

Speaking Visibly in Genuine Rhythm

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My work with the gesture-impulses of the speech sounds has yet again brought me to a new stage in my gradual resolution of the unrest I had felt in my gesture-expression of poems both during my training and afterward. In this article, I want to share my insights concerning those earlier experiences and then describe how I'm approaching my work with poems presently.

Before now, I felt handicapped by my trouble with gesture dynamics and gesture-transitions. I couldn't capture to my satisfaction the sound-pictures of poems in coherent rhythmic movement-expression. These struggles were very real for me. All along I had the sense that gaining the capacity to unfold these rhythmic sound-sculptures and pictures in my movement-expression need not require many years, if only I could fathom how to proceed effectively. It turns out that what I sensed was correct. But not until now could I fathom what was keeping me from achieving real success in my eurythmy expression.

From my new perspective, I would say that several things hindered me.

1. For the most part I did not have direct experiences of the gesture-impulses of the sounds themselves. I am certain of this. Instead, when making a gesture, I was experiencing what I had been shown to do, together with the body of mental images that I created from what I was told about the gesture, plus the feelings I had while doing the movements I had learned, along with some innate sense of the sound. With these elements of experience, I generated as much feeling and intention as I could; and I worked toward making all of these experiences second-nature in my movement.
2. I lacked the ability to bring forth gesture-expressions that are as nuanced and adaptable as audible speech is. Unlike my accommodation of the sounds in relation to each other in my speaking, my gestures yielded poorly to each other and resisted being expressed with convincing subtlety. Feeling back, I realize that I was hampered by the 'archetypal' gesture-forms that I had learned.
3. I lacked awareness of the actual, for-fact sound-structures of the rhythmic flow of our language and of poetic speech. By 'sound-structures,' I mean the sculptural sound-shapes that make up syllables, words and lines. This sculpture is part of what Rudolf Steiner referred to as the 'Lautgebilde'* of our speaking, of language, where 'Gebilde' means much more than just structure, but everything about its creation, its vital shaping and inner relationships (as I discussed in

my Scale Degrees article for our spring 2019 *Newsletter*).
*(Note: "Laut" refers to speech sound here. See *Eurythmy as Visible Singing*, p. 1 or 2.)

4. I had acquired the habit of focusing on the stressed or long syllables in poems, often leaving out unstressed and short syllabic values, such as conjunctions and many of the prepositions. I think one reason I didn't feel the lack of these in our expression more sharply and persistently is because the speaker always filled them in audibly.

Surmounting these obstacles is entirely possible; but I have to admit that it comes slowly, with much effort. A 'winging it' approach does not work. Here are the ingredients: Firstly, it is imperative to stay closely attuned to the renewal of the gesture-impulse from within for each and every gesture-expression of a sound. I have found that this is the only way that I can avoid falling into self-generated movements and gesture-memories rather than real gesture-impulse expressions. And I have to be alert to discerning the difference instantly and correcting myself when I've gone the wrong way. And how do I discern the difference? Once I have been finding my way to the gesture-impulse of a sound, I begin to know what the real thing feels like as an objective soul-spiritual perception. In addition, Dr. Steiner's Figure drawings give me reassurance that I'm on the right path in my rigorous inner process; and they help me direct my attention. If I believe I perceive special features in an area that doesn't appear as a part of the veil or as a character zone in his drawing, I've found it fruitful to stand corrected. And then I observe more closely.* In bringing forth a gesture, it is my fluency of inner access to these perceptions that must become second-nature. The gesture involves no mental imagery, feeling-creation or movement procedures meant to produce various movement qualities; e.g., I'm not bringing mist to mind when doing *M*, not feeling through soft layers of earth for *voiced th*, and not managing my limbs for *é* (as in, 'say'). There is no need: I convey the gestures directly from the source. *(Note: in his book, *Occult Science*, Ch. V, section two, about 2/3 in, he discussed how we know truth from fiction in inner perception.)

