

Dance Becoming as "Event Sequence"

-- A Study of the Choreographic Paradigm Based on Rhythmic Score and Pulse-Fissure

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Abstract

This paper takes the choreographic practice of the dance work *Pulse and Fissure* as its research object and investigates how the body accomplishes movement generation under constantly shifting conditions of time, space, and dynamics, centering on the "rhythmic score" as a generative rule for movement. Drawing on Deleuze's philosophy of "becoming" and the creative concepts of John Cage and Merce Cunningham, this paper proposes a five-step operational principle composed of fundamental pulse, temporal fissure, spatial-dynamic mapping, perceptual dislocation, and execution logic. Through choreographic experiments, it analyzes the changing process of dancers' bodily responses following the intervention of the rule. The study finds that during training, dancers undergo a dynamic process of disruption of existing habits, formation of secondary habits, and subsequent readjustment. Thus, the rhythmic score not only provides a new method for dance choreography but also offers new perspectives for the practical study of bodily becoming mechanisms, holding considerable reference value for the exploration of movement organization in contemporary dance creation.

Keywords

Event sequence, rhythmic score, pulse-fissure.

1. Introduction

In contemporary dance choreography, two opposing modes of working have long coexisted. One relies on fixed movement sequences, achieving the unity and stability of the work through repetitive training; the other employs chance mechanisms to disrupt bodily habits, thereby obtaining open-ended movement generation [1]. Yet the former tends to lead to bodily rigidity, while the latter easily slips into arbitrariness due to a lack of constraints. How to establish a new generative mechanism between fixed structure and complete randomness has thus become an important issue in contemporary dance choreography [1]. Relevant practices in twentieth-century experimental art offer inspiration for addressing this issue. John Cage liberated temporal structure from traditional meter, making time itself an independent structure; Merce Cunningham reorganized the relationships among movement, space, and time through chance operations [2][3]. It should be noted, however, that Cunningham's chance mechanism was not rule-free improvisation, but chance operations carried out under rigorous structural conditions [3]. Meanwhile, Gilles Deleuze's concept of the "fissure", proposed in *Difference and Repetition*, provides a theoretical perspective for understanding "how difference is generated within repetition" [4].

Drawing on Cage's concept of independent time, Cunningham's rule-based chance mechanism, and Deleuze's thinking on the "fissure," this paper proposes the choreographic method of the Rhythmic Score and defines it as an Operational A Priori. Through the choreographic experiment of *Pulse and Fissure*, this paper verifies its effectiveness and observes: when the

body no longer relies on predetermined movement forms but turns toward responding to rhythmic pulses and temporal fissures, how do dancers produce new modes of movement organization, and how does this mode transform bodily perception, movement continuity, and the logic of dance becoming?

The structure of this paper is as follows: Section 2 traces the theoretical sources of the Rhythmic Score and their process of transformation; Section 3 analyzes the specific mechanisms of the five-step operational method; Section 4 discusses dancers' embodied transformations through experimental cases; and the final section reflects on the limitations of this method with respect to issues such as fragmentation and multi-dancer collaboration.

2. Theoretical Foundations

Although the Rhythmic Score was initially grounded in the organizational logic of musical rhythm and temporal structure, its development in contemporary dance creation has, in fact, been profoundly shaped by modern art theory and experimental methods. Among these influences, Deleuze's views in *Difference and Repetition* provide an important philosophical foundation for the generation of the relationship between "fissure" and change within rhythm [4]. Deleuze argues that repetition is not simple replication, but the continuous production of difference through ongoing variation. In other words, what truly matters is not "what is repeated," but what kind of change is produced in the process of repetition. This perspective transforms rhythm from a homogeneous, cyclical temporal unit into a dynamic structure that continually changes through pauses, dislocations, ruptures, and repetitions. Accordingly, the fissure within rhythm is no longer merely an error, a gap, or a technical break, but gradually becomes an entry point for movement generation. To some extent, it is precisely this fissure that opens up the possibility for the body to deviate from established habits.

At the same time, Merce Cunningham's method of chance choreography provides an important practical precedent for the chance operations within the Rhythmic Score[5]. By tossing coins, applying random ordering, and similar techniques, Cunningham disrupted the linear organizational logic of traditional choreography, enabling a more open set of combinatorial relationships among movement, time, and space. Importantly, chance here does not mean total freedom. On the contrary, it always takes place within predetermined rules. Although dancers cannot predetermine the final movement outcome, they must accomplish movement generation under the existing structural conditions. To put it another way, what is disrupted is the sequence of movements, not the generative rules themselves.

