

THE INAUGURATION OF A TRULY NEW DIRECTION IN ART

Dornach, January 11, 1920

In the first part of our offering today we will take the liberty of introducing you to eurythmy. Since it is probably fair to assume that not all of our honored guests today have attended previous performances, where I discussed the nature of the art of eurythmy, please allow me to say a few words about the nature of eurythmy today as well. Eurythmy is not really comparable to any kind of dance that might appear outwardly similar. Rather, what you are seeing is the inauguration of a truly new direction within the arts.

Eurythmy was born out of what we here call Goethean aesthetics, Goethean artistic sensibility. We see it as intimately bound up with Goethe's worldview. I will not try to speak comprehensively today, but rather I will try to indicate what is important in just a few sentences.

You will see movements performed by individuals, and you will see groups of individuals taking up positions relative to each other and interacting with each other. What are you to make of these movements that arise either through the movement of the individual human body and its limbs, or through groups of performers? What are you to make of these movements? What do they mean? The movements are not arbitrary in any sense. For everything in the way of mere pantomime, of mere mimicry, of spontaneous gestures,⁷⁶ has been banished completely from the art of eurythmy. Eurythmy is completely suffused by an inner lawfulness.

In music, in harmony and melody, there is an inner lawfulness, and any attempt merely to paint with tone colors arbitrarily would be unmusical. In the same way, eurythmy does not seek to create accidental relationships between outer movements and inner states; rather, it seeks to follow a kind of lawfulness in the sequence of the movements. Eurythmy seeks to move within a musical element, a linguistic element. What you will be seeing in eurythmy is a mute language. And it is a mute language that was created by attending, with a kind

of sensory-suprasensory seeing, to aspects of speech, especially artistic speech, which we tend not to consider when we are simply listening to the spoken word. We usually direct our attention to the sound of speech.

Just consider how I am causing the air to move by speaking to you right now. This movement of the air is just the continuation of what is present in the way of potential movement, and in particular of the capacities for movement in the larynx and its neighboring organs. One can study that whole marvelous group of organs that underlie speaking, and then one can translate what unfolds as hidden capacities for movement, or as half or wholly executed movements of the larynx and its associated organs, into movements of the whole human body. In that way, the whole human body can become a moving larynx, which is to say, a medium for expressing a mute language.

Explaining what art is before experiencing it is generally undoable. And so I will not try to do that. This is especially true of eurythmy, which has to reveal its nature through the immediate impression that the aesthetic sensation and enjoyment make. But eurythmy can do that, because it calls forth from the linguistic element something that has been lost in everyday, colloquial speech. Especially within the context of our modern culture, something has long since separated itself from the more artistic aspects of language and led it over into mere convention. In our colloquial speech⁷⁷ two things interact: thoughts act out of the head, as it were, and the will acts out of the rest of the human constitution...⁷⁸ In eurythmy, we shut off thinking and bring into movement by way of the human limbs what would otherwise be carried out by the larynx and other related organs: we carry out a human will impulse. The whole human being expresses itself in a mute language as a being of will.

So you will see this mute language upon the stage in the form of eurythmy, accompanied either by music, which expresses the same things through musical tone, or by recitation, which expresses through audible speech what eurythmy expresses in mute speech. In this case, the recitation must conform itself to the eurythmy. And for that reason, we must go back to the better, older, artistic forms of recitation. They attended more to the elements of poetry that are actually artistic: meter, rhythm, the formal aspects of poetry generally, whereas today people tend to recite solely out of the prosaic content. Many people still find it strange to hear what becomes visible in the movement of the limbs

through eurythmy in the recitation itself, through the way in which the poetry is handled by the speech artist when accompanying eurythmy.