I still find – and I feel that it bears repeating – that immersing myself in each of the sounds we utter in our language by actually speaking alliterations and assonance* has been and remains essential to the task of experiencing, re-experiencing and knowing each of the gesture-impulses. This gives me direct, concrete experiences of the sounds themselves. *I didn't really know the contents of my speech activity before I began to speak alliterations and assonance in earnest.* To me, it is a simple fact that no amount of hearing someone else speak the sounds is sufficient to assist the gesture-impulse discovery process. And while it is true that in eurythmy we must direct all of our impulse to speak into our movement, it is also a simple fact that I cannot

possibly give coherent, truthful expression to something that I don't really know; and this is most especially the case with the gesture-impulses. *(I didn't come to this idea myself. Dr. Steiner had directed Lory Maier-Smiths to speak assonance and alliterations right at the outset – see *How the New Art of Eurythmy Begin*, HNA, by Magdalene Sieglösch, p. 17, p. 20.)

With my development of this ability to perceive the gesture-impulses, I enter into the diversity of the Movement colors that belong to them. For example, I experience how the gesture-impulses of **B**, **H** and **G** come forth with the instant Movement-color quality of yellow. When I meet with **L** and **S**, I can't give them, too, a yellow Movement color, for I experience their movement-impulses as silver-grey and grey, which I find lack a direction-related urge – unlike the colors, which tend toward either assertiveness or yielding, or a dynamic balance. When the gesture-impulse of **F** shows me its white movement-quality, I'm again prevented from making a yellow movement. And when I begin to perceive the black of the Character zones of **S**, I grasp the pregnant stillness that makes the sound so arresting in its presence. I've found that the three dynamics – Movement, Feeling and Character – act simultaneously, taking three different roles in relation to the emerging gesture. Working with each sound, these dynamics become ever clearer as I get to know the nature of each gesture-impulse more deeply, in more detail.

Secondly, with this growing body of direct speech-sound experiences, the beautiful thing is that even with the most subtle movement-expressions, my whole being will be involved in the emergence of the movement – as it must be because it is completely one with the gesture-impulse itself, whose presence throughout my being backs up the resulting gesture, making it distinct and telling. I am certain that this must be evident to the onlooker, too. Because of this, I know beyond any doubt that the real speech sound gestures do not merely correspond to or represent the sounds or constitute a codified system of movement for them: they are none of these. They are direct objective manifestations of the actual movement-nature of these sounds. It is a gift to find that I can become incapable of making a movement, for instance with my hands, that indicates or stands for the intended gesture while the rest of my being is dumb to it, as I most certainly could with every manner of learned, self-generated and imagined gestures.

Thirdly and fourthly come the challenges of bringing these individual gesture-impulse experiences together in a truly rhythmic expression of syllables and words and then lines of poetry. The capacity for nuanced expression of the gesture-impulses is what makes it possible to approach this challenge, *provided that I am able to enter into the actual sound-structures of the rhythmic flow of poetic speech with sufficient awareness and clarity*. So, how do I do this?

Here again, my own speaking provides me with the means I need. My first task when entering a poem with my voice is that of experiencing and clarifying how it wants to walk. Through my recitation work, I've found that most of the time there are three factors working together. Firstly, there is the rhythmic dynamic of stressed and unstressed syllables. Secondly, there is the dynamic of long and short syllables. We learned to experience these two dynamics during our first years in eurythmy school. In English, these two dynamics intermingle to a great extent, so that both stressed and unstressed syllables can also be long or short or even extra-short. For instance, the first stanza of Hopkins' poem, "Inversnaid," begins in evenly long syllables of iambic stress-unstress, and the word, "burn" (a brook), is double long. Line 2 proceeds in evenly-long syllables; but in lines 3 and 4, anapest feet appear with unstresses that are extra-short; and length is added to "comb" (a hollow in a hillside), followed by an extra-short "the," and so on. But regardless of these changes the poem continues its walking, keeping a metrical beat of four beats per line, as in music. This pulsing of beats is the third dynamic. The rhythm of the syllables dances along in coordination with this steady pulse:

This darksome burn, horseback brown,
His rollrock highroad roaring down,
In coop and in comb, the fleece of his foam
Flutes and low to the lake falls home.

