Dance Class* (2004). "250 Berlin children and teenagers of 25 different nationalities" (www.rhythmisit.com; accessed February 27, 2007), "from every possible social class" (Rattle in: Rhythm Is It! [2004]), under the guidance of British dance teacher Royston Maldoom, studied Stravinsky's *Le sacre du printemps* for a few weeks and with musical accompaniment by the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra performed before an enthusiastic audience of 3,000 people (cf. Windmüller 2007).

The "Education-Project" also links the social border-bridging, unifying power – which, here again, is ascribed to rhythm – back to timeless biological concepts. In the press release of the documentary film *Rhythm Is It! You Can Change Your Life in a Dance Class* (2004) one reads: "'*Sacre*' is about education and the transmission of knowledge. It is about helping the young generation to grow up by initiating it into the secrets of communal life and nature, through the practice of rites, of cult dances" (Rhythm is it! [2004]). Dance – by the assumed eternal return of a cyclic universalism – thus transcends the historical order and becomes, as it were, nature. "This piece of music immediately takes hold of your whole body", says the conductor and project initia-

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tor, Simon Rattle, of *Le sacre du printemps*, "and it feels as if it is emerging from the depths of the earth" (www.rhythmisit.de; accessed February 27, 2007).[20]

Ultimately, for Rattle this music almost ideally represents his rhythm philosophy, which is deduced from his own, likewise naturalised, biography:

> One Christmas, was I three, was I four? I don't remember. My parents gave me a drum kit, and then, that was it. Lost forever. No rush, really, with weight. There is a part of the brain, the pre-civilised human parts of the brain, I mean almost maybe, whichever part is descended from the lizards, where rhythm is it. The first idea, I think, probably the first communication, was through rhythm, before words. And I think when you get that as a child, somehow you're connecting with your primal origins. (Rhythm Is It! [2004])

In connection with this design of "the rhythmic", particular attention must be paid to the educational programme underlying the Berlin dance project, notably Royston Maldoom's pedagogic framework, which is centred around a concept of body control, that – on a physical level of working out a movement repertoire of the children and teenagers – is based on a de facto physical set up and adjustment of the (dance)body by the dance instructor. Projects like "Rhythm Is It!" show quite plainly – and make people aware – that rhythmic motion patterns not only play an influential role in the development, establishment and irritation of cultural forms, but are – not least normatively orientated and institutionally embedded – trained, strengthened and consolidated.[21] In addition to the private environment, it is public institutions (amongst them nursery schools, general education schools, but also music schools and sports clubs, healing and special education institutions as well as adult education institutions such as adult education centres, seniors' and community centres) that – socially unquestioned and viewed as positive – decisively contribute (as a driving force as well as a corrective) to the shaping of the individual and collective repertoire of movements (in terms of expression, action and experience). Characteristically, Marcel Mauss, in his fundamental text on *Les techniques du corps* (1989; first published in 1935), locates his concept of "technique" – more precisely defined through the accompanying attributes "traditional" and "effective" (Mauss 1989: 205) – close to the concept of "training in the sense of 'dressage'" (e.g. Mauss 1989: 208).[22] And commentaries on the Berlin dance project, which emphasise the discipline-driven impetus of the undertaking (cf. Windmüller 2007: 123), can be linked directly with Michel Foucault's considerations on a "normalising society", where he explicitly names "establish[ing] rhythms" along with "impos[ing] particular occupations" and "regulat[ing] the cycles of repetition" as one of the "three great methods" of the apparatus (Foucault 1995: 149).

Spreading Rhythms

However, the model of "world-language rhythm" opens up new vistas for other qualities of rhythmic praxis and theorisation, which are informed by (non-linear) motion and change, rather than reproduction and stabilisation (and therefore applicable to other areas of complex societies). Social historian and cultural critic Erik Davis, by parallelising polyrhythms of West African drumming with so-called Black Electronic music and by transferring attached rhythm concepts (in accentuating the "assemblage of various distinct rhythmic 'tracks'", he explicitly refers to John Miller Chernoff; Davis 1996), outlines a complex model of interpretation that – instead of emphasising ontological qualities of rhythm – connects to the idea of an "immanence of multiplicity" (Davis 1996):[23] "[I]intense drum'n'bass produces for many listeners the same kind of disturbing confusion that West African drumming does; only instead of being threatened by the 'frenetic chaos' of the 'primitive', they are threatened by the digital chaos of sampled code complexifying out of control" (Davis 1996). Davis, with this model, follows rhythm-theoretical considerations raised by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari in the chapter "Of the Refrain" in *A Thousand Plateaus*, namely to understand rhythm as an element of a "rhizomorphic routed set of vectors and exchanges" (Davis 1996), as a "flow" rather than

