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From Total-Body-Connectivity into Orff-Schulwerk Principles

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Introduction

As Orff-Schulwerk practitioners we are aware of the role of our bodies in our daily practice of connecting music, movement and speech: playing instruments (our own body instrument and Orff instruments) from sensory awareness (especially touch, auditory and kinaesthetic senses), performing a poem based on the vitality of the body, dancing in sync with our inner pulse - the marriage of movement and music rooted in our bodies feels natural.

My personal fascination for the importance of the body in Orff-Schulwerk encouraged me to take further training in a dance practice called *Laban-Bartenieff Movement Studies* - a somatic practice focusing on the value of a connected the body in everyday life and dance. Inspired by this training, I started to integrate the so-called six *Fundamental Patterns of Total-Body-Connectivity* (Hackney 2002) into my Orff-Schulwerk teaching. The term *Total-Body-Connectivity* refers to the concrete sensation, that body parts are not acting separately in their exertion of certain movement tasks, but that the whole body participates in any single movement and creates the experience of constant relationship of connected parts. By “tuning“ the bodies of my students with short sequences based on this principle, they started to flow with ease into speech, song, dance, instrumental play, drawing and scenic play.

As I developed various ideas to root creative tasks in this practice of a connected body, a highly inspiring insight started to emerge in this long-term practical research: In the process of moving I recognized that those principles we base our artistic-pedagogical work on in our Orff practice can be experienced in specific fundamental patterns of Total Body Connectivity. To go even further, they emerge from deep within a connected body. Being aware that these insights arise from practical experience, have a very personal “colouring“ and are open to further development, I am happy to share my personal body-related view on Orff-Schulwerk principles and hope to give inspiration for interested readers.

As the topic is very much based on body and imagery, I would like to remind you in the beginning of some Elemental thoughts by Carl Orff, leading us directly into the discussion of the main themes.

To the Roots: the Elemental

Carl Orff’s thoughts about Orff-Schulwerk and *the Elemental* are expressed in words of powerful imagery – “... a wild flower ... always growing, always flowing ... “ (Orff, 1963, as cited in: Haselbach 2011, p. 134), “... near the earth, natural, physical ...“ (ibid., 144) - remind me of the four elements our body materialises and expresses.

The Elemental has body. The Elemental is body. The body is the root of music and movement emerging together.

Emphasising the power of images connected to the body leads me to some essential thoughts about the “Body Home“.

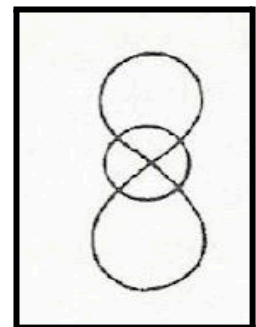
The experience and recognition of ourselves in our world is dependent on a body that is able to sense and move. By challenging children to explore playfully different spatial directions with activities of various body parts, they experience that body parts are relating to each other through a lively body centre. In this way they develop a strong and clear image of a connected body and the feeling of a “home”, from where they can connect to the outside world.

Irmgard Bartenieff (1900 - 1981)

The term “body home” was, amongst other somatic practitioners, used by Irmgard Bartenieff, a student of movement researcher, dancer and choreographer Rudolf v. Laban. Being familiar with Laban’s concept about human movement expression she recognized in her daily therapeutic work the importance of internal body connectivity in order to make movement alive in all the possibilities of human interconnection: self to self, self to other, and self to world.

Bartenieff also observed babies in their first year of life and noticed that they progress through stages in their movement development during which they practise movement patterns repeatedly. This patterning follows a plan set in the neuromuscular system. If conditions are supportive, the child will advance through these patterns and develop in this way those inner connectivities supporting functional and expressive movement later in life.

The developmental sequence of these patterns is presented in the following paragraphs. In order to identify the specific connectivity of a certain pattern, Bartenieff used the figure of eight (which serves as a symbol for the body and as a metaphor for the connective movement flow) and additional lines and circles. The graphic on the right shows the breath pattern with the circle in the centre as a symbol for the experience of breathing.