I've found it extremely important to detect whether a regular pulse pervades the lines of a poem, and to know whether this pulse matches the number of stresses in each line. In hexameter, each line has two sections, two breaths, each having four beats or pulses, only three of which are sounded. The pulse of a poem might easily escape my notice if I take my start with the dynamics of stress-unstress and long-short of the words. Missing the pulse might very well occur with verses in pentameter (e.g., Shakespeare's sonnets and John Keats' "Ode to Autumn"). While there are five stresses per line, per breath, I find that these verses only become musical when I honor the pulse of four beats (filled or not) that I can discern. The relationship between stresses and beats is clear in Hopkins' poem (above), but it's a bit trickier to discern in Shakespeare's "Ariel's Song," from *The Tempest*, I,II. (Note: a "burden" is a recurring refrain):

Full fathom five thy father lies:
Of his bones are coral made;
Those are pearls that were his eyes;
Nothing of him that doth fade
But doth suffer a sea-change
Into something rich and strange.
Sea nymphs hourly ring his knell:
Burden. Ding-dong.
Hark! now I hear them – Ding-dong bell.

Here, I soon realize that the whole song wants to move in a fluid (i.e., not rigid) pulse of four beats per line, where the last two lines together make eight beats. Clarifying the pulse, I find that it requires a bit of feeling-reflection to be certain of how lines 1, 2, 4 and 5 move; but my expression won't be truly musical without settling this.

In line 1, I discern five stresses, but I won't sound a five-beat pulse by mistake: I will seek out where the four beats are. When I find that "five" must fall on the second beat, I can feel "fathom" moving between it and the first beat. If I have any urge to make "thy" fall on the third beat, I ask: is the possessive, "thy," what matters in this image? No; to me, "father" is what matters. As I go, I mark the words with a superscript ^x for stresses (adding a dash for longer values, ^{x-}) and superscript [~] for unstresses.

Keeping the pulse in line 2, I easily allow "of" to fall on the first beat, especially because I notice that all of the other lines begin directly, with a stress on the first beat.

In line 4, "of" would naturally come on the second beat. Yet I hesitate to do this here because in recitation – and I don't know why – preferred practice is to tuck prepositions in as unstresses. But here, I sense a slight disturbance if I make "of" an additional unstress before "him." Why not let it be the stressed word? I have found that when I allow prepositions to receive the stress, a door can open in my feeling for a verse. So I come to: "xNothing xof him xthat doth xfade" But am I convinced? In all cases such as this, a study of the character of the sounding of the poem can guide my artistic judgment. Because I've taken my start by actually working on speaking the poem, I've already begun to notice the pileup of what I fondly call the '**resonators**' – voiced consonants that have duration. Beginning with line 1 I hear: **L th M V th th R L Z: V Z N Z R R L M; th Z R R L Z th W R Z Z** – and so on. Goodness! For me, this settles it: "of" falls on the second beat. Its 'f' sounding as **V** gains weight and the special relationship of possession (brought in line 2) is furthered. It happens that now the first and second stresses sound the vowel, **ũ**, which is soon echoed in unstressed "doth." I gain much by sounding the line this way, with a regular pulse. And then, in line 5, I clarify that "but" falls on the first beat, and "sea-change" falls on the third and fourth beats with no unstressed syllable between.

With the rhythmic structure clear, I now begin to learn the poem. With full voice, I give real expression to it, sinking into it as a concrete, rhythmic sound-phenomenon: I hear the pattern of the rhymes and feel myself sounding the changing vowels and consonants. I feel my way into the **sound-sculptures** of the words and I take note of sounds and patterns that repeat. Nothing in the poem remains abstract. I find that what Rudolf Steiner wished to "lay on [our] hearts" near the end of his lectures on speech eurythmy is true: before doing any eurythmy we must make "a

careful analysis" of the poem, of its various aspects, and "above all else" of the sounds it contains. This is what I am doing. (See *Eurythmy as Visible Speech, EVSp*, Lect. 15, 3/5 or so in.)

And when I'm ready, then comes the magic: I begin to fill the poem with my silent movement. I do this step by step, diligently, entering a profound process of discovery, and practicing something quite completely new, building up the skills of expression that I need as I go. I give the sounds movement-expression in stages, securing them as follows:

1a. Only the vowel of the syllables that fall on the four beats, expressed without reservation; then only the vowel of the syllables that sound during the offbeats, expressed subtly.

b. Both the main vowels and these others, with nuanced expression according to their rhythmic values and timing.