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a standardising temporal reference system. Or in the words of Deleuze and Guattari: “It is the difference that is rhythmic, not the repetition, which nevertheless produces it: productive repetition has nothing to do with reproductive meter” (1987: 314).[24]

And following Deleuze and Guattari as well, media theorist Stamatia Portanova – in her attempt to think sound and dance rhythm in their global dimensions – explores “rhythm as a force of disruption and of re-organisation”:

> By disentangling rhythm from human corporeality, habits and purposes (rhythm as a prerogative of human movement), we will propose its re-qualification as an attribute of matter itself: rhythm as a galvanising current flowing in and between all human, animal and technological, animate and inanimate, organic and inorganic bodies, simultaneously dissolving their solid organisations and remodelling their fluid exchanges. (Portanova 2005)

Based on the electronic beats of “techno”, on “new dance rituals” of the “twenty-four hour plus rave experience”, on the “combinations of acoustic amplifications, visuals, techno sounds and drugs”, Portanova conceives an “epidemiological rhythmicity” with rhythm as “a viral propagation infecting all biological, social or cybernetic bodies” (“Working as a virus, rhythm disrupts linear bodily movements and clear perceptions, re-organising them after its own order”; Portanova 2005). Rhythm in this conceptualisation cannot, however, solely be understood as a “liberating and revolutionary movement opposed to the ordered, metric structures of capitalism.” Portanova rather promotes a simultaneous model, which fosters “practices of potential modulation and total control, censorship and commercialisation” as well as “a different, alternative ecology of biological and cultural transmission through the forces of sound and dance” (Portanova 2005). Davis’ as well as Portanova’s considerations add new weight – and a further, substantially differing social (and political – and cultural analytical) dimension – to the concept of rhythm as a “lingua universalis” and its ongoing, persistent appeal.

Programmatic Suggestions

The aforementioned considerations should outline a movement-oriented (and particularly rhythm-oriented) perspective in cultural analysis – exemplarily demonstrated on the basis of a popular model connected to rhythm: the model of rhythm as a “world language” (as an experiential and interpretative model). Against the often evoked universality of rhythm, against frequently observed holistic (and essentialist) ascriptions, this paper argues for the investigation of concrete forms of appearance in their specific and larger contexts, their functions and content, for the exploration of rhythmic phenomena with regard to related sensitivities, to effects on self-perception and perception of the other (in case of the individual and groups). This research design draws upon a multi-perspective approach to interrelations and interactions of rhythmic forms and concepts, comprehending the potential of expanding as well as narrowing repertoires of action, perception and meaning. It is apparent how different, even (supposedly) competing concepts are affiliated, how explicit and subliminal models and practices are adjoined by further meaning, and – not least – how they develop culture-constituting qualities. Against the background of the survey, it is in particular the openness and multi-dimensionality of rhythm as a term, a concept and an idea, that affects its manifestations and is prominently involved in their barely noticed, but far-reaching effects.

Basically, it must be considered that rhythm is not only an abstract classification system, but is always associated with the body and correspondingly shows the capability to reveal the potential of experience in social as well as in research contexts and processes. Not least, the approach fosters an analytical perspective that goes beyond the basic assumption of a cognitive bonding of social actions and cultural practices to “physical realisation and performances” (Klein 2004a: 247),[25] that focuses on bodily, sensual-affective and instantaneous “in-the-moment” experiences, or, in short: to orientate cultural analysis towards physical (rhythmic) processes and movements. In this context, investigating the experiential and interpretation model “rhythm” offers promising

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approaches, as rhythm – according to ethnomusicologist und anthropologist John Blacking – is a primary physical-emotive phenomenon which develops its power especially in the physical performance, in the "possibility of shared somatic states" and the "rhythms of interaction" (Blacking 1977: 9; cf. McNeill 1995).

