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Rhythm as a Metric for Performance Creation

-- A Brief Discussion on the Importance of Rhythm in Performance

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Abstract: Rhythm is an extremely difficult concept to grasp. Philosophers and aesthetes have wrestled with the word rhythm. At the same time, artists and art critics have been using it, unconsciously or even carelessly, to describe the effect of a work or part of it. Rhythm is indeed a word that keeps popping up around performers. Actors and directors work on the rhythm of a scene; many people also use the effect of rhythm to describe how good certain scenes are. Rhythm is therefore crucial to performance creation; for performance creation, it can push the storyline to a climax and make the audience emotionally deeply involved. For the actor, it helps to understand the inner emotions and experiences of the character and to integrate better into the role.

Keywords: Performance rhythm; Tempo; Language rhythm; Psychological rhythm; Physical rhythm

Introduction

Rhythm is a rule of performance creation that provokes the audience to feel emotions and experiences that correspond to the performance itself. Rhythm is an inherent quality of organization for natural phenomena and life expressions, as well as in artistic works in general. Performance is a comprehensive art and an art of action, which is why its rhythmic expression is more complex. The performance is based on the rules of rhythmic development, integrating the individual elements of each artistic sector and unifying them in the overall requirements of the ideas and visuals of the performance, so that they can form a complete performance process in a coordinated manner. The external form of rhythm is the speed of the action, the strength of the movement, the size of the physical image and the duration of the performance. For the actor, these elements of the performance are particularly important, as they are what the audience intuitively perceives. Only when these are done well can they resonate with the inner rhythm of the audience. Therefore, rhythm is the measure of performance creation.

1. The concept and meaning of performance rhythm

1.1 What is performance rhythm?

The Chinese dictionary defines 'rhythm' as a regular phenomenon of alternating intensity and length in music, or a metaphor for the steady, regular progression of work. In the Dictionary of Film Art, "rhythm" is defined as "the rhythm of performance". This comes from Stanislavski's acting system and is one of the elements of acting technique, a technique that helps actors to provoke the right experiences and emotions. In this definition, tempo is a component of rhythm and one of its external manifestations, while rhythm is an alternating and regular phenomenon that occurs throughout the performance, generally referring to the intensity, length, etc. of internal and external movements.

In summary, rhythm is a regular and objective phenomenon that recurs in the development of things in nature and is a function of life. And in artistic performance, rhythm is one of the most fundamental elements that make up the arts of music, dance, theatre and film.

1.2 The difference between rhythm and tempo in performance

Tempo and rhythm are terms commonly used in performance and as two concepts, but because they are interrelated, Stanislavski often used the term 'tempo-rhythm' to combine them because in many cases there is often a direct interdependence between them. Tempo is the speed of movement, the relaxation of movement; rhythm is the regularity of movement, the alternating cycle from 'tension' to 'relaxation'. Tempo and rhythm as a whole are inseparable.

From the point of view of natural science, speed is the external manifestation of a movement that can be immediately judged by the naked eye. Speed is one of the components of movement, one of the measures of movement. Rhythm, on the other hand, is a concept that is easy to understand but difficult to express - it is generally explained as "the relationship between the actual time value of a certain speed and a certain beat and the quantity of the unit temporal value." Simply put, "rhythm is the feeling created by the simple or complex alternation

of something or a unit" ["On Speed and Rhythm in the Performing Arts", May 2008, Ding Xin.]. Anyone who pays particular attention to rhythm will find that it is far more complex than speed, which is a question of how fast or slow a movement is, whereas rhythm is an organized and complete pattern. Speed is a matter of how fast or slow something moves, a matter that can be easily perceived with the naked eye and easily sensed with perception. Rhythm, however, is a pattern of movement formed on top of tempo, and there can be no rhythm without tempo. Although tempo and rhythm are relatively independent, they are inseparable.