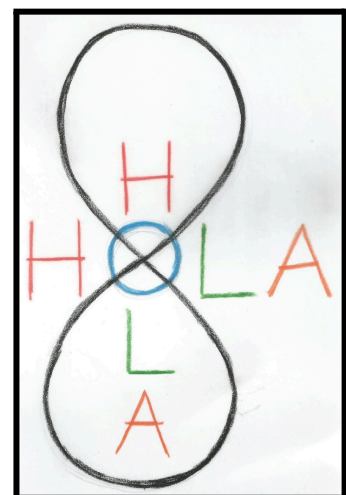
Fundamental patterns and principles of Orff-Schulwerk

The following paragraphs are dedicated to the six mentioned patterns. Each of them will be described in its specific movement and meaning emerging from its underlying connectivity. Based on that description I develop my thoughts about the integration with Orff-Schulwerk.

Breath

Breath is the source of being and doing. Breathing allows a quiet space of mental and physical rest. Being attentive to the breath is essential for creative thought and action to evolve, the “doing”:

“Music begins inside human beings ... The starting point is one’s own stillness, listening to oneself, the ‘being ready for music’, listening to one’s own heartbeat and breathing.” (Orff, 1932, as cited in: Haselbach, 2011, p. 66)



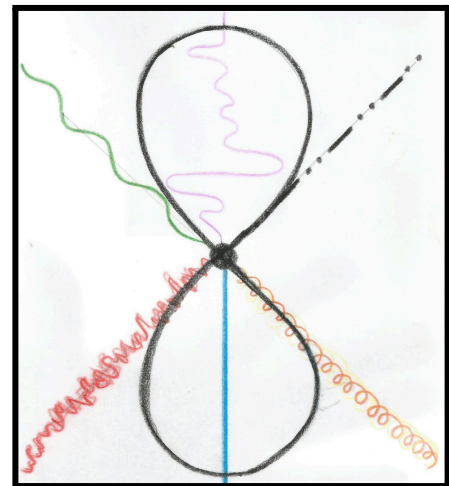
Orff-Schulwerk: Aesthetic Attitude

There is an intrinsic attitude in the breath pattern: “HOLA” - opening our sensory antennae and welcoming the present moment in yielding to our inner rhythms, to the ground, to an object or an instrument, to humans, from where sound and movement evolve.

Core-Distal

The self-aware filling and emptying of our breathing progresses into a movement opening out into the world and returning back into our body centre. Reaching out and pulling in, pouring out and taking in, giving and taking. The many variations of the pattern of opening and closing transmit the feeling of connection with the outside world. Recognizable in the basic pattern of the infant thrusting out its limbs and pulling them back again and in the young child’s body-centre initiated whole-body-movements, it gives an experience of wholeness and integration.

By being in touch with our core as our body centre moving our distal ends of arms, legs, head and tail, we might also experience, that each limb moves individually and differently from others, but is still connected to all the others through this strong core. A sensation of individuation and differentiation of infinite possibilities might emerge in this centre-lead integrating movement of our limbs.

*Orff-Schulwerk: Music is an integral term*

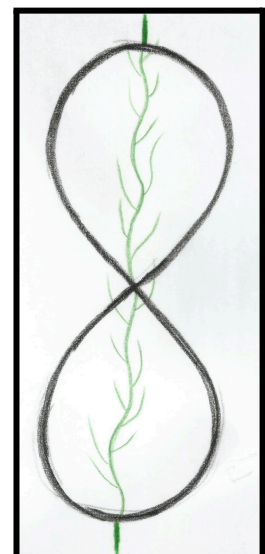
From a state of yielding we unfold our individual expression of sound and movement in creating a melody, a dance phrase, a spoken line or a line becoming a drawing from our core and inner rhythm. We integrate music, movement and speech through a lively body centre and refine our personal expression in these art forms: Integration and differentiation.

Spinal Pattern (Head-Tail-Connectivity)

Differentiation progresses and curiosity comes into play, forming over time the infant’s wave-like spine. Our eyes and ears, nose and mouth balance in our head on one end of our spine and explore the world with movements, which travel through our whole wavy spine. The spine indulges in a flowing movement quality and identifies naturally with the flow of imagination and creativity. This pattern is not about accomplishing tasks, but about getting fluid and creative from our individual spine.

