

Embodiology: A Hybrid Neo-African Improvisation-as-Performance Practice Distinguished by Dynamic Rhythm 

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Abstract and Keywords

Dance-drumming performance practices in West Africa reveal multiple modes of communication that take place between performers and informed audiences, in an ongoing exchange of novelty. In the Ewe case, the critical nature of the relationship between movement, music, and language lies within their explicit drum syntax producing Ewephone comprehension, which is processed through the body's varying porous kinaesonic surfaces. This principle process is conceptualized as Dynamic Rhythm, the metacomponent of Embodiology, which is both a training methodology and a theoretical framework that makes inherent improvisation discernable to the nonpractitioner. In addition, as a result of this understanding, interlocking aesthetic values within West African performance practices are identifiable within the African Diaspora. This articulation of improvisation from a West African perspective creates a gateway for both the scholarly and artistic fields of dance to develop a way to understand these autopoietic phenomena that were, until now, largely hidden.

Keywords: Improvisation, rhythm, drumming, Ewe, dance, embodied cognition, informed audience, fractal, sensory, joy

Introduction

DYNAMIC Rhythm is at the core of Embodiology[®], my theoretical and practical conceptualization of how improvisation, as a form of performance, is realized in West African performance practices. Embodiology[®] was developed through practice in the field. Consequently, my praxis translates this knowledge into strategies and techniques that contemporary dance and music artists can apply to generate improvised performance.¹ The neologism particularizes an understanding of West African practices of improvisation by focusing on interrelated sensory and cognitive processes.

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Improvisation is a critical dimension of performing Africa's dances, serving as a vehicle for creativity, edification, civic engagement, social interaction, spiritual communion, and aesthetic innovation, among other advances. It is a collaborative communal practice that yields knowledge production and circulation. Performance studies theorist Margaret Drewal explains that from a Yorùbá perspective, 'improvisation requires a mastery of logic of action and in-body codes ... together with the skill to intervene and transform them' (1991: 43).

From this perspective, improvisation-as-performance is dependent on expertise that builds on recognized information. Embodiology enables these values to come to the fore and conceptualizes aesthetic processes that are evident across a broad range of performance environments. These processes are deeply intertwined with music and are adaptively applied in order to generate contemporary performance practices. Concomitantly, Embodiology's model of improvisation-as-performance can also be used as an analytical schematic to identify generative strategies deployed within African diasporan or 'Neo-African' performance practices at large (Euba 2003). The latter aspect (p. 764) of Embodiology, however, is not the subject of this essay; rather, the focus is on Dynamic Rhythm, henceforth the metagenerator of improvisation-as-performance, which leads the first of its six generative principles.

Model of Embodiology

First, I will briefly outline Embodiology as a whole, which consists of six components that interweave aesthesis, evident in Ewe and Yorùbá cultures. Similarly, they also reflect African diasporan values that distinguish my own dance history.ⁱⁱ Embodiology praxis furnishes individuals and groups of performers with the ability to generate and sustain high-level performance. Its six generative components create an autopoietic system, capable of maintaining and recreating itself. At the helm is Dynamic Rhythm, Embodiology's meta-structuring component, which impacts all outcomes through its consciously sustained invocation. Then, I elaborate on how my fieldwork in Ghana propels Dynamic Rhythm to the core of my studio practice through my work with a group of dancers and musicians brought together as the Embodiology Research Group (Gwen Jones, Bless Klepcharek, Ingrid Mackinnon, Corey Mwamba, Martin Pyne, Johanna Sarinnen, Lauren Segal, Chiara Vinci, and Noelle White).

Six-Component Model of Improvisation

Figure 43.1 represents the relationships between Embodiology's six components: Dynamic Rhythm, Fractal Code, and Inner Sensing and Balance, Collaborative Competition, Play and Decision Making, and Audience Proxemics. The first three are primary (found in all contexts) and the latter three secondary (found in all contexts, but with greater variance), collectively these make up the tenets of Embodiology.

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Component 1: Dynamic Rhythm

Dynamic Rhythm represents temporal dimensions of improvisation-as-performance, which most often are represented as music-based interactions. It is evident that during various types of performance that participants—Ewe, Fanti, Yorùbá, for example—perspicaciously listen, identify, and honour the value of the layered tonally-based patterns highlighted in their musical repertoires. To be musically responsive, the entire body must be engaged in qualitative listening so as to understand how time is musically configured. This is not in the mechanical sense but as a grounded development of kinaesthetic alliteration where absorption of sound takes place. (p. 765)

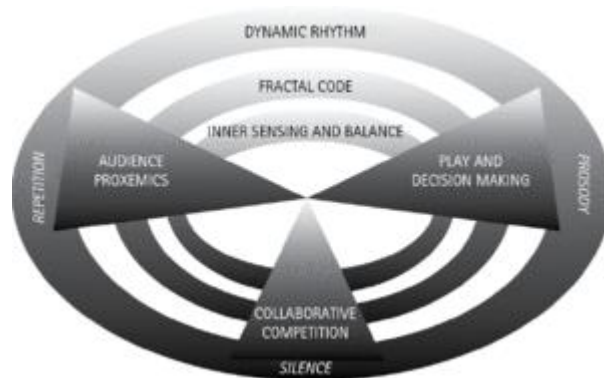


Fig. 43.1. Model of Embodiology.

