

THE RHYTHMS OF THE GAZE AND THE DISSOCIATION OF THE FINGERS

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Extract from Chapter 1:
‘The auditive and visual sensations
influenced by the positionings of the fingers’

When I first heard Liszt in Rome, in 1868, all my powers of hearing seemed to be transformed as soon as he began to play: this completely unexpected transformation struck me more than the playing itself. It seemed as if up till then I had been suffering from a form of musical short-sightedness, and that I had suddenly discovered that there exists a point of view regarding the hearing of sounds; indeed, on hearing certain sounds, I was not able to follow a phrase without being impelled to return to certain other already faraway sounds; or rather it was the case that these earlier sounds were suddenly reappearing in my mind and were overwhelming me as though I was seeing ghosts.

While I was listening to this music, so different to what I had heard up to that point, I was sensing my thinking moving as if it had acquired – independently of my free will – the power of walking backwards and forwards along unknown paths. I was unable to explain how these paths being traversed by my thinking were able to emerge with such a clear sense of direction, and the cause of that direction escaped me.

I must state, that it was not the music – as had been written by the composer – which I was hearing, it was the ideal transformation of this music, an infinitely more beautiful and more divisible music, in which the most minute of gradual rhythmic changes and variations in shading (those incapable of being rendered by musical sym-

bols) were clearly producing the most profound and durable impressions on me.

Notes are grouped upon the musical score by separate signs; they do not have a shared life in the true sense of the word: in contrast, the notes thought up by the composer are influenced in relation to their length and their intensity; they respectively come closer and move away from each other by the tiniest of gradual changes. These are those freely flowing influences which shape the higher line which is undefined in the composition, but which the musician perceives and makes the listener perceive, when he or she is acting on the listener's thinking, as Liszt was doing on mine.

Liszt's playing had demonstrably acted on my mind in a way for him to communicate powers which it had never possessed; and if he was thus in some form suggesting to me a mind different to my own, this is because – spontaneously – he was suggesting to me another memory, a memory through which the impressions caused by the sounds continue for a long enough time, the result being that the musical art itself seemed to me to have been transformed.

And it was clearly the phenomenal dissociation of the fingers of Liszt, closely linked to the extraordinary brain activity involved in his playing which brought about the temporary improvement of my memory, and as a result, of my musical thinking.

Here is how the connection between the intellectual activity in Liszt's playing and the wondrous dissociation of his fingers is explained. We can say that because of this wholly exceptional dissociation, Liszt possessed in each one of his fingers a different *state of awareness*, in which he perceived – as in a four-way mirror – the different states of awareness of each of his other fingers; it is the aptness of this arrangement of these multiple 'shimmering' effects which creates both the maximum transparency in the sonority, and the maximum enrichment of the musical thinking.

Yet, it is precisely because of this four-way mirror with which each of his fingers needed to be equipped, that Liszt's hand is not the same as ours, since we do not feel the living force of the other fingers being reflected through the activity of any one single finger. In reality, we are not unaware that if on each hand the pianist plays only with five fingers, his or her brain must act as if twenty five in each hand were being detected.

It must be said that this balance of the hands' sensations permitted to be registered by the keyboard has become for me a science which is destined to form part of an intellectual education, because it is capable of providing a substantial benefit to every mind. For this educational process, each new dissociation of the feelings corresponds to a new flow of thought, which takes place along previously unknown paths. In this case, learning to know oneself in a new way is indeed a question of learning to think in a new way.

Since I started to refine the smallest elements of my tactile sensation, I have found it unacceptable that the development of this silent music which spreads through my fingers (for my tactile sensations seem to possess a balance and to be interconnected as with my auditive sensations) should not be regarded as an obligatory form of manual and intellectual well-being for the civilized person (or one who claims to be so).

Due to the extraordinary improvement that our manual activity is capable of attaining, we certainly do not have the right to allow our hands to be uneducated, or if not uneducated, at least completely unfit to allow us to render the maximum intensity of the sensations perceptible (in which their harmony consists). Admittedly, the importance of the hand's improvement spreads well beyond the scope of professional education, whatever that is. How can one imagine that the infinite subdivisions of space and of time, which we are able to conceive as the deliberate refining of the attitudes and of the movements of the fingers are developed, if they do not coincide with certain special phenomena limited to manual functions

In spite of the still partial dissociation of my fingers, I am already able to state that my manual improvement exercises an undeniable influence not only on my ear, but also on my sight; since, being influenced by a simple change of attitude communicated to the index finger and to the thumb, my auditive and visual perceptions can undergo significant changes. Before sketching out an analysis of these results gained by the manual artistic education, let it be said that these phenomena only concern our state of special awareness.



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