

“The Word of my Feet”: The Three Parts of Walking

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“The art is in the technique”

In the detailed report that I wrote and submitted to my colleagues for posting on the EANA website at Michaelmas 2014, *The Speech Sound Etudes: Feeling the Gestures and Finding the Figures*,* I mentioned that during my preparations for renewed work in eurythmy one of my goals was to be able to walk and to move in all directions easily and frontally, and that in the fundamental act of walking I had found truth in what Rudolf Steiner had said, that “the art is in the technique.” He had stated this in the report he wrote for the “*Nachrichtenblatt*” (the “News Sheet,” No. 28, July 20, 1924), concerning the series of lectures he had just given on *Eurythmy as Visible Speech (EVSp)*. His report appears in English editions of *EVSp*. Here is some of what he said there about art and technique. This is so important:

The eurythmist must devote themselves to the gesture down to the smallest detail, so that their performance really becomes the self-understood expression of the life of soul. They can only give form to the gesture in its fullness when the smallest detail comes first to consciousness, that it may later become the habitual expression of the soul-being.

... From eurythmy one can learn to value the technique of art; but from eurythmy one can indeed also become deeply imbued with the way in which the technical must put aside everything external and be completely taken hold of by the soul, if the truly artistic is to come to life. People who are active in any sphere of art often speak of how the soul must work behind the technique; the truth is that it is in the technique that the soul must work.

And so it is with three-part walking. I’d like to elaborate on this because of its power to lead over into how “the word of my feet” – as pointed to in *The Eurythmy Meditation* given to us by Rudolf Steiner (see below) – can make a clearer and more compelling contribution to artistic expression in eurythmy. I have found a new world opening up to me as my feet ‘speak,’ as I let what I hear guide my understanding and my work. *(You may inquire for this and for *The Speech Sound Etudes: Revelations of the Logos* at the Rudolf Steiner Library in Hudson NY or the Turose Gift Shop in Ghent NY.)

The deeds of the moving foot

To begin with, I discovered that by following the deeds of my moving foot and by describing these anew, the rhythmic

dialogue it carries out in relation to the earth has come more strongly to the fore in my awareness. Rather than saying to myself, “Lift-Carry-Place,” which describes only my part in the step, I began to say, “Leave-Free-Meet,” to acknowledge my relationship and dialogue with the earth. Indeed, it is surprising to consider that at every moment in my walking, the ground does not cave in under my step; how would I ever manage if it did? And as my awareness of this continual dialogue and support has grown, so too has my sensing and knowledge grown regarding the distinct character of the three parts of each step. And along with this, the moment of transition between each of the three phases has appeared more clearly as the minor miracle in inward experience and outer expression that it is.

The deeds of the ground foot

However, despite having a clearer experience of these transitions, I still found it all too easy to transfer my weight from one foot to the other too soon, disrupting the flow. Could I find the means to move through the step evenly? Indeed I could: by inquiring into the deeds of my ‘ground foot,’ as I now call it. Here, there are also three parts. Moving forward, the flow through the ground foot is: “Heel-Arch-Toes” (the reverse when moving backward). Giving attention to the ground foot in this way has stirred remarkable perceptions: there is an intimacy of gesture in what my ground foot is doing. Considering the number of bones the foot has, it is not surprising that extremely subtle experiences of movement through the foot can be had while walking, in this case through the length of the foot. As I mentioned in endnote 14 of my above-mentioned report, *The Speech Sound Etudes: Feeling the Gestures and Finding the Figures*, we learn to walk when we are too young to know of such possibilities. But as adults, we can cultivate this intimacy of gesture on the part of the ground foot in its dialogue with the earth. And not just that: I’ve found that the ground foot and the moving foot are also in dialogue. The subtle flow of the ground foot and the overt flow of the moving foot are tethered together beautifully, as when eurythmists move together in tighter and looser curves simultaneously. Here, in the feet, Arch in the one speaks to Free in the other.

To bear witness to these dynamics more carefully, one can slow down this flow and these intimate gestures by dividing each part into a duple or even triple rhythm. For this, one can count out subdivisions to the three beats of the step like musicians do, until a clear sense for the flow is established. One step per measure of three beats would be:

Duple division: “Heel and Arch and Toe and...”

Triple division: “Heel and-a Arch and-a Toe and-a...”