Dynamic Rhythm contains three subfeatures: repetition, prosody, and silence. These (noun-like concepts/components/ideas) are important to define because general conceptions of rhythm in dance are insufficient and do not account for particular gradations. I will explain these subfeatures in greater detail after I present the overview of the model, scoping these features through illustrations of them as encountered in my fieldwork. To complete the transference of knowledge from theory and fieldwork to contemporary dance practice, I will also show examples of Dynamic Rhythm's subfeatures reconfigured as tasks, animated by the dancers and musicians who make up the Embodiology Research Group, demonstrating these features' generative capacity to produce improvisation-as-performance. Developing the responsive skill to detect how communication is carried through tone, cadence, duration, and pitch is tantamount to informing a sensory-knowing performer, one who can equitably inform those playing the music how it might develop its tonal qualities and inspire further participation. While being able to identify and generate patterns spontaneously, the tacit and sensory values of silence must accurately be felt.

Component 2: Fractal Code

Each site of performance has a history, customs, custodians, protocols for participation, potential new enthusiasts, reservoir of lived memories, and repertory of previous events that make up its Fractal Code. This term conceptualizes repetitious formations (Eglash 1999), based on particular constraints manifested at varying scales, both temporally and

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geographically. A performance form can geographically migrate with a people. While some aspects of that form remain consistent, certain characteristics are altered to accord (p. 766) with local social and economic currents. Novelty emerges out of the event's Fractal Code, its existing knowledge projected anew, whereupon continuity is evident. This temporal concept, though aurally and kinaesthetically based, has similarities to the way a scholarly exegesis takes shape, taking account of the past while creating opportunity for new perspectives to emerge.

Component 3: Inner Sensing and Balance

Performers' interior sensory and cognitive landscapes produce impulses that inspire interventions whereby participants' actions create emotional connections with others, be they 'informed audience' members or others who are dynamically shaping the unfolding action (Dortey 2012: 57). For example, the intentional use of eye contact leads to definite recognition of another participant, a haptic intensification of in-the-moment awareness for both the viewer and that connection's initiator. Other modes of sensory awareness invoked within this concept include the imagination, kinaesthesia, synaesthesia, and intuition, which can coalesce to produce exaggerated impulses that heighten the emotional surges as a performance unfolds. The performers' 'intersensory' (Sacks 2003: 233) worlds, as this extends outward, invokes the presence of joy as an aesthetic value, an enduring concern.

Component 4: Play and Decision Making

With the intensity of new information that is present in a performance, where improvisation shapes the proceedings, performers make conscious in-the-moment decisions. Such actions demonstrate the role that executive function (Diamond: 2011) plays in harnessing responsivity and flexibility. Revealing new ideas out of familiar material is invoked by a commitment to discover novelty through intensive investigative play, leading to dramatic redrafting of repertoire, which in turn can reinspire the undercurrents of the performance. Executive brain function integrates the use of deductive reasoning; short- and long-term memory make it possible to deploy an extensive range of interventions that may also include irony, as well as nonaction. Courage is displayed through daring to make provocative choices, demanding that others use their reflexes to respond. For the audience such surges of surprise produce affect, which in turn create durable memories that go well beyond that of the performance duration.

Component 5: Collaborative Competition

Seemingly an oxymoron, this clause is used to represent a type of competition similarly found among members of the same sporting team. In such cases, an individual's efforts towards excellence propel others within their group to achieve greater levels of (p. 767) acumen and skill. In this way, individuals collectively energize and sustain performance through overtly challenging each other, themselves, or even the audience in a series of brinkmanship activities where parody, copying, and outmanoeuvring are common tactics,

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enabling levels of unforeseeable virtuosity to be on display. In broader West African and African diasporan contexts, we can see that improvisation engenders competition among expert dancers (Jackson 2001; Daniel 1995). Competition is not only to show movement mastery but also to critically demonstrate innovation through rhythmic perspicuity despite existing constraints of movement, vocabulary, or style. In this way, musical distinction creates higher and higher levels of competitiveness that yields a collaborative mode of instantaneous learning and reinvention, where individuals observe each other closely, using skills of mimesis, satire, and ironic play (Daniel 1995; Drewal 1992). An informed audience's attentiveness to this communicative jousting brings critical attention to cocreators' innovations, and with this interaction they affirm their community's cultural values.

Component 6: Audience Proxemics

The audience is not assumed to be a fixed entity that is made up solely of static observers. They are stratified participants (in age, experience, expertise, and even mood) and, in a dance-drumming context, they may only engage on a subtle level of head nodding or foot tapping; there could be those among them who are leaders and who could emerge as physical or vocal performers. The physical space where the performance takes place is also porous, an entity through which action can flow in or out (Ajayi 1998). At any given moment, performers can direct their focus towards a particular section of the audience, or indeed the viewers can simultaneously be the performers, as in a procession performance. Moreover, it is expected that the audience contains those who have expert knowledge; it is they who deem a virtuosic performance worthy of praise or dismissal through their palpable diminished engagement.