An appropriate research programme faces great challenges, not least the development of adequate instruments and terminology oriented towards the description and interpretation of movement (sequences). Furthermore, it is crucial to reflect and productively integrate a science-historically grounded unease towards irrationalisms and (somatic) dynamics of collectives. This perhaps allows the avoidance of a defensive stance on an academic level, which is often apparent in restrictive approaches on a societal level. There is no need to go back to the general ban on drum music, which was forced upon African slaves in some places in the southern states of the USA. In 1994 in Great Britain, in the course of the spread of the techno movement, the British government under John Major passed a Criminal Justice and Public Order Act which codified a whole string of criminal offences under paragraph 5, amongst them unannounced raves, defined as gatherings of one hundred or more people in the open air who dance to amplified electronic music, which above all is distinguished by "repetitive beats" – an offence which can be punished with up to three months imprisonment (Klein 2004a: 5; Hutnyk 1996: 156). The aforementioned examples allow the anticipation of the explosive nature of (foreign) rhythms and the power ascribed to them – and danger. In conclusion we can refer back to the example of drummers at the Obama election campaign event and the estimation of the *Spiegel* journalist and his commentary: "It is an experiment and it is risky" (Hujer & Meyer 2008:102). In this case it was quite obviously successful.

Notes

1 All translations in this article were made by the author, unless otherwise stated.

2 Nitschke – in historical perspective – directly connected this approach to movement attitudes by politicians (1992).

3 For more on rhythm research in musicology, cf. Pfleiderer (2006).

4 You, in her programmatic outline of an "Anthropology of Rhythm" alone identifies "some 200 definitions in Western music history" (You 1994: 362, referring to Gabrielsson 1986: 142); among others Dürr and Gerstenberg (1963: 385) notice a "confusing plethora of rhythm defintions" and in the article "Rhythm" in *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (1959) one can read: "Precision, however, has hardly yet been reached" – an estimation that is still valid.

5 Cf., in addition to countless surveys in an interdisciplinary field, social and cultural analytical approaches of mid- and long-range rhythm-based theory (e.g. Jousse, Lefebvre, Meschonnic). Eventually, You (1994) also – in her conceptualisation of an "anthropology of rhythm" is caught up in definitional work. Cf. Spitznagel (2000: 14): "Definitional suggestions that vary between similar and heterogeneous or sometimes also dicta meanwhile have become a subject sui generis and helped a literature to develop whose main topic is the 'definition of rhythm'."

6 A similar semantic is demonstrated in the film *Zakir and his Friends* (Germany, Switzerland 1997; Director: Lutz Leonhardt; Subtitle of the film: *A Rhythm Experience*). According to the text on the DVD case it is "a filmic journey to the most exciting drummers and percussionists in the world": "The Indian *tabla* player Zakir Hussain who is a virtuoso of the variety of language in the world language of rhythm and can make himself understood everywhere is in the spotlight. *Zakir and his Friends* connects what at first appearance seems to be worlds apart. A multifaceted whole, a new montage originates out of disparate worlds of rhythm. Rhythm is life and life is a rhythm experience." Among the press comments on the DVD case are: A "hymn to rhythm, an equisite music film … Zakir and his friends allow the world to become one great room of resonance" (*Tagesanzeiger*) and "A great, imaginative intoxication of rhythm … the definition world music gains a new meaning through Leonhardt's film: The astounding relationship between widely scattered tones is condensed into a world wide rhythm" (*Berner Zeitung*).

7 The author names Australia as the sole "drumless … continent of silence" (Bachmann 1997: 13).

8 There it means: "Naturally, they [the drums; S.W.] come from Africa but also other parts of the world" (Bachmann 1997: 13).

9 On the semantic of the cradle in connection with ideas of rhythm, cf. Windmüller (2009).

10 Tellingly, the title of the German edition (1999) is

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Rhythmen der Gemeinschaft.

11 On the role of "Dance and Body Culture" in the creation of a "Community Myth" in modern European cultures cf. Baxmann (2000).