For the performing arts, tempo and rhythm are both the inner patterns and the outer expressions of movement. Tempo and rhythm have a direct impact on both the performance of the actors and the overall perception of the artwork, and therefore tempo and rhythm play a key role in the success or failure of the artwork.

2. The importance of rhythm in performance

2.1 Performance rhythm is the measure of performance creation

Rhythm is the genie of the performing arts, an important means of artistic expression. As Stanislavsky said, "Rhythm - it is the basis of creation. " Rhythm is an important element of beauty, and without it, performance is bound to lose its beauty and will not appeal to the audience. Rhythm is very important to the art of theatre, it is the soul and breath of theatre life, and without it, it means the end of the show.

The Chinese actor Honglei Sun, for example, often presents his performances in a state of desperation, with a seemingly undulating harmonious padding that conceals a hidden mystery, and a unique outburst that expresses the internal passion of the character when it matters. This quality is most fully expressed in Honglei Sun's masterpiece *Like Mist, Like Rain, Like Wind*, in which he plays Ah Lai, from his repressed love for An Qi to his final outburst of revenge in order to protect the woman he loves, performing with great tension.

It can be seen that Sun Honglei understands his own characteristics and the demands of his role better than actors with generic performances and knows how to find the explosive points of his character. This is not only because he is a talented and skilled actor, but also because as an actor who has come from the theatre to the big screen, Sun Honglei has very precise control of the rhythm of his performance. The right rhythm makes the character more realistic, which is why it is the most important metric in performance writing.

2.2 The rhythm of the performance is the basis for the creation of a distinct character

An actor's performance is, above all, a reproduction of the process of human life in reality. Since rhythm is an indispensable movement in life, "the film character has to build up the organic nature of the character with the organic nature of human beings. There is only one way to create a film actor, and that is to follow the rules of the human being. "

The term 'performance out of rhythm' is often used to refer not only to the rate of the actor's movements but also to the intensity of the actor's actions and experiences, that is, the degree of emotional excitement within the actor when fulfilling a stage event. In addition to this, the concept of rhythm encompasses rhythmicity, a certain uniformity of action, and its arrangement in time and space. When we say that a person walks, talks breathes and works with rhythm, we mean the even and smooth alternation of moments of tension and relaxation, of movement and stillness. The opposite often results in an out-of-phase heart rhythm, stuttering speech, disorganized work, etc. Stanny says: "The speed rhythm of a play or character, if found correctly, can naturally and directly, sometimes mechanically, capture the actor's feelings and stimulate the right experience. " It follows that the speed rhythm of the action not only stimulates the emotional experience of the actor but also creates a certain emotional atmosphere that helps the actor to get the task and action of the character in the prescribed situation exactly right. In a film, the rhythm of the screen is the result of the combined treatment of the film's many instruments. The mastery of performance rhythm has an extremely important influence on the expressiveness of the plot conflict and the coherence of the characterization of the characters. In this sense, as the famous Swedish actor and director, Ingmar Bergman said, "Rhythm is crucial, always crucial. "

Different personalities determine the features of different characters, as well as the rhythm of different physical movements, and the accuracy reflected in the rhythm will counteract the character's personality. Therefore, when portraying different characters, the correct mastery of the tempo rhythm specific to each particular character becomes a crucial step. We can often judge the maturity of an actor by how well he or she knows this. Dustin Hoffman, for example, can be the "Rain Man" who knows nothing about life but has a great talent for mathematics, or he can be the ignorant man in the film "Straw Dogs". It was for this reason that Dustin Hoffman won the Academy Award for Best Actor and the nickname "The Man with a Thousand Faces". For the same reason, audiences will want to see more of him, they will forget about the actor himself for a while and expecting him to appear in different films. They forget about the actor himself for a while and look forward to the new characters he portrays in different films.