Detailing Dynamic Rhythm: From the Field to the Studio

Returning to Dynamic Rhythm, I now give further credence to its three subfeatures: repetition, silence, and prosody. Each creates specific pathways to generate action that transmits to and interacts with others. After defining them, I will show how I turn the concepts into techniques to ground improvisation practice. Preliminary aspects of this translating process are evident in the deep autoethnographic excavation of Dynamic Rhythm, which I undertook in Kopeyia village, an Ewe district in Ghana that borders Togo, known worldwide for its practitioners and teachers of Ewe (p. 768) dance-drumming.ⁱⁱⁱ While based at the Dagbe Center of Ewe Arts, the prolific nature of music and dance throughout village life was abundantly clear. Locating myself here, I invested my improvisation inquiry through reflective practice across a broad range of activity, ranging from formal repertory-learning activity to social interactions and privileged access to attend a spiritual festival. Through conversing with local experts and leaning into life alongside practice to comprehend the interstitial aspects of their prolific dance-drumming lives, I understood more precisely what skills, modalities of awareness, and values lead to improvisation competencies.

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In my case, situated in a context of learning Ewe dances, the first and greatest challenge was to learn the intertwined relationship between speech, song, drum, and movement (Agawu 1995). Beyond the formal space of learning codified Ewe dances at Dabge Arts, I also experienced the communicative nature of song, drum, and dance while attending a funeral, observing a Breketé spiritual festival, and participating in a regular *Kinka* (community meeting). Through participatory-experience, I learned that (1) each musician can expertly demonstrate dance movements, coordinating the reception of sound proprioceptively, which stands above visuality; (2) where there is dance, then the music exists to serve it; (3) individuals may choose to redirect you if you are dancing without adequate understanding of appropriate bodily emphasis; (4) improvisations or embellishments are a requirement only after competency is achieved; and (5) there is an audience for individual contributions, be it as subtle as a head nod or a foot tap. Overarching my experience, I learned that participation affirms the value of communicative interaction at a variety of intensities. My initial academic tendency toward separating these entities caused a delay in recognizing and thus synthesizing them, which is the goal in understanding Dynamic Rhythm's movement-music syntax.

Repetition, Dynamic Rhythm's first subfeature, affirms the significance of movement; intensification through repeating is highlighted in Kariamuwelsh-Asante's work outlining aesthetic properties in Africa's dances (Welsh-Asante 1985). Thus, while improvising a movement's reinscription leads to its transformations, moreover, we can see that whereas pattern generation, recognition, and iteration are critical to human development, it is the capacity to introduce difference, bringing about something new, that makes repetition valuable. The act of repeating a movement phrase while improvising allows the performer to fully explore it proprioceptively; in parallel they also transmit it kinetically, allowing others to kinaesthetically empathize with it (Reason and Reynolds 2010). In addition, this act of repetition commits the action to short-term memory for later recall by themselves or others participants. Musicians also deploy repetition in the use of their sensorimotor skills when making the many different types of African music. Ethnomusicologist Ruth Stone points out that multiple layers of asymmetric pattern are performed as 'polychronic time' (1985: 44), meaning 'many-things-at-time'. Such polycentricism is similarly experienced by dancers who perform dances that reflect a symbiotic relationship with the music's polyrhythms, thus displaying polycentric movement, in which time is displayed variously through different limbs at the same time (Gottschild 1996; Welsh-Asante 1993).

(p. 769) In the Ewe contexts, repetition-with-a-difference manifests as cyclical movement patterns, evident in the practice of their dances, ranging from simpler forms, such as *Kinka* and *Agbadza*, which support high degrees of individualized elaboration, to the very demanding and highly specific *Togo Atsiã*. Only once knowledge of this music and dance phrases is achieved, then the pathway for sensitized dancers to extemporize is laid open. The repetitive aspects of this presentational dance, successfully performed, require dancers' maintenance of the integrity of each rhythmic movement statement in an ongoing fashion without knowing necessarily for how long that particular motif will last; the choice to change the movement-music variation, in Ewe cases, is completely within the lead drummer's jurisdiction. What this means for the dancers is that they must continue

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to unreservedly commit to repetition, thus being decidedly in the moment, while also listening acutely for when the drums call for change, a shift into a new pattern; this must be precise and lock into the pocket of the new musical expression immediately.

There are implications for improvisation practice here. Foremost, the dancer must consistently invest in the relationship with the music; performing is not a solo pursuit. Second, the music enters into the body not only via the ears but also through other membranes that conduct energy waves: the body's surfaces have varying degrees of porosity; consequently, vibrations that fill the environment are transferred into the body. In addition, different regions of the body correspond to distinctive tones (Zbikowski 2002). Third, this ability to recognize and value patterns of repetitious phenomena through immersion consciously utilizes cognitive and somatic intersensory processes. Vibratory feedback from the music reinscribes the communication, affirming what is presented; in effect, repetition is not mechanical movement or music but presents new opportunities to represent the material's full dimensions, becoming an interactive entity through which to communicate with the audience and other performers. Applied, these dexterities enable performers to serially navigate the changing dynamics of musical time's subterranean divisions; these 'multilogics' (Drewal 1992: 90) are the first rule of embodying time with acuity.