2a. The initial consonant or consonant clusters (e.g., **str**) of the syllables that belong to the main beats, without reservation; then those of the syllables that belong to the offbeats, more subtly (e.g., line 1: **F F F L; F th th th**).

b. Both the main initial consonants and these others, with contrasting expression according to their rhythmic values.

3a. The initial consonant(s) and vowel (or just initial vowel) of each main beat; then the same for the other syllables.

b. The initial consonant(s) and vowel of all of the syllables, expressing those of the main beats clearly, the others subtly.

4. The ending consonant or consonant clusters of the main syllables; then the same for the other syllables (e.g., line 1: **L V Z; M R**).

5. The vowel plus the consonant or consonants that follow it for the four main beats; the same for the other syllables.

6. Unfolding the gestures of all of the sounds in the syllables that fall on the main beats, in accord with their rhythmic values and the actual duration of the vowel, in context; then the same for the other syllables.

7. Unfolding two-syllable words, making the swift transition between where the first syllable ends and the next begins.

8. Doing two complete words in succession, expressing the special transition between them, which we deftly signal in our speech even when we seem to connect them seamlessly.

9. Doing whole lines and then the whole poem.

(Two people can share steps 1b., 2b. and 3b. – one taking the four main syllables and the other taking the lesser ones – to bring out the rich, rhythmic gesture-contrast even more.)

This is certainly a lot to do; and some of these steps will be a serious exercise in concentration (great!). But once I take hold of a poem in this way, day by day each aspect of my gesture-expression becomes increasingly differentiated and strong; sound-relationships sort themselves out and indispensable insights come (as discussed below). I'm also

blessed with the development of important and satisfying powers of feeling and discipline in unfolding the gestures.

I feel supported, knowing that Rudolf Steiner wanted us to develop thorough gesture-expression skills. He said, “Much study is required before one succeeds in expressing the succession of sounds, together with the indication of the logic of language, of the emotional content” (*EVSp*, Lect. 4, end). And it seems to me that he meant us to include all of the words in this “succession,” for he used “und” (and) to show how gesture-transitions are made (Lect. 4, 1/2 in). As recorded in *HNA* (Ch. 4, 7/8 in), Lory Maier-Smiths, Annemarie Dubach-Donath and Erna Wolfram van Deventer regularly practiced gestures and gesture-transitions. And later on, in her book, *The Basic Principles of Eurythmy* (Ch. VIII, 2/3 in), Annemarie Dubach-Donath wrote about the necessity of mastering common combinations of sounds. It’s high time that I did this; and my approach to “Ariel’s Song” spurs mastery of a number of common words.

So, what comes of this approach so far as I have found? Through steps 1 and 2, the drama of the changing vowels enters my awareness even more than when speaking the poem, and I feel every vowel within the forward-to-backward gesture dynamic. The repetition of *āi* (eye), *o*, *ū* (as in “pearl”) and *ū* sings strongly in my movement. I notice particularly how *i* or *ī* on the third beat precedes *é* or *è* on the fourth beat four times: “sea-change,” “rich ... strange,” “his knell,” “hear them.” When “ding-dong” sounds *i-ô* instead and then shifts to *i-ô-è*, I’m quietly struck by it. And of course, through step 2 my experience of the alliterations as gestures deepens. I feel the insistence of *F*, the resonance of *voiced th*, and *F-th* repeating in line 1. *Z* in the first three lines changes to an accumulation of *S* in lines 5-7. In lines 6 and 7, *R* builds upon the *i-é* pattern. If the *T* in “strange” sounds as *tch*, it links with “rich.” I feel strongly the repetitions of *D* – “ding-dong” – and of the *H* in “hark” and “hear.” I’m steadily entering this soundscape.