Orff-Schulwerk: Improvisation

Sensing, playing, exploring and improvising, creating and forming are those activities we encourage from the very beginning in our students. We stir their imaginative minds and bodies with different impulses in

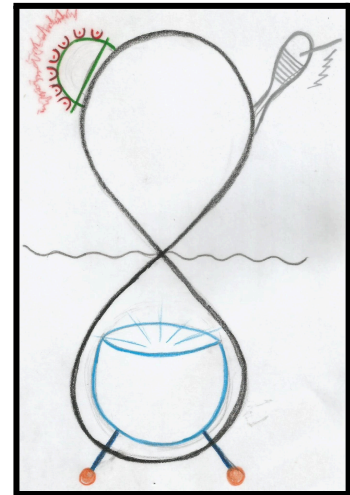


order to get their flow of creativity going. The fluidity of the spine can support this process.

Homolog Pattern (Upper-Lower-Connectivity)

In the Homolog Pattern the lower body coordinates with the upper body, mostly symmetrically through the centre. The first crawling of the baby is a homolog push of both lower arms to move from the spot. Later it moves in this pattern from sitting into standing.

The development from the spinal to the homolog pattern is essential. We need hands and feet to travel through space and to reach out and realise our intentions in action. In this pattern further differentiation happens. Body parts develop their function in dealing with the world: The lower body supports locomotion to get us where we want to go. This frees the upper body to create relationships with the world (emotionally and practically). This pattern is now about accomplishing tasks.



Orff-Schulwerk: Skill-building

The creative power dwelling in our spine needs to be complimented by the craft of hands and feet to polish our artistic expression. Due to the development of fine-motor skills, coordination, concentration and cognitive understanding the older child is able to differentiate more and more their expression in instrumental play and dance. Their craft develops in the process of music and dance making:

“The concept of Orff and Keetman is learning music by making music, in contrast to the traditional way of learning in order to be able to make music.” (Hartmann, 2021, p. 28)

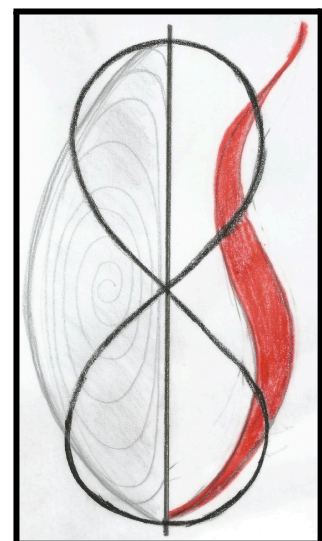
Homo-Lateral Pattern (Body Half Connectivity)

In the homo-lateral pattern body halves start to coordinate with the spine as their middle-line. The contrasting but complimenting functions of stability and mobility of both halves can be observed in the baby’s homo-lateral crawling as it shifts its weight on one body half in order to reach out or pull something in with the other one.

Orff-Schulwerk: Polarity

The essence of this pattern can be explored and further developed using the principle of polarity: two poles complimenting and balancing, each aiming to create a whole experience.

In the Orff practice we “compose” sessions along methodical-didactic principles based on polarities such as process and product, structure and freedom, individual and group, imitation and improvisation.



Also teaching material can offer contrasting and complimenting sensations and discoveries like wooden/metal instruments, objects of different textures, contrasts in space/time/dynamics, shapes, or contrasting sensory inputs.

Contra-Lateral-Pattern (Diagonal Connectivity)

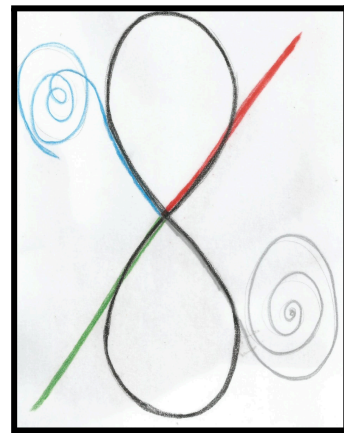
In the contra-lateral pattern, body-halves coordinate by crossing over. This pattern is leading directly into three-dimensional movement which we can experience by focussing on our everyday walk: a mingling of up and down, right and left, front and back is initiated through the force of an action transmitted diagonally through the core of the body.