Furthermore, John Cage's rhythmic experiments further advanced the formation of the idea that "temporal structure is independent of meter" [6]. Cage progressively weakened the centrality of meter in traditional music, making time itself the structural subject, with sound, silence, and even ambient noise all participating in rhythmic generation. Under this influence, the Rhythmic Score gradually shed its subordinate role of accompanying the music and turned toward organizing the conditions for movement occurrence and the process of bodily perception. Rhythm here is no longer merely something that accompanies movement but is more akin to an internal mechanism that propels movement into occurrence.

It can thus be seen that Deleuze's emphasis on "the production of difference," Cage's reconstitution of "temporal structure," and Cunningham's operational practice of the "chance mechanism" have together driven a pivotal turn in the logic of dance creation — namely, a shift from predetermining movement outcomes to predetermining movement generation rules. Dance is no longer centered on fixed movement forms but begins to attend to how movement is triggered, how it is generated within rhythmic constraints, and how the body continuously forms new dynamic relationships within the rules.

Building on this theoretical background, this paper proposes constructing the Operational A Priori of dance choreography through the Rhythmic Score. Unlike traditional dance, which takes spatial form as its a priori presupposition, the Rhythmic Score does not predetermine movement outcomes but pre-specifies the operational rules for movement triggering, rhythmic conversion, and bodily response. It more closely resembles a generative grammar: it suspends the outcome-oriented question of "what does the movement look like" and instead stipulates "under what rhythmic relations does the movement occur."

The core of this mechanism lies not in randomness but in the control of the generative boundary. The Rhythmic Score is neither rigid nor arbitrary. It does not prescribe in advance the fixed postures that dancers must assume; it only stipulates the temporal pulse and dynamic conditions under which movement occurs, so that movement is always in the process of being generated in the present moment. At the same time, however, once the chance mechanism is triggered, dancers must strictly submit to the established rules — for example, the binding relationship between speed and space, the constraints of movement duration, and the logic of conversion between rhythmic nodes. That is to say, dancers can generate movement but cannot act arbitrarily outside the rules. It is precisely under these conditions that dance becoming both escapes the mechanical memorization of fixed movement characteristic of traditional dance and avoids the disorder and loss of control inherent in a state of pure improvisation, ultimately achieving a bounded becoming. In this sense, dance is no longer understood as a fixed work awaiting replication and reproduction, but approaches more closely a bodily event that continuously occurs and transforms under the constraint of rules.

3. The Construction of the Rhythmic Score and the Five-Step Operational Principle

The Rhythmic Score is not a set of movement combinations or a training paradigm in the traditional sense. It is a system of rules for bodily movement generation. The five-step operational principle proposed in this paper comprises five progressively advancing stages of bodily becoming. Dancers are required to enter the rhythmic system through these rules and to continually adjust their bodily responses within a process of constant change in time, space, and dynamics.

Traditional training predominantly takes the complete movement as the unit of memory and, through a path of high-frequency repetition, forms an embodied path dependency. The beat serves as a signal triggering a pre-set movement; once the rhythm begins, the body subconsciously returns to familiar modes of force exertion, rather than re-perceiving the present state. The "Rhythmic Score" seeks to change this. It understands movement as an organizational process underway, rather than a pre-existing outcome. This does not pursue disorder or pure instability but aims to reconstruct the body's movement logic — compelling dancers to strip away their prior movement experience and redeploy bodily dynamics according to the rhythm conditions generated in the moment. Only when dancers can no longer rely on old movement experience and must readjust their dynamics in response to the present rhythm will movement gradually depart from its original fixed path.

3.1. Kinesthetic Unitization of the Fundamental Pulse

The first stage of the five-step operational method involves breaking down movement into the most basic "pulse units." The most important task at this stage is not, in fact, to create new movement, but to weaken the body's automatic connection to complete movement forms. In traditional training, dancers typically take the complete movement as the unit of bodily memory. Turning, jumping, arm swinging — these movements are stored in the body in relatively fixed ways, forming a singular, stable structure of force exertion. In the "Rhythmic

Score," therefore, the pulse replaces the movement as the minimal unit. It refers to a very brief dynamic activation within the body, such as a shift of the center of gravity, a sudden localized muscle engagement, or an instantaneous impulse driven by the breath[7]. This stage emphasizes de-formalization, shifting the dancer from attending to external posture to attending to the formation and transfer of internal dynamics.

