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Plotinus on Music, Rhythm, and Harmony

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Abstract

According to Plotinus, music in the sensible realm represents a stepping stone to reach the intelligible world and, more generally, the One. From the very early treatises, Plotinus notes that the perception of harmonies and rhythms is susceptible to leading to the understanding of intelligible harmony. While Plotinus abandons the link between music and astronomy, distinguishing himself from the general reading of Plato developed in the imperial era, he stresses the psychagogical dimension of music. On the one hand, Plotinus simplifies the analyses devoted to music as a preparatory discipline to the contemplation of the transcendent realm, but on the other, he draws upon examples from the arts of rhythm (namely dance and music) to illustrate key-aspects of his cosmology and of causal processes. The rhythm of human choreographies provides insight into the cosmic order, its harmony and its regularity. But this image is also used to point to astral causality, as well as to the soul-body relationship. After reviewing the place of music in Plotinus' metaphysical organization, this paper examines the use Plotinus makes of images related to music, dance and rhythm to exemplify different causal relationships. It concludes with an analysis of the meaning of an *hapax*, the adjective *arruthmiston* (*Enn.*, V.8 (31), 1, 8) taken from Aristotelian doxography and initially associated with the primordial indetermination of matter. These considerations lead to the conclusion that, in the *Enneads*, the concept of *rhythmos* goes beyond the field of musical arts and denotes the dynamic productivity of intelligible realities.

Introduction

In *Enn.* VI. 3 (44), 16,¹ where Plotinus establishes a cartography of what should be ranked among qualities and what belongs to the world of substances, he indicates that there is a "double music" – just as there is a double arithmetic, geometry or astronomy –, drawing inspiration from analyses of *Republic* VII. On the one hand, there is sensible music, which manifests itself through the sound of the singer and of an instrument, and which makes the soul incline towards the sensible world. On the other, there is intelligible music, which directs the soul towards the intelligible and that which is beyond any sound. A few lines further on, Plotinus compares the practice of sensible music to that of *praktikai aretai*, which confine the activities of the soul to the requirements of the political life, that is, to the general care of the life of the soul-body composite. This presupposes that the other music is analogous to the purifying virtues that lead the soul to the contemplation of the intelligible. Nevertheless, to fully understand this opposition, one must consider the general context of the treatises on the genera of being, in which Plotinus endeavors to emphasize the distance between the intelligible, the only true *ousia*, and the sensible, which is only a set of qualities. Indeed, if the sensible has only a homonymous relationship with the intelligible, from which it derives, their separation does not imply a total break. The deficiency that Plotinus indicates both in acts of conventional virtue and in the sensible arts is indeed their "other-directedness", to use an expression of J. Wilberding². But in other contexts, Plotinus shows that, just as some virtues related to the composite, that is, civic virtues, can prepare the soul for its ascent to the

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¹ *Enn.*, VI. 3 (44), 16, 13-32.

² J. Wilberding (2008).

intelligible, certain arts related to the sensible, such as music, likewise serve to prepare the soul for its ascent towards the intelligible realm. However, if one examines *Enn.*, I.3 (20), addressing the role of sensible music in the soul's ascent to the intelligible realm, Plotinus appears to have relatively little to say on the matter. This third treatise, according to the Porphyrian order, follows *Enn.*, I.1 (53) entitled, 'What is the Living Being? And What is Man?'. Identifying the properly human dimension of human beings, that is, that which connects them to the intelligible realm, as opposed to the *zoōn*, the part that is subject to passions and emotions, is the first step in Plotinus' philosophical programme. The next treatise, *Enn.*, I.2 (19), which is devoted to the analysis of political and purificatory virtues, lays out the various stages that are required for the soul to purify itself and thus return to the intelligible world and the One, and *Enn.*, I.3 (20) examines the three natures that are most apt to ascend to the intelligible (the *mousikos*, the *erotikos*, and the *philosophos*). In this context, the experience of music is presented as a transitory step in the ascent of the soul to the intelligible realm and, ultimately, to the One.