“These contra-connections enable our brains to play effectively between right and left brain functioning, connecting the symbolic and the analytic, ..., feeling and form, while also connecting grounding with reach into the world.” (Hackney, 2002, p. 198)

Orff-Schulwerk: The spiralling principle

In the contra-lateral pattern the body moves in highly orchestrated ways with intention in space, time, energy, shape and relationship. Movement is complex. So is Orff-Schulwerk, inviting us to explore its complexity by creating connections of and between principles, media, activities, themes, people of all cultures and abilities. And we do this again and again, developing and evolving into life.

“We spend a class period circling around going nowhere at all - but with such pleasure and delight in the journey!” (Goodkin, 2004, p. 50)



Example

With the following example I would like to give a little taster of a teaching session with a group of musicians at the Conservatory in Innsbruck, studying Early Music and taking the Module *Historical Dance* as part of their Curriculum. I base our study of the 15th century Italian Renaissance Dance *Rostiboli Gioiosa* on some chosen fundamental patterns that support the movement style and step study. The dance description and score of *Rostiboli* can be found in the first dance treatise from the 15th century (1455) by Domenico da Piacenza (*De arte saltandi et choreas ducendi*).

As iconography from the 15th century in Italy shows a very clear preference of the homo-lateral pattern (as it can be seen in Botticelli's *Primavera*), my aim is to incorporate this body posture into the movement of the basic steps of *Sempio* and *Doppio*, giving the dancers a feeling of leaning into one body half on each step pattern. By looking at details of *Primavera* with my students, they also find words for an imagined movement of the graces: lightness, rising and falling like a gondola on the waves, grace.

Based on these descriptions we approach the dance through chosen fundamental patterns, which can support these qualities of lightness and flow which will in turn support the learning of steps in a body-half connectivity and of further presentation skills later.

Sensory Awareness and Exploration

Breath: Yielding with our feet to the ground, we connect with our breath and continue into drawing its phrase into the air, experiencing a rising and falling movement. The breath sounds. Singing the melody of the dance (Bassadanza: Part one) connects with the movement flow.

Core-Distal: As we aim in our later performance of the dance for a clear connection of arms and legs into the body centre, we awaken the core-distal connectivity with elbow circles in different spatial dimensions. We sense the movement initiation of the elbow through our core into the whole body. All six distal ends start to move. By passing the leading role to other body parts, the *spinal and homolog patterns* come into play.

Improvisation

I play a recorded version of „*Rostiboli*“. The music of the dance consists of three different parts easy to distinguish because of their specific rhythms and tempi: Bassadanza (slow 6/4), Saltarello (quick 6/4) and Piva (quick 6/8). Students improvise to the Bassadanza based on previous exploration of movement qualities and supporting patterns and embody the new parts of the music spontaneously, recuperating from the previous slow movements with quicker steps, jumps and staccato gestures.

Learning the Bassadanza-Section

Building on the sensation of rising and falling led by the in- and out breath, I demonstrate the step *Sempio* with a clear leaning into the hip of one body half and then complementing it on the other side. Students join in. We need a clear focus in the body to get used to this unusual way of stepping. Singing supports the movement flow. We learn the *Doppio* step (based on the same principle) and develop individual combinations of the steps again to the music before learning the sequence given by Domenico.

In later sessions we add the choreography of the Saltarello and Piva section and experience - in performing the whole dance - different movement qualities (based on embodied connectivities) in a lively dialogue with our dance partner in complete synchronicity with the music.

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Angelika Wolf is a movement and dance practitioner. She obtained her Master of Arts Degree at the Carl Orff-Institute in “Elemental Music and Dance Pedagogy” specialising in Dance. She has completed further teacher training and education in different fields of dance (Modern, Contemporary, Baroque Dance and Laban Bartenieff Movement Studies) and in somatic practices (Hatha Yoga, Franklin-Method); and has continued her development in the artistic and pedagogical field of movement/dance and music. She is mainly based in Austria and works for various pedagogic universities, the University “Mozarteum”, and the Music Conservatoire Feldkirch.