I specifically draw from my Ewe experience to develop this listening acuity in contemporary dancers. Expert Ewe performers who display movement show musical perspicacity through all of their communicative transactions, which takes place through maintaining a prioritization of recursive repetition-driven exchange. These transactions are all grounded by the music's primary, centripetal timekeeping instrument, known locally as the *kan-gokoui*, commonly referred to as the bell. Apprenticeship in dance-drumming begins here with learning to play its seven-beat bell-pattern amidst the density of the many other layers of timing. Essentially, until its asymmetric pattern is fully embodied, there can be no definite progression in Ewe dance-drumming. I make use of this easily portable iron duotoned instrument, both symbolically and practically, in the studio to support the dancers' process of assimilating to its polychronic duple and triple time-feels. Figure 43.2 shows two people playing the bell together, making the challenge to maintain its steady representation even greater. (p. 770)

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Fig. 43.2 The bell-pattern played simultaneously by two people during an *Adzogbo* event, an Ewe cultural practice. Afloa, Volta Region, Ghana, July 2013.



Fig. 43.3 A seven-beat Ewe bell-pattern, approximately recreated on a Western music staff by composer Derek Bermel, who has studied Ghanaian music. The recreation exemplifies the two different signatures or time-feels.

The bell-pattern contains seven beats within one cycle; it can be thought of as containing two rounds of a triplet pattern or a continuous ambulatory 2/4 pulse, even and steady, like walking. While playing their instruments, Ewe musicians interchange between the two time-feels without disrupting the music's integrity. Figure 43.3 represents these two different time signatures on a Western staff, showing how they overlay and interstice to make one pattern.

To explore this embodied musical perspicuity, I work with a group of contemporary trained dancers in the United Kingdom. As part of the analysis, I use their expert voices (p. 771) to highlight moments of learning, and revelation, which points towards deeper levels of inquiry. First, together we form a circle—a rhythmic circle (a spatial organization we return to often) to assist in apprehending anew, the motor skills we use in embodying the bell-pattern. Conceptually, circles in African aesthetics are significant in a number of ways: they are predominant in musical structures; movements have curvilinear form; and they are visible in the architecture of performance spaces, and symbolically representing democratic nonhierarchical unified structures (Anku 2000; Welsh-Asante 1995). I participate in our rhythmic circle alongside the dancers because my experiences in Ghana confirm that I, too, am still learning. In addition, partaking supports my kinaesthetic align-

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ment with the dancers' experiences, promoting my discovery of new skills alongside theirs.

From the open view of the circle, we clap the bell-pattern. I identify the triplet pattern that repeats itself twice in one cycle of the motif. Then, on beat 1, I step to the side with the left foot; on the next beat I transfer weight on the ball of the right foot; and then on beat 3, I transfer again with the whole left foot. A simple, somewhat simple foot pattern is what we use to demonstrate the ongoing triplet cycle, illuminating itself through a pendulum weight shifts, reciprocating from side to side. This seems like a straightforward undertaking of 'dual task interference', where there is a distinction between the spatial and temporal motions of two different movements (Hagendoorn 2003), in this case dancing the triplet while clapping with the bell-pattern. However, it is not as direct as putting two initially independent actions together; there are more overlapping layers within this process.

The steps of the triplet do not fall in synch with the bell-pattern's asymmetric phrasing. This phrase contains seven beats, which with the slightest lapse in concentration feels disruptive. In addition, the strong downbeat of each triplet does not coincide with that of the bell-pattern's beginning, because it takes two cycles of triplets to complete one cycle of the bell-pattern. The symmetrical form of the triplet sits uncomfortably with what now feels like ever-increasing asymmetry in the bell-pattern. Dance scholar Brenda Dixon Gottschild calls this inhabitation of differing modes of time 'embracing the conflict' (Gotschild 1996; DeFrantz 2004: 64–81). However, we seek to go beyond restive tolerance and enter into a state of holistic confluence.

Moreover, continuing on, we layer in the second time signature the 2/4 ambulatory march (found within the 6/8). This alternate time-feel is tantamount to slowing down the pace and experiencing a significant gap between the even steps. This contrasts significantly with the former, more dominating, 3/4 time that is comparatively incessant, requiring less motor control to achieve accuracy. The 6/8 walking time seems abstract and disconnected—that is, until our fibrous body breathes and consciously registers change, so that we sensationally recognize that we are not in discord or hanging ambiguously without a relationship to the existing pulse. Moving between these subtly intertwined modes of time is 'polychronic', as Stone suggests (1985). Conceivably, for dancers, this experience of time-flow is also poly-haptic. By this I mean that an understanding of time is deduced through multiple sensory interpretations (kinaesthetic, cognitive, visual, and haptic), which relay qualitative information. Excelling in this application of (p. 772) Dynamic Rhythm certainly goes beyond differences in the spatial and temporal motions of two different body parts, rather entering into more advanced states of cognitively embodied presence.

The purposes of developing rhythmic dexterities are ultimately to build intersensory awareness and to strengthen communicative performance skills while extemporizing for an unknown public. Including additional stimulus from the outside world, we add the gaze of an audience by moving this rhythmic training to a public space. Both attentive viewers and passers-by provide us with variance in the audience-gaze. Practice in uncontrolled

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public spaces requires a sharp internal focus, providing a gateway to allowing more finite sensory connections to enter into the body, a definitive requirement to blend these differentiated inhabitations of time. Such experimentation creates an entryway for dancers to connect their experience to onlookers' tacit inquiries. Onlookers' unconscious identification with rhythmic patterns signals participatory impulses, and dancers recognize the potential to engage with Audience Proxemics in modular ways through their direct or indirect responses to this public attention.