Once I’ve become fluent with steps 1 and 2, I approach step 3. And now comes a breakthrough in relation to the time element of my gesture-expression: I suddenly become fully conscious of the fact that the *vowels* are the heart of each syllable, and that their sounding occurs in coordination with the pulse; and further, that they govern the durations, long and short, of the syllables. These are mighty, revolutionary revelations; and they transform everything in my approach to my work. *I now understand that these initial consonant gestures must be completed just prior to each vowel gesture, like grace notes before musical tones.* The consonant doesn’t activate on the beat. In its entirety, it acts before the beat; not overstepping, it ushers the vowel in, which alone appears on the beat.* I must acquire an amazing sense of timing in order to meet this reality. And each consonant has its own requirements: I can interpose *B*

quickly, but I can’t rush the blue prelude of *P*. With these revelations in mind, I need to go back and practice step 2 again. *(Even the ‘letters’ of occult script are not blended – see *Occult Science*, Ch. V, section five, 2/5 in.)

And now, I also grasp two other important facts: the vowels which sound on the main beats give the pulse its integrity, and the lesser vowels on the offbeats establish the rhythm. *Without these lesser syllables, there is no rhythm: all is the same plodding pulse.* There is no real music in my expression unless I include these lesser syllables – and when I do include them, all of the diversity of rhythms that I lived with in my first two years of eurythmy school come to life. (Note: I recall that Rudolf Steiner said that the Angels only perceive our syllables. And in *Poetry and the Art of Speech*, Lect. VII, “The Syllable: Quantity, Meter, Weight,” he said that the “Spiritual world goes only as far as the syllable, not as far as the word.”)

When I turn to step 4, I open a new trove of revelations. I become aware that certain consonants behave differently at the end of a word or before another consonant than they do before a vowel; and in fact, I must handle them differently. In the word, “full,” the *L* doesn’t complete and release to the vowel like it does in the word, “lies.” Likewise, in “bell,” it doesn’t release. In both words it lolls in itself – suiting these images well. The *R* by itself would run on and on once it’s set in motion. If it doesn’t need to release to a vowel, I must stop it, or another consonant must curtail it. In “pearls,” the *L* catches and curtails it – but then the *L* itself is kept from lolling when *Z* summarily quiets it. With this double rounding-off after the perfect *P* and *ū*, “pearls” is an amazing sound-picture. In a similar way, the *N* in “bones,” “into,” “change,” “and strange” is prevented from releasing by *Z*, *T*, *J* and *D* – yet my feeling affirms: it is still *N*. I feel how this held *N* resonates with the repetitions of *ng* in the poem, too. Then with the *T* at the end of “that” in line 4 and “but” in line 5, I discover that it, too, is curtailed: the *D* of then next word, “doth,” halts it. But none of these curtailed soundings can disquiet me when I have the ability to bring forth gestures from the gesture-impulses; for the impulses themselves will reveal to me the gesture-expressions of each of them.

This intimate oneness between the sound and the gesture is what I was pointing to in my article on the vowels (spring 2018). This is why the diacritics that I use are only inexact reminders. When I find English *D* to be heavier than German *D*, I’m also likely to find that its gesture-impulse and gesture are just a bit different from what appears in Rudolf Steiner’s Figure for *D*. The International Phonetic Alphabet can’t really help me with these nuances: I must speak each sound I encounter accurately and thereby work to perceive its actual gesture-impulse. *Meeting in this foundation of fact is what will unite eurythmists and speakers.*

At this stage I'm beginning to pay close attention to the sounds and their gestures in yet another way. I ask: "Are my gestures distinct? Will the onlooker be confused and mistake one for another?" My conviction is, that if I make gestures that appear much the same during differing sounds, the onlookers will not be able to make sense of my expression – albeit that this 'making sense' works below the level of their consciousness. Dr. Steiner advised Lory to bear this in mind.* He affirmed to her that *i* could be expressed with arms outstretched to the right and left; but he pointed out that even though the physical body should 'disappear' in eurythmy, the onlooker sees the cross, *é*, of the human upright with outstretched arms; and this visual impression conflicts with the gesture-expression. In like manner, if my arms are open, the visual impression is always going to be *ah*. In "Ariel's Song," I meet with a number of potential gesture-confusions, especially due to proximity to each other: *oo* ("full") – *ü*; *M* – *V*; *B* – *o*; *B* – *K*; *R* – *L* and quite a few more. I've found that my ability to differentiate the gestures for the onlooker depends entirely upon my access to the gesture-impulses themselves and my faithful manifestation of their characteristics and colors. Then the exact manner of their expression is nuanced and I have many options. With these I can make my intentions clear. *(See in *Eurythmy: Its Birth and Development*, GA 277, end-note 62, p. 208; English edition, Anastasi Ltd., 2002.)