One of the basic requirements for an actor's performance in a film is to portray a natural and realistic character with a distinctive personality on the screen. To make the audience feel the unique character and the great strength of the character through the actors' performances, it is necessary to start by analyzing the character's personality. Character can also be understood as the way in which a character handles things,

while the character's thoughts and emotions are an integral part of a character. Engels once said, "A man's character is expressed not only in what he does but in how he does it." This means that the character traits of a character determine the way he or she behaves, the logic of his or her attitude and the way he or she expresses his or her feelings. Human character is formed in the course of life practice, and the expression of a character's character in a play does not rely primarily on the objective description but is expressed directly in the course of action, that is, in the way the character has become accustomed to behaving. Each person's character is characterized by a different pace, and everything he is involved in must proceed at a pace corresponding to it. The actor who captures this speedy rhythm will allow the audience to see the character traits within the characterisation.

As mentioned earlier, any external expression of the character in performance is a product of the character's internal activity, and the external behaviour will be based on the internal, organizing their movements to achieve a certain purpose. We can therefore derive the theory that the character's tone of the character is the basis and foundation of the character's inner change, and that the embodiment of rhythm is the process of the character's inner change. Since rhythm is the organizing principle of all movement, when the overall rhythm of a film's characters is mastered, the "character's tone" is also mastered. The actor can move each process forward precisely according to the needs of the performance, spending the least amount of effort to achieve the maximum effect, analysing each part of the character, grasping the tone of the character, and designing the actions and movements to form a unified whole in a regular manner.

In *The Silence of the Lambs*, for example, the character of police cadet Starling, played by Jodie Foster, is characterized by her "strength in the face of adversity, her defiant spirit and her slightly masculine personality". The independent analysis of the case photos at the beginning of the film, the contrast with the male police cadets in the lift, the absence of the most common female jewelry in the character's look and the absence of skirts throughout the film, are some of the outward signs of her character. But the true tone of the character is also determined by the rhythm of the performances in the plot. This is why the rhythm of the performance is the basis for the creation of a distinct character.

2.3 The rhythm of the performance adds to the character's personality and charm

The performance of a famous Chinese actor, Ge You, and the many distinctive characters he has portrayed can better illustrate the rhythm of the performance and add to the character's personality and charm. His father is the famous actor Ge Cunzhuang, who starred in the 1988 film *The Naughty Master*, an adaptation of Wang Shuo's novel, and his appearance and performance fit the "cold-faced, warm-hearted" humor of Wang Shuo's minor character. In 1993, he was nominated for the Golden Rooster Award for Best Actor, and in 1993 he won the Cannes Film Festival for his starring role in Zhang Yimou's *Alive*, and went on to work with Feng Xiaogang five times, becoming a pillar of Chinese New Year's Eve cinema and a deservedly popular film star.

There is a wonderful performance by Ge You in Chen Kaige's 1993 film *Farewell My Concubine*. And the scene where Master Yuan is escorted out to be shot, but still paddles through the scene, has become a classic that people are talking about. An actor's sense of pacing in a performance is paramount, and this ends up creating an actor's plasticity and shaping multiple character personalities and personalities. In the film *Let the Bullets Fly*, Ge You's lines shift from time to time, making the role more comedic and making the character more charming as a minor character, it is easy to see in the film how Mr Ge You has a grasp and control of every line and the rhythm of his performance, for example, the line: "We were riding horses, singing songs and eating hot pot when we were robbed by mahjong bandits!" The line "We were riding horses, singing songs and eating hot pot" is slow, giving people a gentle feeling and bringing them into the soft and cheerful rhythm, then the pace suddenly increases to "And they robbed us by mahjong bandits!" The tempo suddenly changes to a faster pace, giving the audience a sense of surprise. Ge's excellent control of the pace of his performance allows him to deliver a performance that is both relevant and not boring.

3. Grasp and control of performance rhythm

3.1 Rhythm of language

We all know that language in communication is the bridge between our ideas. The rhythm in the treatment of lines has its roots in the rhythm in literature. It is necessary to grasp the deep meaning and connotation of literary language to create an attractive form of vocal expression. The rhythm in line and the rhythm in literary texts cannot be separated and are mutually influential.