An example of this is evident in another exercise to understand the bell-pattern and its internal rhythms, to create a networked, simultaneous polyhaptic experience of its subpatterns. While outdoors, working in groups of three, we transfuse the bell-pattern's three prominent layers into each other's bodies through physical rhythmic patting on the body so that the rhythmic layers are simultaneously felt. Through tactile application, each of the rhythmic tiers can be identified singularly or experienced as confluence. The formation of the haptic-transfusion is as follows: the first person of three is the central receiver, and she stands in place, but is not still; she claps only the main bell-pattern. The second stands behind her and takes the duple (2/4) rhythm, patting this on outside the receiver's hips. The third person taps out the triplet (3/4) rhythm lightly on her head or the back of her shoulders. The idea of locating the resonance of the sound in different parts of the body also relates to the polycentric aspects of movements found in many West African and African diasporan dance and music forms, mentioned earlier. This task directs the receiver towards being able to explicitly feel time being shared across different bodily locations—with specificity—while also identifying the rhythmic conglomeration. This experiential understanding of being able to sense rhythm transfers directly into practical knowledge of how to perform isolations and how to create a synthesis of several rhythmically distinct isolations into one polyhaptic combination.

Continuing on, to amplify the haptic sensation, we all magnify our vibratory fields, enlisting another oscillating pattern through singing the rhythms aloud. Deep listening begins as a 'polychronic', immersive investigation into sound and its sensory location in the body. The task demands patience and perseverance. Recurrently, each person's embodied cognition falters, and loss of participation in the rhythmic network occurs. A rhythmic network is when musical movement patterns are generated and developed conversationally by two or more participants, and if this falters, to regain access we must listen strategically—inwardly and outwardly. When one loses one's place, this creates a separation, causing what philosopher Henri Lefebvre calls (p. 773) 'arrhythmia' (2004: 17), which is a moment of disequilibrium and in this case awkward embodiment.

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Fig. 43.4 Highbury Green, August 2013. A London public space where the Embodiology Research Group practices the bell-pattern.



Fig. 43.5 The three-person rhythmic transfusion.

Conversely, when actively immersed, there is a distinctive feeling of connection and ‘kinaesthetic’ holism (Wilson-Bokowiec and Bokowiec 2006). As a result of rhythms being played on our bodies, vibrations interact internally and coalesce. The interior meeting of rhythmic patterns produces a haptic experience of their overlapping relationship. By tapping specific parts of the body, the vector receiving knowledge, accessing formerly hidden or submerged tripartite rhythms becomes attainable. Figures 43.4 and 43.5 show this tactile immersion. In other words, by adding touch and vocal sound to assist deep listening, these multiple senses produce a state where exploratory associations between layers

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of time are possible because their absorption—haptically, sonically, and collaboratively—provides the receiver with intersensory dimensionality.

From this foundation of deep communicative listening, the next day we return rhythmically wiser to the studio, joined by the two instrumentalists, playing kit drums and vibraphone. We form the rhythmic circle, where we reassume the bell-pattern. Unapologetically, with our rhythmic confidence on display, we share our seven-beat bell-pattern, with our understanding of its components. Together we build short pieces by layering and posing rhythmic statements, which are short patterns that are repeatable, and these build into sophisticated rhythmic networks.

In combined tasks with the musicians, the dancers are required to concentrate on sustaining *rhythmic network*, thereby actively using memory and producing patterns in three distinguishable ways: (1) creating clear discernable patterns, adding to an existing composition, (2) enabling the learning of phrases created by others while simultaneously performing one's own, and (3) being able to produce new unique patterns that are different discernibly different from those created by others. To achieve (p. 774) this insertion, it is necessary to see the space in another person's movement or sound, to observe space and *feel* silence, which is the final feature of Dynamic Rhythm on which I will elaborate. Layer by layer, we build a performance from a simple clapping rhythm, and it develops into full movement and use of space. Tactics of inventing, capturing, and sustaining rhythm are at the fore. Reflecting on the final phase of foundational rhythmic games, Bless Klepcharek reports on his experience as follows: 'I felt that finally we started to move forward, everyone enjoying themselves. At the end of the day we created a piece which we could already perform. All of us put effort into doing something together. If you are working as a group it is much stronger than just one single person' (2013). Klepcharek's testimony asserts that the challenge of being responsively attentive, as a concern for improvisation, occurs automatically with this activity of rhythmic exchange and invention. Moreover, joyfulness arises as the group creates together, a default benefit that co-opts stamina. In addition, the other dancers describe the activity as addressing 'unity', 'connection', 'sensitivity', and 'multisensory listening'.

My full participation to develop these initial foundational exercises is important for two additional reasons: first, it supports the realization of trust and parity between myself as a researcher and my expert subjects, since we are tackling tasks with the same restraints, and second, it gives me a more precise reading of what the challenges are as they arise. Consequently, I am in flow, effective in my ability to intuit what the investigation's next intervention needs to be, without disrupting the performers' momentum.

Leading on from Dynamic Rhythm is the next feature, Prosody. 'Prosody' is a linguistic term referring to poetic qualities inherent to language—the cadence, pitch, and melody essential in the carriage of meaning when words are spoken (Nketia 2002). West African languages such as Ewe and Yorùbá are syntactically tonal in nature, which means that changes in speech cadence transform meaning.