Emphasis reveals the qualities of each phase

However, I still felt disturbances in the unfolding of my steps within the element of time, still shifting my weight too soon. So I began to emphasize each part by dwelling on it longer, consciously and actively unfolding that part over time. Taking the first two beats for the emphasized part and only half a beat each for the other two parts during the third beat works well. The counting for emphasis on 'leave' would be:

Count: [3 and] "1 and 2 and 3 and ..."
 "Leave and 2 and free - meet ..."

Emphasis on 'free' or 'meet' requires sensing an upbeat (a count of "3 and") before the count of 1:

[leave and] "Free and 2 and meet - leave ..."
 [leave-free] "Meet and 2 and leave - free ..."

As an unanticipated gift from this emphasis practice I've found that the distinct character of each part has become quite striking. For instance, a quality of desire seems to well up over the lengthened duration of the Leave, and at a certain point it must break out and lead over to the Free portion. And during the lengthened Free movement, the sense of possibility of intention, to be given from within from a significant, thoughtful process, comes forth – the careful consideration of the direction of the step. And the placing of the foot during the extra-long Meet (toes first as usual) feels full of determination; and with no qualms and no introspection, the intent is carried out thoroughly. These differences and the skill that we can develop through deliberate emphasis on them, to become steeped in them, can form the basis for an artistic technique and expression that streams right through our feet; that conveys and supports such things as the differences between the lyrical, epic and dramatic styles in poetry.

We can change the focus of this emphasis exercise so that we dwell longer on one or another of the phases of the ground foot instead of the moving foot, to know its contribution. We simply substitute Heel-Arch-Toes for Leave-Free-Meet (reversing the words to go backward).

The sensation of the unperturbed streaming of weight as it moves through the length of the ground foot in its relation to the earth is beautiful. At this point in my experience of this 'music' of my feet, I'm sure that outer musical accompaniment for walking could only obstruct these delicate perceptions and this beauty. The words I've provided for myself and share with you now are for the sole purpose of drawing attention to the delicate details of these subtle motions made by the foot. By bringing these to consciousness we can illumine them, to "become deeply imbued" with them and make them part of "the self-understood expression of the life of soul" in our eurythmy work. And the point is to hone our ability to "put aside everything external" to the actual facts of what unfolds. (See the *Nachrichtenblatt* cited above for the rest of that passage.)

And, as a bit of an aside here, my work with the large body of speech sound etude-studies which I've written in response to one of Rudolf Steiner's earliest instructions to Lori Maier-Smiths is for the same purpose: to "put aside everything external"; to create a means of working that would exclude mental pictures from any and all sources that dictate what each speech sound is supposed to be like; and instead, to create an ever-fresh means of gaining highly differentiated and concentrated perceptions of each sound's nature at work in our language – experiences which cannot be acquired very well through poems alone. Through the etudes, my perceptions and insights find corroboration and/or correction regarding what rightly belongs to each sound as its distinct impulses and what its activity in our language really is. I use the Figures that Rudolf Steiner drew for us near the end of his life as a means of corroboration and guidance for myself, also. So long as I have not diligently and securely raised my knowing activity to the higher levels of cognition that he had clearly achieved – Imagination, Inspiration and Intuition (see his *Occult Science*, GA 13, Ch. 5), I know that I must regard his drawings as guiding supports for my work, to keep myself on track.

Walking sideways and diagonally

Maintaining a frontal orientation to the onlooker is somewhat challenging to do when walking diagonally, but it is especially challenging to maintain in the sideways direction. I began to take a closer look at these difficulties in light of the possibilities of my physical body. To move sideways one cannot do otherwise than pass one foot in front of or behind the other foot. The feet are longer front-to-back than side-to-side so we can't even approximate moving a straight line with our feet as we can when walking forward and backward. Going sideways, we most naturally end up doing an ugly zigzag, as one foot lands more forward and the other more backward; or we go more so on tiptoe, to avoid placing the whole length of the foot down; or we resign ourselves to the expedience of turning ourselves or at least turning our lower body Egyptian style and pointing our feet in the sideways direction. But I've found it impossible to experience and express a truly leftward or rightward movement so long as I turn like this, depriving both myself and the onlooker of that experience. In actuality, if I turn to move in the sideways direction, I express forwardness in that direction; and I express a conflicted direction if part of me turns and part of me doesn't.