In the performance of the original comedy *Spicy West Smile*, I played the role of the landlady and the entertainment reporter respectively. The language of the landlady in literature is always sarcastic and harsh. So when I got the script I wondered what this person's speech should be like. I thought of some real-life city ladies who speak quickly and even have a slightly high tone of voice. So I was thinking that the overall speed of this person's speech should be fast, or at least faster than the others, to fit the person's identity, because only then can it create a contrast for the actors who take over the scene later and fit the overall pace of the scene. Having thought about the speed of speech, let's look at the intonation of the character.

The actual pitch of the tone also gives the audience a change of pace. Therefore, in the play, I treated the tone of this person relatively

high, because this person is dignified and her intonation in life must be higher than others. When she is used to saying justifiable words, she will unconsciously form a pattern, so that she can also form a contrast with others. In fact, this person is a representative of a group of people, and by capturing the intonation characteristics of this group of people, the characterization comes out easily. Raising the tone of this person to contrast with those at the bottom of the tone gives the audience an aural change of pace so that the audience does not suffer from aural fatigue.

A fast rhythm in linguistic expression is not a constant, nor do we always speak at one speed; we have to turn literature into everyday language, which means externalizing the rhythm of your language according to the inner rhythm. For example, when the landlady talks about the money, the pace of speech becomes noticeably faster, because she wants to know the inner workings of the matter very quickly, her heart is urgent, and the pace of speech is accordingly accelerated, if she were to pose slowly at this time, it would not fit the prescribed context.

We have seen chronic people in our lives, but their speech speeds up just as much when they encounter special situations, and this is what makes a living person, and what is portrayed on stage is also a living person, so when setting the rhythm of a character's speech it is just a general direction to use the appropriate rhythm of the lines according to the prescribed situation.

In *Spicy West Laughs*, the landlady's voice is a high octave and her language is fast-paced, making her image as a small-minded woman very clear. But when she sees the money, the language becomes soft and flattering, and the rhythm of the language becomes soft and slow. Of course, the rhythm of the actor's speech is only a small part of the rhythm, the rhythm of the body is even more distinctive and plays a decisive role in characterization.

To sum up, speech rhythm is particularly important in characterisation. The rhythm of speech varies significantly according to the age, status and social position of the character, and capturing the speech rhythm habits of this group of people can be an important help in characterisation.

3.2 Mental rhythm

"Phases are created by the mind": a Buddhist saying that speaks of the dialectical relationship between the mind and phases in a materialistic way. Here, we can perhaps take it out of context and graft its literal meaning onto the film. The way the characters move their hands and dispatch their routes in the play can be a true reflection of inner activity. Once we have understood the definition of the mental activity of a character, we need to continue to explore the fact that in a film performance, if the mental activity of a character is to be presented to the audience in a way that resonates with them, then the actor must organize the action to show the inner activity of the character. In the process of organizing movement, there is speed and consequently rhythm.

The actor's performance is a form of expression that uses the body as a medium of communication to externalize the psychological rhythm of the character. In our daily lives, we are constantly in a state of rhythmic flux because they are a fundamental means of communicating and conveying thoughts and feelings. For example, if I am very excited at the moment, my rhythm of speech and action will become faster and faster, and when the excitement subsides, I will return to my usual rhythm, which is the basic expression of emotional change. This change of rhythm causes a strong shift in mental and emotional emotion, which results in a variety of rhythmic changes, and the change of internal rhythm causes a change of external rhythm. This is why it is said that the change in embodied mental emotion is the mental rhythm.

Here is an example from my practice. In the microfilm *Father*, I played Mengxi, the daughter of Mr Li Xuejian. Because the character played by Mr Li was not my real father in the play, so Mengxi hated and rejected him. Once I fell deeply into this role and believed that he was my "stepfather", I felt a change in my internal rhythm, from being happy and relaxed when I did not see him to being irritable at the mere mention of him.

This shows that the mental rhythm is the main factor controlling the external rhythm of action and speech, as acting is an artistic process that moves from 'experience to embodiment'.