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In Ewe music, drums are designed as linguistic membranes. When played expertly, the tonality in the drumming corresponds directly with pitches and patterns in their spoken language. There are grammatical structures in Ewe drumming. Identified verbally in conversation by master Ewe drum teacher Emmanuel Agbeli, he articulates a system as follows: 'TOE; TE; GA; GI; DEY-GI; TO; GA-DRA—those are the notes we use in drumming'. Furthermore, he states: 'When we are playing, these are the notes we put together to make words as a variation' (2013). Note that by 'variation' he means improvisation. Over-archingly, speech, poetics, and communication between musicians, singers, dancers, and participatory observers are realized by perspicacious listening. For the dancers to interact effectively, they must register the 'melo-rhythm' of the music (Nzewi 1974), discerning its tonal registration in order to inform the amplitude of the movement. In developing such agility, 'kinaesonic' mapping techniques—physical renderings of sound as body movement (Bokowiec and Bokowiec 2006)—are deployed to observe musical gradations, charting these across the body with specificity.

(p. 775) Prosody—Examining Musical Textures of Speech

Adapting the concept of Prosody with the Embodiology Research Group, I develop a distinctive syntax of movement method in order to graft motion onto speech and vice versa. Taking the prosodic, often melodic, lilt found in English speech as the starting point for furnishing the improviser with a wealth of opportunity to develop syntactical movement, we begin with a body-vocal exploration. The task has several generative stages of evolution, and outcomes include a recalibration of the dancer's perception of risk-taking and access to an unending source of novelty. In the first phase, I speak aloud, extemporaneously, and task the dancers' to move (stepping or isolating a body part) according to the cadence of my speech. I speak with clear enunciation and affirm that their locomotion should be precise—each shift must be a visible enunciation of each word, paying deference to the syllables that give each word its rhythmic arc.

To give an example of the second phase of Prosody development, I use a local Ewe proverb and translate it into English: 'Nobody knows tomorrow' (Tsra 2005: 27).^{iv} Using this as a fixed sentence, it is possible to repeat it with variation in cadence, speed, volume, and inference. We break it down by number of words and also by syllable. Performers then generate the corresponding number of physical steps or movements to correspond with the words and their syllabic breakdown. This method does not indicate the qualities that these actions may have, since these temporal actions are influenced by the aural textures and tones of these words, impelling the dancer to move responsively and not simply mechanistically. When this sentence—'Nobody knows tomorrow'—is spoken naturally, in each of its syllables and the phrase overall there are changes in pitch, both upward and downward, as cadences transition. These characteristics propose qualitative weight change from syllable to syllable; how the dancer embodies the tonal motion is presented as potential for variation with each sound.

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After identifying that the phonology of 'tomorrow' contains three syllables, the dancers must articulate each syllable by flexing, extending, or isolating a different part of the body, or by moving and using the same part but to a greater or lesser degree, simultaneously as I speak the phrase aloud. Symbiotically, dancers comprehend that connecting with the speaker's breath pattern results in greater precision. As dancers steer away from mimetic gesture, their reflexes produce movement that visually appears as vocal and physical simultaneity. An iterative challenge is set is to stringently detect the syllabic breakdown of a speech in a storytelling context. This time with a partner, the dancers use each other's narratives to produce simultaneous bodily articulations. Overall, this syllabic articulation presents greater challenge than merely tracing movement that flows with the melodic contours of storytelling speech. It requires rigorous concentration since narrative comprehension, as well as tonal and syllabic filters, are at work.

(p. 776) After achieving a level of actualization, the next iteration is applied, in which the dancers speak aloud while moving in tandem, creating their own prosodic textures. The entire body is in locomotion, while expressive stillness represents punctuation. To expand the range of movement articulations, we exaggerate the use of our voices; and together these stringent detections of the syllabic and tonal make-up of our speech produce simultaneous bodily articulations. Once established, performers can go beyond normal tonal range of speech: elongating words, intentionally stammering and changing the pitch (sometimes artificially—even within one syllable), exceeding the realms of everyday speech or even song. These utterances now present greater colour and texture, and the expressions of movement follow. These syllabic movement articulations are similar in character to 'Africanist' movement modalities identified in African American and Caribbean forms in which fast isolations and counterpoising coordination are prominent (Gottschild 1996; DeFrantz 2004).

In addition, underlying speech patterns exists a subterranean tempo, a hidden pulse carrying the voice and likewise the motion. These iterative cycles of exploration show ancillary potential in achieving the simultaneity of aligning movement with speech poetics. Insofar as making words comprehensible, it engenders an automatic coordinated use of breath that informs and differentiates each person's subterranean pulse. By making this breath control intentional, we distinguish both our tonal range and our punctuation. Refracted, these voice modulations in movement produce notable gradations in motion and gesture. Each iteration of this task serves to demand more of the dancers' attention to emerging detail; the challenge is to attend to this exercise with increasing precision; it is not impressionistic, as their performances show direct relationships between movement, sensation, and speech poetics.

To illustrate use of a short spoken phrase danced with these finite modulations, Gwen Jones, working intensively in this laboratory setting, deploys a simple clause, uttering: 'I feel great in this space'. She uses repetition of this sentence with a range of modulations, including pitch, volume, and speed. Notably, her actions reveal that, at times, her voice is altered by the movement's momentum. These consequential changes in cadence demonstrate how motion can impact linguistic carriage of meaning. Jones, on hearing these vo-

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cal changes, is affected and makes immediate, definite choices to respond to these cadences. At one point, she chooses to increase volume in her voice, and the movement develops into much bolder gestures, which challenges her balance, but instead of pushing her to lose control, her movement expression becomes virtuosic and surprising.