Here is what I've discovered: this turning isn't necessary. If I keep myself centered between my 'front-ness' and my 'back-ness,' my weight can pass from side-to-side through my forward-placed foot via the heel when it serves as the ground foot, and side-to-side through my backward-placed foot via the toes area when it is the ground foot. Beautiful! And then my artistic sense and inner experience

of the direction manifests freely through my whole being, and my experience of my direction is supported and affirmed by the “word of my feet” through their contribution of a right technique.

Counting for the three phases of the **sideways** step focusses what the ground foot does, and differs for the front-placed ground-foot and the back-placed foot, as they alternate. Going *rightward*, the right foot serves as the back-placing foot; the left then passes in front (and the reverse for leftward):

Right foot initiates: “Leave – Free – Meet”
 THEN Right stays: “Big-toe – Toes-arch – Little-toe”
 THEN Left stays: “Left-heel – Mid-heel – Right-heel”

After achieving a modest mastery of this technique with the ground foot – of feeling the ground with my whole foot while nevertheless keeping my weight centered – I began to do the emphasis exercise with my moving foot (or my ground foot) in this sideways direction also; lengthening each phase in turn. I’ve found it a great deal easier to move sideways now than I ever have before. With good attention, our feet and body are in fact quite able to do this; it works and it has grace in it. I find that the strong, grounded sideways flow of movement through the ground foot helps keep my feet from turning to the side too much.

The **diagonal** is easier than sideways because we can usually pass one foot in front of or behind the other with less sense of zigzagging; but grounding the flow helps. The movement flows both sideways and lengthwise along a diagonal through the ground foot. For the ground foot in a right-forward diagonal direction (reverse for a left-backward diagonal):

Right foot initiates: “Leave – Free – Meet”
 THEN Right stays: “Left-heel – Arch – Little-toe...”
 THEN Left stays: “Left-heel – Arch – Big-toe...”
 And again, after achieving relative ease with this, I began to do the emphasis exercise.

Greater skill in walking supports our work

There’s such vitality and sweetness in this grounded work of the feet. Our increasing mastery with it can give us capabilities that I know I want to be ready to use, and it can help us in matters of expression that might otherwise suffer some neglect. For example, when making forms the forward, backward, diagonal and sideways movements can convey the active, passive and/or duration quality of verbs. Side-ways movements can show correspondences between things, such as with metaphors or dialogue (see toward the end of Lecture 9 in *EVSp*). The simpler skills of walking in the straight directions becomes intensely malleable for moving circles and curves, the direction changing every moment. And when the transitions between lines and curves is deeply

felt and purposefully expressed, these can likewise be more deeply experienced by the onlooker.

Through the increasing skill of our feet, our ability to remain frontal to the onlooker can strengthen and we will more readily sense it if we turn away. When it becomes a free deed to turn away or not, it can become a conscious and meaningful choice if and when we depart from frontal and take leave of our onlooker. This matters, because through our frontal and open orientation we invite the onlooker to see what we feel,* and to see and feel as a participant in the experience, not merely as a spectator of what we do, as in dance and mime. Therefore, being able to move in all directions easily and frontally is not just of benefit to ourselves; it is a real blessing to the onlooker, because it means that we will find it easy to honor and maintain this precious connection and this relationship through which so much good can come. *(See Rudolf Steiner’s lecture, “Veils, Dresses and Colors,” Dornach, August 4, 1922, ~ 6 pages in; found at the back of *EVSp*, 1984 edition.)

The Eurythmy Meditation

I seek within
 The Working of Creative Forces,
 The Living of Creative Powers.
 It tells me
 Of Earth’s Might of Weight
 Through the word of my feet,
 It tells me
 Of Air’s Forces of Form
 Through the singing of my hands,
 It tells me
 Of Heaven’s Power of Light
 Through the sensing of my head,
 How the World in MAN [the human being]
 Speaks, sings, senses.

– Rudolf Steiner (rendered by Kate Reese Hurd)

Ich suche im Innern
 Der schaffenden Kräfte Wirken,
 Der schaffenden Mächte Leben.
 Es sagt mir
 Der Erde Schweremacht
 Durch meiner Füße Wort,
 Es sagt mir
 Der Lüfte Formgewalt
 Durch meiner Hände Singen,
 Es sagt mir
 Des Himmels Lichteskraft
 Durch meines Hauptes Sinnen,
 Wie die Welt im Menschen
 Spricht, singt, sinnt.