We shall perform individual poems through the art of eurythmy, and then after that, a longer poem, a Norwegian dream-song, *Olaf Åsteson*.⁷⁹ This Norwegian dream song is something of extraordinary interest in its own right. It was rediscovered when there was an awakening of interest in the Norwegian folk dialect, *Landsmål*, as opposed to the literary language, *Riksmål*, which is cultivated more widely now. This *Landsmål* is like an old book of folklore, and there is something contained within it of which this dream-song of *Olaf Åsteson* is a part. Clearly it can be traced back to very early times, in which the Norwegian spirit expressed what moved its soul at a time when the old pagan Nordic clairvoyance persisted; and then it was suffused with Christianity. This poem about Olaf Åsteson shows us how these old Nordic conceptions merged with profound yearnings that arose out of a deep, inward, affective understanding of Christianity. A truly wonderful piece of folk poetry. With the help of Norwegian friends who know *Landsmål*, I have sought to render this dream-song in German, and this is the text that has been set to eurythmy in the performance you are about to see.

And the third thing we want to present to you is a Shepherds' Play, the kind of Christmas play⁸⁰ that takes us right back to the Christian folk-didacticism of earlier centuries.

The Shepherds' Play that we will be performing was discovered by my revered teacher in Vienna, Karl Julius Schröer,⁸¹ with whom I spoke a great deal about such things almost forty years ago. That is what gave rise to my love for such things. Out of love we have tried for several years within the anthroposophical movement to renew these things and to bring them before the public once again.

This Christmas play was last performed among the German colonists in western Hungary, in the area around Bratislava,⁸² the Oberufer region, near the Žitný ostrov. And the interesting thing is that these Christmas plays and others like them—Schröer collected them in Hungary, and Weinhold⁸³ collected them in Silesia—that they were collected at a time when they were actually disappearing. They were brought along up until the 16th century by the German colonists who pushed into that area from more westerly regions, and they survived among them in their original form. Every year, when the corresponding festivals approached, these plays were prepared and performed with great ceremony. It is very

touching to recall how the people of these villages—these Germans who lived in what can only be described as grinding poverty—performed the Christmas plays during the 'forties, 'fifties, and 'sixties, while Karl Julius Schröer was collecting them. It is touching to recall those performances, which took place every year around Christmas.

As soon as the grape harvest was over, then the person who was entrusted with putting on the plays in a particular locale gathered together the stoutest lads. These Christmas plays were entrusted only to those in the village who deserved to participate. (Back then, they were never printed; rather, they were passed on from father to son to grandson, and so forth.) With the consent of the local priest, he would then choose the most worthy lads—only males were allowed to perform then.

An old custom regarding theatrical productions was preserved in this context. And the performers were given strict instructions. Just that fact alone reveals the mood in which such things were performed. The lads who had been chosen were forbidden to visit the tavern during that whole time of the year; they were obligated to conduct themselves morally; they were obligated to keep their promises while the plays were being rehearsed and performed; they could not question the authority of the director in any way, and so forth. The plays were approached with great ceremony.

And then, after a parade around the village and gathering in the hall of an inn, these Christmas plays were performed for the people. The plays reveal how they lived among the people who had come from a place far to the west. Right at the beginning, in the so-called star-song, you will hear about the sea and the Rhine. Of course, those things were not present in the Oberufer region where these plays were finally discovered. Rather, when the sea is mentioned, what is meant is Lake Constance, and when the Rhine is mentioned, that is because these people originally lived along the Rhine. Then they migrated eastward, and took the plays along with them.

Whereas the cultivated elites in the western lands suppressed these things, so that they were kept alive *sub rosa* if at all, these German colonists kept them alive through the middle of the nineteenth century and performed them with great piety. Here we gain a deep insight into the way in which Christianity educated Central Europeans. And we view it as an important part of our task not just to pursue conventional,

external history and to get to know the evolution of humanity, but also to bring history to life in this way for our contemporaries.

Finally, I would ask you please to bear in mind what we know all too well: that our new art of eurythmy is still at the beginning of its development. It will be perfected, and then it will be able to take its place beside the other established art forms. But for the time being, I ask you please to be patient with eurythmy. This is just a beginning. In the same way, I would ask you please to keep in mind while enjoying our performance of the Shepherds' Play that we have not been able to engage professional actors. Rather, we are trying to keep an important cultural artifact alive.

Please try to make do with what we are able to offer at this time! We appeal to your forbearance, but we are also convinced that your good will in the case of the eurythmy and the cultural interest in the case of the Shepherds' Play will justify our having performed them.