12 Cf. also Klein (2004a: 38): "The ritual practices [of ravers; S.W.] remind some authors of shamanism, the ecstatic dancing and trance-like state that makes ravers appear to be led on a journey back in time to the prehistory of civilisation", and, citing Friedhelm Böpple and Ralf Knüfer, "Their parties visually remind one of the rituals of the African Nuby, which fascinated Leni Riefenstahl."

13 Klein here joins Gebauer and Wulf (e.g. 1998) who had given new strength to this model; regarding the concept of mimesis in a cultural analytical context, cf. Cantwell (1993).

14 According to Klein, movement is to be understood as "socially made, culturally encoded and historically changeable" (Klein 2004: 134).

15 On reverse distribution asymmetry on a local level, cf. for example Sawyer (2003).

16 On an aesthetic-economic level, Erlmann (1995: 7) with regard to the phenomenon and myth of "world music" says that homogenisation and differentiation must not necessarily exclude one another, but – in their inter-relationships – are "integral elements of musical aesthetics under late-capitalist circumstances".

17 Bartmann deals with this problem in other texts and was invited to a symposium in May 2006 in Wuppertal (Germany) on the subject "'World Music' – a Misunderstanding?" In the announcement it said: "Yet the thing with world music is that it could be due to a fatal misunderstanding: a sheer incomprehensible range of music styles is, if possible, reduced to the simplest definition of dancability and consumability. And that is following a westernised style of understanding music … That means: Hidden behind this definition of world music are the lean left-overs of the world of music and these are subjected to a consistently one-dimensional dictation of bass and beat. What is also missing is the study of a change of perspective, the attentive turn, the learning and comprehension of context, concentrated listening, the perspective of differentiation, the change in oneself."

18 Cf. in addition the relevant scrutiny of ethnic-racial oriented rhythmic competencies in children, e.g., van Alastyne and Osborne 1937. Cf. also the implications of the article in *Der Spiegel* (Hujer & Meyer 2008). Aside from that, at this point, I would also like to refer to the context of cultural-philosophical and political attempts at a positive re-evaluation, e.g. in the concept of "Négritude": e.g. Léopold S. Senghor, progressive thinker, author, politician and Senegalese president from 1969 until 1980, conceived rhythm as a principal element of African culture and society, as a plainly stylised (black) African "tune", whereas these rhythms are connected to nature and are invested with "being at one with the universe, being 'free' and lively" (e.g. Senghor 1964).

19 Cf. Binas-Preisendörfer (2008: 170) on the mostly female clientele of "world music" at the end of the 1980s and the 1990s: "Their engagement with world music was not limited to buying sound carriers. Interested people were culturally active. They went to concerts and attended workshops."

20 Rattle, together with his orchestra, worked to a sound "that is dark, that comes from the ground". Cf. Gamsera's account (2004): "Once he finds [Simon Rattle, S.W.] that the orchestra has not hit the right basic tone a piece: he is very 'á la Karate kid' but should ascend to the primordial perception of rhythm. A jolt goes through the musicians. The orchestra understands: Rhythm is it."

21 Cf. especially on dance pedagogics in this context Windmüller (2007).

22 Mauss indeed sees a close connection with the technical-instrument-oriented technical definitions, whereas the techniques of the body in their entirety precede the techniques of instruments (Mauss 1989: 206).

23 Davis (1996): "We are timestretched to the edge of the timeless, but a timeless that has nothing to do with the eternal and everything to do with the immanence of multiplicity."

24 Cf. the crucial passage in Deleuze and Guattari (1987: 313): "It is well known that rhythm is not meter or cadence, even irregular meter or cadence: there is nothing less rhythmic than a military march. ... Meter, whether regular or not, assumes a coded form whose unit of measure may vary, but in a noncommunicating milieu, whereas rhythm is the Unequal or the Incommensurable that is always undergoing transcoding. Meter is dogmatic, but rhythm is critical; it ties together critical moments or ties itself together in passing from one milieu to another. It does not operate in a homogeneous space-time, but by heterogeneous blocks. It changes direction."

25 Here Klein relates to Gebauer and Wulf (1998: 11f.).

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