In coming to steps 5 through 9, I want to share that I've found vowel-to-consonant transitions less challenging than consonant-to-vowel transitions. But in both cases, patiently entering the gesture-impulse of each one in turn is what helps the most.* When I leave off with the first impulse, the next impulse – when I feel it truly – will guide me, show me, how it will begin from wherever I am physically. This means that the impulse of the *artistic* expression is the absolute source that drives, determines and informs *the technique*. All technical impulses external to the artistic experience and expression are excluded. I believe that this is what Rudolf Steiner pointed to in his report on his lectures on eurythmy as visible speech (see News Sheet Nr. 28, July 20, 1924 – usually found in editions of *EVSp*). As I become familiar with a sequence of transitions, I naturally begin to anticipate the next gesture, just as I do in speaking: when I speak *B* it is always *B*, but it allows each of the vowels follow it easily. If I do steps 1 and 2 well, then I will be giving plenty of attention to bringing forth each gesture-impulse clearly and fully, becoming skilled in carrying out a nuanced expression of them according to their rhythmic values. All of this holds me in good stead; and I make sure that none of this vitality shall be lost as I work on the forming of words, transitions between words and lines, and then the whole poem. *The secret is my instant and absolute change of consciousness from one gesture-impulse to the*

next, and, of course, my capacity to manifest that change throughout my being. *(Note: this is not at all the same as patiently rehearsing the learned archetypal gestures in sequence, to imprint them into our movement memory.)

Before now, certain words – for instance 'light' and 'night' – were particularly frustrating for me. This was so much so, that I (like many others) simply ignored the *ai*, and appeared to express *ah* instead. Now, I simply set to work with my new skills: I enter each gesture-impulse in succession. Because the first sound, *L* or *N*, is an initial consonant, it releases to the vowel; so in my movement, in practice, I complete the gesture. Then I inwardly shift to the gesture-impulse of *ai*. From where I left *L* or *N*, the *ai* impulse will take over and lead me in expressing it ... and likewise will *T* lead me. With *ai* appearing as the heart of my gesture-picture – not the *ah* that used to be there – I can finally feel and show the sense of something subtly alive within the phenomena of light and the night. With great relief, I find that sculpting words in nuanced expression is only difficult if I'm impatient or I stray from the gesture-impulses or I'm not yet fluent with commonly-occurring transitions. I now have a path. I know the path.

I want to share that my creation of sound-pictures has been helped greatly as a result of experiencing strongly the gesture-impulses of *i* and *ī*. When these take hold of me as genuine vertical stretching – and feeling the movement of *ī* as brighter, more toward yellow, than *i* – I'm freed from the 'archetypal' arm movements. Experiencing these vowels through my whole being, they can sing out their rhythmic durations in whatever manner befits their context.

When all of these experiences from within enable me to form whole words with increasing confidence, with the vowel singing out as the heart of each syllable, it comes home to me how the consonants clothe the vowels before and after, relieving their nakedness. Maybe I can understand Rudolf Steiner's description of the consonants as our "apology" for our sounding of the vowels as expressions of *inner* (spiritual) experience while engaged in earthly affairs ... yet he also said that in eurythmy we should make our expression of the vowels – which are the musical aspect – as long as possible.* With the vowels at the core of my new process, this I can easily do, more and more. *(*Eurythmy as Visible Singing*, Lect. 5, 1/3 in; Lect. 6, 6/7 in.)

In closing, I'd like to add that I believe that the onlooker's greatest joy would be to witness the speaker and eurythmist in a unison of rhythmic expression of audible and silent speaking, having rehearsed as an intimate duo. It must be a great joy for a speaker to meet a eurythmist in a vibrant unity of rhythmic expression, too. And I know that it would be a great joy for me if, in due time, I am ready for the collaborative work of performance.* I now know how to work toward that! *(I have begun that joyful collaboration!)