In practice, a student who had long received classical training, after beginning to engage with localized pulse exercises, would subconsciously enter preparation for a turn following pelvic initiation. Yet after twenty minutes of continuous training, a marked rupture moment emerged: her knee suddenly locked, her breath halted at the inhalation phase, her center of gravity pressed onto the balls of her feet, and she stood still for several seconds. At this point, a judgment delay in the next movement path occurred, and the body began to re-perceive the critical node of the present moment. However, after a period of repeated practice, it was discovered that a single pulse disruption easily gives rise to secondary habits. Dancers re-formed new fixed rhythms, and their movements increasingly resembled one another. As training time increased, all dancers began to initiate the shoulder in advance on the same beat. That is to say, the pulse exercise originally intended to disrupt habits was gradually becoming yet another new habit. Evidently, the criterion for evaluating the success of pulse training should not be confined to the novelty of the movement's outward appearance, but should focus on whether dancers have truly divested themselves of automatic reliance on pre-existing movement pathways — that is, whether the body is in a generative state of being unable to predict.

3.2. The Chance Intervention of the Temporal Fissure

Given that the body is highly susceptible to rebuilding new rhythmic habits within the fundamental pulse stage, the second stage introduces the Temporal Fissure mechanism. If the first stage deconstructed spatial form, the present stage aims to disrupt temporal continuity. The fissure is not a mere physical pause, but a sudden disturbance to the temporal structure (such as an abrupt change, delay, or suspension of the beat). Its purpose is to interrupt the body's experience-based movement anticipation, compelling dancers to maintain the execution of rules amid randomly triggered variables [4].

In practice, fissures are typically triggered through a chance mechanism. For example, dancers may need to alter the current speed structure based on the result of a coin toss or an instantaneous verbal command [3]. However, the chance here applies only to the timing of the fissure's appearance, not to the nullification of the overall rules. That is, although dancers do not know when a fissure will arrive, once it does, the body must still continue moving according to the current speed and spatial rules.

Practice reveals that the impact of the Temporal Fissure on different bodily habits varies. One subject with extensive improvisation experience, when confronted with a temporal rupture, attempted to use a continuous sequence of rolling movements to create a "visual filling-in." Although the external presentation appeared fluent, when a second sudden shift in the beat occurred, the subject's dynamic direction could not be reversed in time. This exposes the fact that, even in an improvisational state, the body still harbors the hidden habit of "automatically smoothing over movements" rather than genuinely responding to the immediate rhythmic conditions. Furthermore, the fissure itself may also be "assimilated" by the body. After continuous intervention with temporal fissures, it was observed that most dancers began to exhibit "waiting behavior" — actively decelerating or reserving space for adjustment. Dancers would decelerate in advance and deliberately create a sense of pausing, even intentionally slowing their movements to leave themselves room for adjustment. What was originally intended to disrupt habits ultimately gradually became a predictable movement habit. This reveals the body's powerful internal tendency toward self-organization and repair. The body

instinctively re-encodes unstable elements, incorporating them into new stable expectations [8], so that even the fissure may slowly become another form of habit. The core difficulty of this stage, therefore, lies in this: the focus of training is not the superimposition of movement complexity, but the resistance against the body's instinct to automatically repair temporal ruptures. Only when the body completely relinquishes the advance prediction of pathways and passively and instantaneously reconstructs its dynamic chain within the fissure can the generativity of movement truly manifest.

4. Analysis of the Choreographic Experiment in Pulse and Fissure

The choreographic process of *Pulse and Fissure* is, in essence, a practical experiment on how bodily habits are disrupted and then reorganized. This chapter examines the dynamic evolution of dancers' bodies — "disequilibrium → formation of secondary habits → instantaneous response" — following the intervention of the rules.

4.1. Transient Loss of Control in the Initial Stage

During early rehearsals, a frequent occurrence was that the body had already begun moving, yet the dancer was unable to determine how the next movement should be generated. This is because dancers, having undergone long-term standardized technical training, have internalized the instinct to pursue a complete movement pathway[9]. Once the beat intervenes, the body tends automatically to activate pre-existing structures of force exertion. Consequently, when the Rhythmic Score forcibly severs these connections, the most immediate responses from dancers are movement hesitation, rhythmic misjudgment, and transient loss of control. Some dancers would suddenly halt mid-movement; others would subconsciously complete movement connections that had already been disassembled. This discomfort is not merely a technical unfamiliarity, but more closely resembles a perceptual disequilibrium brought about by the temporary disruption of the body's prior organizational logic.