3.3 Physical rhythm

Physical rhythm is the pattern of external physical movements that occur to achieve a certain purpose of action. "Physical rhythm is the window through which the actor's performance is externalized, the root of the body movement is internal, and the rhythm of the body movement is the pattern of the actor's body movement during the performance. The actor's sitting, standing, walking, and any movement is a form of movement, even if it is still, it is also a form of movement of the actor. The corresponding rhythm of these actions is the key point for the actor to understand. Rhythm is produced by movements that have a certain integrity, and if we just do one movement, then the resulting rhythm is meaningless to us. For it is the connection of movement that is primary, in the same way as verbal rhythm. The beginning of this movement means the end of the previous one, and in between, the rhythm goes through a process in which the end of the previous rhythmic form means the beginning of the next one. The actor should not only focus on the strength of one movement when understanding the rhythm but also bring the rhythm into the whole running action." [Zong Dexin and Tang Xuli, authors of *A Basic Course in Form Movement for Film*

and Television Acting]

And with a practical example, I will talk about how form rhythm helps the actor to shape the character, using the example of a drama I starred in, *Strong Man is also a Soldier*. Because the physical rhythm of this play brings out the inner rhythm in particular, it also helps the actor to grasp the character very well. The actor will unconsciously use the physical rhythm to inspire his inner rhythm when acting in this play.

In this play, I play the role of Wang Yingxia, an underground member who infiltrates the Japanese army to steal information, but I do not know that I have fallen deep into the enemy's trap. My brother was also a soldier in the 149th Regiment. To intercept the transmission of the information, I struggled and fought, while my partner was still in the dark. To keep the plan from becoming a blackmailing tool for the enemy, I took advantage of the lack of defence and rushed towards the bayonet, letting it pass through my entire body and eventually dying a heroic death. There was also a noticeable change in the rhythm of my physical from struggling and resisting to desperation and then defending the plan of action with my death. The sudden rush towards the bayonet, in particular, is so fast that the audience can't imagine it at all. It will resonate with the audience's heart, and the audience will have an unconscious anticipation of how the plot should develop later, and this rhythm will make the audience's heart ripple, thoroughly bringing them into the atmosphere of tension and despair.

As is the case with the audience, so is the actor. The actor goes through a change in the rhythm of the external form that stirs up a strong sense of fear inside. It allows the actor to get into character better. The rhythm of the whole scene goes from tense to calm then sudden shock, which not only captures the audience's heart but also makes the actor's heart ebb and flow.

The character I play in this play has a feeling of reluctance towards her partner, hatred for the enemy and love for her family. After emerging from the enemy's tent, the character's pace is heavy and very, very slow, during which the lines are spoken very slowly, and the audience can easily see my helplessness, which is inseparable from the rhythm of my form. When I put my body through the bayonet, after all the enemy troops panic, immediately after all of them fall into silence, this kind of fast-paced physical action also gave me a great impact on my heart, when I slowed down the rhythm, my heart would be unconsciously suppressed, there is a kind of feeling that I can't use my strength, but this is exactly the kind of state that is wanted, that she just has to hold back a strength, that kind of inner suppression is to have this kind of slow The slow rhythm helped me to find this kind of psychological feeling.

The role of Wang Yingxia demonstrates that accurate physical rhythm not only allows the actor to look like the character but also allows the actor to become the character from the inside out by using the external physical rhythm to drive the internal rhythm of the heart. This is why the rhythm is so important to the actor's characterization.

4. Conclusion

Art comes from life and is above life, and as rhythm exists everywhere in life, the art of acting is all the more inseparable from it. An actor should be aware of the character's emotions and their impact on the character's actions, in order to understand the rhythm of the character's performance, which can help the actor to better portray the character. However, this sense of proportion is not something that can be mastered overnight. As an important metric in performance creation, rhythm requires actors to gain more experience in their usual practice, using external performance and internalised understanding to present the closest perfect rhythm together.

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