Gwen Jones Explores Prosody

What Jones shows in Figures 43.6–43.9 is common among the group—textured, repetitive use of a short statement that leads to unusual movement pathways, placing bodies at extremes of physical range, but with virtuosic ease. (p. 777)



Fig. 43.6 Gwen Jones's prosody exploration.

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Fig. 43.7 Prosodic pronouncements.



Fig. 43.8 Prosodic conviction.

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Fig. 43.9 Prosodic abandon.

On discussing where the experiment might go next, a turn is taken to explore whether the same effect might occur without speaking out loud. In other words, can we internalize Prosody and will this still produce movement differentiation? Astonishingly, equal fluidity and virtuosity does occur when the dancers recite their statements (with prosodic variation) only in their minds. Imagined manipulation of sound creates vivid bodily articulations that demonstrate strong individuated aesthetics. Ingrid MacKinnon, reflecting on the development of her prosodic articulations, surmises: ‘when you speak and you’re trying to make your point and you’re not sure of what you are saying, you pause to make sure that you are being articulate and make sense. When you transpose that onto movement, you take pauses to make sure to make your movements make sense (p. 778) or translate into *something*; rather than just constantly moving, and never really making a point’ (MacKinnon in group interview, 2013).

Speech syntax requires the use of pauses, brief suspensions of time; these are intervallic punctuations, necessary for comprehension. Transferred into movement, these silences translate into an array of punctuations—halts, dramatic level changes, and recalibrations of energy. Similarly, group member Noelle White confirms that the Prosody technique makes it possible for her to remain in the moment and create with greater differentiated qualities. Uncharted patterns of movement that enable florid cadence to unfurl are accessible using this strategy; the mind is visibly expanded as cognition distributes across the body. Movements appear radically free, at times, almost abandoned. However, the performers visibly remain in firm control, demonstrating a responsive awareness of environmental factors—sound, space, and the presence of others.

Within these ‘kinaesonic’ body-mind phenomena, where a sequence of events appears linear, with the speaking voice conterminously determining the movement, upon close examination, one discovers a dynamic multidirectional loop. Through use of voice, dancers take increased risk with their movement, and more technical skills (balance, coordina-

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tion, range, speed, level, and multiples uses of directional change) are co-opted in their handling of seemingly precarious and multifaceted movements. Prosody explorations, informed by the linguistic base of Ewe drumming, create unique routes towards complex arrangements of novelty and dexterous control, not revealed by other processes. However, further elaborations of voice and movement relations, beyond what is described here, can be iterated. Precision is of utmost importance in Prosody, affirming that movement can inform language. Though other ways of interweaving voice and movement exist, this approach is founded on syntactical actuality, resonating in the body, and not on allusions to sonic hues.

In this exploration of spoken language, one of the important features we encounter in speech are silences, or pauses. Silence is the third feature of Dynamic Rhythm. It is these suspensions within speech that deliver meaning and enable comprehension in the listener; the use of punctuation enables meaning to be deciphered. It has a number of connotations, depending on whether it is a referencing term for sound or physical movement, which may more accurately be thought of as suspension, because micromotions continue and these too are expressive; in both cases, sound or motion pertain to occupying physical space. As I have established, rhythm is identifiable through the presence of repetitive forms or patterns. These organized time-shapes work across micro- and macro-spaces. Patterns realized have discernable shapes; they make impressions through non-expressions, thus giving form to space; the way that space differentiates regularity and asymmetry creates their characteristics and ultimately their communicative affect.

Fundamentally, to sustain a pattern requires the use and observance of silence and space; this creates form, legibility and comprehension. Where the dance is concerned, Welsh-Asante points out that 'attention must be directed at the silence and the stillness if one is to appreciate the full complexity and beauty of the polymultiple [*sic*] experience' (p. 779) (Welsh-Asante 1985: 81). Paul Berliner, scholar of both Zimbabwean music and North American jazz, classifies parts of rhythm that are absent, calling them nonstrokes that are felt to be 'inherent'. Furthermore, Agawu's argumentative essay 'Structural Analysis or Cultural Analysis? Competing Perspectives on the "Standard Pattern" of West African Rhythm' points out the significance of silence on several occasions. At one point he states that 'a metric cycle may also employ silence as a marker of the regulative beat' (2006: 23) and 'armed with the cultural notion of play ... silences are just as likely to mark beats as sound' (26).

The entry point of silence comes from aural resonance that furnishes rhythm with entryways back to connecting with the next tone. The feeling of space is in itself generative, it is not emptiness (Thiong'o 1997); it is visual, spatial, and tactile, a metadirectional connector of events, and this interweaving of actual and implied timing holds implications for improvised interactions. This attentional directive towards space amplifies the conceptual significance of silence as a tactile entity, following time's viscosity. This aesthesis, or in other words tacit process, suggests ways for timing dynamics to be examined in the dance studio setting. The subtleties of the spaces between rhythm and timing are a critical part of polyphonic dance-drumming music. Its microsuspensions, in conjunction with

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the surrounding kinetic activity and sensory-cognitive awareness, makes Embodiology's deployment and examinations of rhythm unformulaic.