4.2. The Formation of Secondary Habits in the Middle Stage

As training progressed, the body did not remain in a state of instability indefinitely. On the contrary, it continuously attempted to re-establish new structures of order [10]. Dancers shifted from exhibiting brief pauses at moments of sudden change to beginning to anticipate the appearance of fissures in advance. Some dancers initiated the shoulder ahead of time on the same beat; others subconsciously synchronized their breathing tempo; some actively decelerated, while others deliberately reserved buffer time for themselves. This demonstrates that as the body gradually adapts to instability, it attempts anew to transform the fissure into a predictable rhythmic structure. The training originally intended to weaken habits had instead generated new bodily habits once again.

4.3. Instantaneous Response Amid Continuous Change in the Later Stage

Entering the later stage of training, dancers' bodily perception of instability began gradually to shift. In the earlier stages, the dancers' bodily response had been one of urgently repairing disequilibrium. In the later stage, however, when movement deviation occurred, the dancers' bodies no longer immediately retreated to the original pathway but continued to adjust dynamic relations within the process of disequilibrium. For instance, in the spatial transition exercise, some dancers were already able to sustain movement after losing their center of balance. This indicates that dancers' bodies had begun gradually to adapt to this generative state of being unable to predict in advance, maintaining instantaneous response within continuously changing time. New movement states were generated in the interstices between deviation, recovery, and reorganization.

The choreographic experiment of *Pulse and Fissure*, therefore, was not merely aimed at producing effects of rupture, irregularity, or loss of control. Its genuine concern was how the body, under constantly changing rule conditions, gradually sheds its pre-existing movement habits and re-establishes the capacity for instantaneous perception of the relationships among time, space, and dynamics.

The changes in dancers' bodily perception of rhythm, space, and dynamics ultimately projected onto and reshaped the viewing experience in the theater. In the presentation of *Pulse and Fissure*, the audience's visual expectations were continually suspended: movement seemed at any moment about to slide into a familiar paradigm, only to be forcibly diverted at the next sudden shift in speed or fissure. Thus, viewing was no longer the recognition and decoding of pre-established forms but was transformed into a synchronous perception of "how movement is being generated in the moment" [11].

5. Conclusion

Grounded in the choreographic practice of *Pulse and Fissure* and centered on the Rhythmic Score as a rule for movement generation, this paper has sought to transform rhythm from a traditionally ancillary element into an organizational mechanism for the generation of bodily movement. Drawing on Deleuze's thinking on difference and becoming, as well as the creative concepts of John Cage and Merce Cunningham, this paper proposed a five-step operational principle comprising fundamental pulse, temporal fissure, spatial-dynamic mapping, perceptual dislocation, and execution logic, and analyzed the changes in dancers' bodily responses following the intervention of the rules through a concrete choreographic experiment. The study finds that bodily habits do not disappear immediately upon the intervention of rules; rather, they undergo a dynamic process of disruption of existing habits, formation of secondary habits, and continual readjustment by the rules. The body possesses a strong capacity for self-organization even when pre-existing movement pathways are disrupted by pulses or fissures, it continuously attempts to re-establish new stable structures. Movement generation is therefore not a one-time act of innovation, but something that occurs continuously in the process of breaking and rebuilding bodily habits.

The experimental results indicate that the Rhythmic Score does not prescribe movement forms, but rather, through constraining the relationships among time, space, and dynamics, guides dancers to continually adjust their modes of bodily organization. The focus of the dancer's memory gradually shifts from fixed movement to the rules themselves; when confronted with constantly changing rhythmic conditions, dancers must reorganize movement based on instantaneous perception, rather than relying on pre-existing experience to execute movement. This mode of training transforms the body's understanding of movement generation and endows the dance work with greater openness and generativity.

At the same time, this study has also identified the limitations of Rhythmic Score training. For instance, the body is prone to re-forming new habitual structures, and the fissure mechanism may, with repeated training, gradually be predicted and adapted to by the body. In addition, the number of experimental subjects in this study was relatively small, the experimental period was relatively limited, and a more systematic comparative analysis of differences among dancers from different dance genres and different training backgrounds remains to be conducted.

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