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Principles of Rhythm in Pre-Expressive Performance Training

A PRACTICE-LED PhD BY EILON MORRIS: YEAR 1

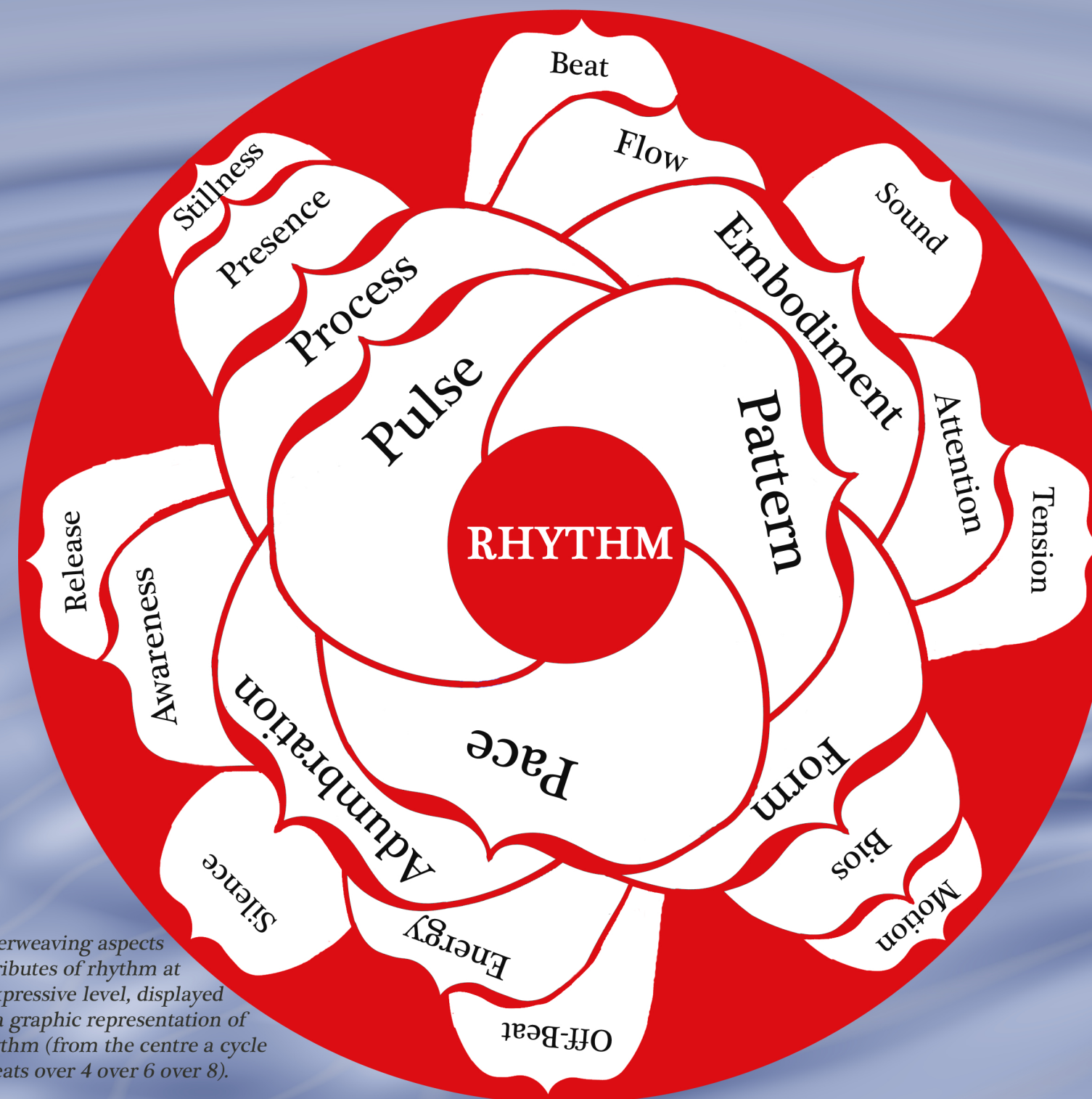
The Bios of Rhythm

Rhythm is a vast and paradoxical field of activity and thought: as timeless as it is temporal; repetitive and yet always changing; experienced by us all and yet almost impossible to define.

It is suggested that our sense of rhythm has a biological source, originating in the interplay of the rhythms of our environment, and the biological rhythms of our own bodies (Pradier, 1990). The calming effect of waves crashing on a shore, the way an infant's movements synchronise to the rhythm of a mother's voice, the intoxicating buzz of a Brazilian carnival: these are ways rhythm moves us, whether we are aware of it or not.

The Pre-Expressive Rhythm of the Actor

The primacy of rhythm as a biological phenomenon makes it one of the most effective elements in engaging actors' and audiences' attentions and shaping the perceptions of performance at a fundamental level. The field of Theatre Anthropology understands this as a pre-expressive level. This refers both, to processes that precede 'expression' and to a collection of principles that remain consistent across a broad range of performance practices, aesthetics and cultures (Barba & Savarese, 2006). These fundamental principles, archetypal forms, and practical tools are the key subjects of this research into rhythm within actor training.



The interweaving aspects and attributes of rhythm at a pre-expressive level, displayed within a graphic representation of polyrhythm (from the centre a cycle of 3 beats over 4 over 6 over 8).

“It is one of the hardest subjects to explain because it is so simple...” (Boleslavsky, 1987)

Areas of Actor Training Being Investigated

- Rhythm in the body - the body in rhythm
- Polyrhythm and Simultaneity
- Rhythm and Presence
- Trans-cultural Rhythm Practices

Research Questions

- What are the fundamental principles of rhythm in pre-expressive performance training?
- What training practices assist a performer to cultivate a deeper awareness and mastery of this field?
- How can these processes, experiences and understandings be effectively mapped and disseminated to other practitioners?

Practice-Led Research

This research is driven by questions and understandings that emerge from within the field of practice, drawing on research methodologies that are congruent with the practices and theories of Western Studio and Laboratory Theatre training. Outcomes will be reached through an interrogation of my own training practices and understandings, and those of other leading practitioners within this field. These outcomes will not take the form of scientific facts, but rather, embodied and pragmatic forms of knowledge that are directly applicable to actor training practices.

Eilon Morris and Hilary Elliott performing in 'Spontaneous Combustion 32' 2008



References :

- Barba, E. & Savarese, N. (2006) *A Dictionary of Theatre Anthropology: the secret art of the performer*. 2nd Ed. London: Routledge
- Barrett, E. & Bolt, B. (2007) *Practice as Research: Approaches to Creative Arts Inquiry*. London: I. B. Tauris & Co Ltd.
- Boleslavsky, R. (1987) *Acting: the First Six Lessons*. 1st Ed. New York: Theatre Arts Book
- Pradier, J.M. (1990) 'Towards a Biological Theory of the Body in Performance.' *New Theatre Quarterly*, Volume 6, Issue 21: pp. 86-98.

Rhythm in motion: Biomechanics exercise, 'the slap in the face', in three stages: intention, realisation and reaction. (Barba & Savarese, 2006)