It could be argued that silence is the leading feature of rhythm, since the other two aspects, Prosody and Repetition, cannot exist without it. I, however, chose to represent these three features in the specified order, ending with silence, as a way to arrive at this place of coalescence whereupon emphasis on a sensory mastery of space, silence, and suspension creates undeniable facility. It is possible to identify space, silence, and suspension at the core of our being, through our breath. When we breathe, we observe suspension between the inhalation and exhalation; when one exhales, one's lungs can be considered empty, but in another sense that suspension hails the moment of expectation when the lungs are ready to be filled.

Conclusion

While constraints exist in Dynamic Rhythm through practical and theoretical study of concepts—including rhythmic network, kinaesthetic alliteration, and repetition-with-a-difference—it is possible to achieve a level of embodied acuity. In this way, practitioners' abilities to spontaneously create, in groups or individually, exceed conscious competence. Moreover, these distinctive neo-African laws of improvisation become clear. When later recombined with the other five constitutive parts of Embodiology, Dynamic Rhythm fulfils the role of the metagenerator. Emerging from the essence of breath, from this place Dynamic Rhythm encompasses various sensory and cognitive states of awareness. To practice improvisation with deference to Dynamic Rhythm requires the cultivation of whole-body listening to discern internal (p. 780) patterns, to generate external, legible forms, to transform them collaboratively, and to sustain them with the proprioceptive wisdom that supports interactivity. By working with the Ewe bell-pattern to infuse the body with simultaneous multiple time-feels creates gateways for experientially registering different resonances of time across the body that coalesce to become one unifying vibration that promotes musical flow and readiness to interpret musical phrasing offered by others. The rhythmic network is always active, communicating to participants in accordance with their level of acuity and activity. The relating of rhythmic pattern to speech poetics, through deploying Prosody strategies, makes the relationship between movement polycentrism, isolation, and unyielding inventiveness clear, a reality that brings with it nuances of tonally informed, individually virtuosic movement, but without loss of connectedness with others who are participating.

This paradigm for generating performance stems from improvisation practices found in West Africa; Diaspora dance styles have subsequently extended out from the continent through an implicit deployment of these six generative laws, and many also have African foundations—to name a few: tap dance, dancehall, lindy hop, house, voguing, breaking, salsa, flamenco, and tango. These dance cultures emerged in conjunction with specific types of music; therefore, to research and practice improvisation with African-centred logic it is necessary to approach it holistically. This interdisciplinary and intercultural fact

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is woven into Embodiology praxis, which offers West African aesthetics as bountiful alternative strategies to inform and enrich contemporary dance practices, wherein improvisation-is-performance.

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Notes:

(i.) Embodiology[®] is a registered trademark and as such demonstrates my commitment, as an action researcher, to return a royalty payment to the Ewe community in Ghana each time its principles are shared in full or in part.

(ii.) My multimodal methodology combines adapted strategies from autoethnography, Practice-as-Research, action research, and grounded theory. My journey toward Embodiology stems from a fascination with improvising, traceable to my formative years of danc-

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ing at home with my mother, learning 1950s and 1960s Jamaican social dances. In this informal yet performance context, with family members watching, blue beat, ska, calypso, and reggae, interchanged with US rock and roll, rhythm and blues, and Motown, inspired hours of original dancing based on combined musical interactivity of instrumentalists and singers. Fast-forward into the latter years of my formal studio-based dance training in the late 1980s and 1990s, I revisited the social context, vigorously participating in club dancing, and this brought with it a musical awareness of jazz-funk, bebop, Latin jazz, fusion, and breakbeats. So, despite performing challenging repertory, in London Contemporary Dance Theatre and Rambert Dance Company, by choreographers including Jane Dudley, Ohad Naharin, Robert Cohan, and Anthony Tudor, I remained inspired by improvisation, which, I contend, uniquely emerges as inventive, self-actualized performance.

(iii.) Other researchers, such as influential American ethnomusicologists David Locke (1992) and James Burns (2009), have also undertaken research residence at this site. Despite Ewes being one of the country's minority ethnic groups, dances and 'musics' (Lomax 1980) from this region are a central part of the National Dance Company of Ghana; furthermore, across the African Diaspora, Ewe songs and dances are also widely practised.

(iv.) A proverb is a short sentence in common circulation that declares an accepted wisdom. This proverb means: no one knows what will happen tomorrow, so we need to be careful in life. Further interpreted, it cautions those 'who make plans without submitting them to the will of God' (Tsra 2005: 26).

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S. Ama Wray is Associate Professor of Dance at the University of California, Irvine; she received her PhD from the University of Surrey in 2016. Within the realm of contemporary dance, she was a dancer with flagship dance companies in the United Kingdom—London Contemporary Dance Theatre and Rambert Dance Company—and she continues to be the custodian of Jane Dudley's timeless solo *Harmonica Breakdown*, created in 1938. Alongside her scholarly purpose in developing her neo-African improvisation praxis, *Embodiology*®, she continues her longstanding artistic practice as a choreographer and director, choosing the term 'neo-African performance architect' to describe her professional role. Her collaborators include Gary Grosby, Julian Joseph, Zoe Rahman, and Wynton Marsalis. Beyond dance, she directs and choreographs Mojisola Adebayo's work and cocreates *Texterritory* with Fleeta Siegel, a cell-phone-based interactive performance platform that stimulates audience participation in performance.