Plotinus' engagement with the Platonic tradition concerning music is in fact rather limited. While in the *Republic* and the *Laws*, Plato addresses at length the importance of choosing appropriate melodies and choreographies, as an essential part of his reflection on politics, these concerns are hardly touched upon by Plotinus. He does not detail which kinds of melodies or rhythms are conducive to the softening of the senses, to courageous deeds, or to virtue³. Music is no longer conceived as a collective experience, but instead – and above all – as a stage in the soul's solitary progress towards the recovery of its original, essential nature.⁴ On the one hand, from the very early treatises on, Plotinus states that the perception of harmonies and rhythms is conducive to the understanding of intelligible harmony. On the other, however, he gives only marginal attention to issues such as the nature of harmony itself – the mathematical reflection on numerical relations. To a certain extent, his approach to music is an expression of what has been identified as a 'de-mathematization' of Plato's thought⁵. Although Plotinus does point to the definition of the soul as a musical harmony in *Timaeus* (36a-37a), and to the role of numerical proportions in its generation, these are only allusive references. Nor does he explicitly articulate the link between music and its 'sister science', astronomy⁶ – the importance of which as a pedagogical practice also remains unmentioned in the treatises. Plotinus thus departs from the general reading of Plato developed in the imperial era, which is exemplified in chapter VII of the *Didaskalikos*, among other sources. In this passage, Alcinoüs discusses the role played by ἡ τοῦ μαθηματικοῦ θεωρία, which he defines as a subdivision of theoretical philosophy, together with theology and physics. For him, the purpose of mathematics is to sharpen the mind and to help develop mental precision. Music and astronomy are part of the mathematical training in that they each contribute to the exercise of a specific sense:

For even as the eyes are naturally suited to astronomy, so is the sense of hearing to harmony; and even as in applying our minds to astronomy we are led from visible objects to invisible and intelligible essence, so in listening to harmonious sound we in

³ According to Porphyry, *VP*, 14, "Plotinus had a complete knowledge of geometry, arithmetic, mechanics, optics and music, but was not disposed to apply himself to detailed research on these subjects".

⁴ V. Jankélévitch (1998), p. 38.

⁵ R. Chiaradonna (2014).

⁶ Plato, *Republic*, 530 d8.

the same way transfer our attention from things audible to what is contemplated by the mind itself.⁷

On the one hand, Plotinus simplifies the analyses devoted to music as a preparatory discipline to the contemplation of the transcendent realm, but, on the other, he draws on examples taken from the arts of rhythm (namely dance and music) to illustrate key aspects of his cosmology and of causal processes. The rhythm of human choreographies provides an insight into the cosmic order, its harmony and its regularity. But this image is also used to point to astral causality, as well as to the relationship between the individual soul and the body which depends on it. Together with music, the art of dance (whether individually practiced, as in pantomime, or collectively, as in the case of choral dancing) follows a numerical pattern, and it is ruled by rhythm, that is, ‘the order of movement’, as stated in book II of Plato’s *Laws*.

Beyond the simple evocative use of musical or choreographic rhythms to illustrate causal processes, Plotinus attaches great importance to the very notion of *rhythmos*. The concept of rhythm runs through Plotinus’ metaphysics and cosmology insofar as – and this is what this paper proposes to examine – it expresses the dynamism and productive power of intelligible realities. First of all, we will discuss the role that Plotinus confers on music in the ascent of the soul to the intelligible. Sensible music, when regulated according to measure and proportions, is a manifestation of a higher order, stemming from the intelligible world to which the soul itself, in its highest dimension, is always connected. Secondly, we will see how the notion of harmony, understood as the perfect unity of a multiplicity, which is at the heart of the process by which the soul gradually becomes aware of its intelligible nature, is also used by Plotinus as an image of the causal relationships between the different levels of reality. This will lead us to see how the concept of harmony is, in a way, subordinated to that of rhythm, which is at the very foundation of the generative power of the Forms.

1. *Music and sensible beauty*

At the beginning of *Enn.*, I.3 (20), commenting on *Phaedrus* 248 d3, Plotinus establishes that the natural dispositions of the *mousikos*⁸ are twofold and complementary. On the one hand, the musician has an emotive and reactive temperament; on the other, he naturally seeks beautiful things:

One must consider the musician as easily moved and excited by beauty, but quite incapable of setting himself in motion on his own, while quick to be dragged by random images that are, so to speak, impressed upon him; and just as fearful people are quick to react to noises, so the musician is to sounds and their inherent beauty; always avoiding what lacks harmony and unity in songs and rhythms, he seeks instead rhythmic proportion and appropriate sounds⁹.

⁷ Alcinous, *Didaskalikos*, VII, 161, 37-41.

⁸ As J.-B. Gourinat (2016), p. 99, notes, in this treatise the term *mousikos* is not employed in the general sense of ‘friend of the muses’, i.e., cultivated person, but more specifically to designate the lover of music and dance – not necessarily the professional musician, but also the amateur who practices music or simply appreciates it.

⁹ *Enn.*, I. 3 (20), 1, 22-28. My translation.

As V. Jankélévitch notes, following Ficino, the Plotinian *mousikos* has an inner disposition – or "flair", as it were – that allows him to perceive beauty before he can fully apprehend it.¹⁰ For the music-lover, to be defined as an emotional being signifies that the dominant part in him is the lower, irrational soul. His emotive nature causes him to shun discordance and disharmony and seek harmonious sounds instead. The musician differs from the philosopher in that: while easily moved by the beauty of harmonious sounds, he is incapable of initiating his ascension towards essential beauty.¹¹ Therein lies his weakness: he is dependent on external *stimuli*, on the impressions caused by random objects on his senses (ἐκ τῶν τυχόντων οἷον ἐκτύπων).¹² His soul is not capable of spontaneously setting itself in motion and returning towards the superior principles of the universe. Of the three natures that are best disposed to turn towards the intelligible – the musician, the lover, the philosopher –, only the philosopher is naturally disposed to detach himself from the sensible in order to contemplate the intelligible. By contrast, the lover and the *mousikos* need, first, the impulse of sensible beauty and, second, an education, in order to turn towards intelligible beauty. There are several stages in this education. The first one consists in comprehending that harmonies perceived by the senses are only a trace of the higher, intelligible harmony. Once the musician has been moved by sensible harmonies, he will dissociate them from their sensible shell, and thus apprehend the beauty of harmonious measures and rhythmic proportions:

After perceiving the sensible sounds, rhythms, and figures,¹³ he is to be guided as follows: by discarding the matter of those things upon which such measures and proportions supervene, he is to be led to the beauty that reigns over them. He is to learn that this was the source of his transport – that is, the intelligible harmony and its inherent beauty, or the universal beauty, not just some particular beauty, and he has to internalize the philosophical notions. It is from this starting point that he is to be taught to believe in what he still does not know to be in his possession. What these arguments consist in will be discussed later on¹⁴.

There are three elements in particular that the musician seeks: (1) harmony, that is, consonant arrangements of sounds; (2) rhythmic proportion, which lies in the arrangement of long and short; (3) the appropriateness of figures (σχήματα) – be it musical figures or choreographic figures set to music. This triad, which is inspired by *Republic* III, 413 e, was to become a main tenet of Middle-Platonic thought.¹⁵ According to Plotinus, by seeking order and measure, the musician is willing to order his own soul, which is the first step in the process of purification by which the individual soul gradually arrives at its intelligible origin. In *Enn.*, I, 3 (20), 1, Plotinus remains quite elliptic and does not give precisions about the

¹⁰ Jankélévitch (1998), p. 34.

¹¹ *Enn.*, I, 3 (20), 1, 22-23.

¹² On the meaning of τυχόντες, see J.-B. Gourinat (2016), pp. 110-111.

¹³ As J.-B. Gourinat notes (note *ad loc.*), it is difficult to determine whether σχήματα designates the 'figures' of sound – this rather enigmatic expression may refer, as in *Laws* II 660a, to a certain rhythmic arrangement – as the context would indicate or, more generally, the dance figures executed to the musician's tune.

¹⁴ *Enn.*, I, 3 (20), 1, 28-35. My translation.

¹⁵ The triad has often been read in terms of the Pythagorean tradition associating musical intervals and harmony as an expression of mathematical proportions. See Plato, *Laws* II, 654 e - 655 a and Theon of Smyrna, *Expositio*, p. 11, 12-13.

steps of this ascensional process. In the next chapter, studying the case of the lover, who, like the musician, is initially moved by sensible beauty, he introduces the role played by the practice of civic virtues. To order one's soul, to give measure to the emotions that come from the living being, corresponds to what Plotinus calls the practice of the civic virtues, which are themselves a propaedeutic to the acquisition of the cathartic virtues, which enable the soul to contemplate the intelligible Forms. This entire progression through the degrees of virtues shows the processes implemented so that the soul may detach itself as far as possible from its alienating concern with the sensible world and direct its attention towards its higher dimension, living in accordance with the intelligible.¹⁶ From harmonious sounds, the musician's soul is to ascend to the apprehension of a loftier beauty; from visible beauties, the lover's soul is to progress to the apprehension of the beautiful as displayed in righteousness and honest behavior. Perceptible proportions, measures and harmonies thus point to a superior harmony, and ultimately to the measured order of intelligible Forms. Now, what enables the soul's ascension is that its higher dimension has never actually left the intelligible realm. This is why, before considering its collective or political aspects, Plotinus primarily conceives of music as an individual experience, that of the soul's return to its primordial origin. In the case of the musician and of the lover, the perception of sensible beauty can be seen as a starting point permitting the ascent towards the intelligible. This statement is to be understood in the general context of the Plotinian theory of sense-perception. Broadly speaking, sense-perception – which is primarily an activity of the soul – is to relate various incorporeal *typoi*,¹⁷ drawn from sensible experience, to the traces of the intelligible Forms ever-present in the soul.¹⁸ When the soul perceives sensible harmony, what makes it capable of recognizing it as such is a pre-existing and higher harmony in the intelligible world. According to Plotinus, what Plato calls 'recollection' is the achievement of this relational activity of the soul, ultimately leading it to the full recognition of its intelligible nature.¹⁹ In *Enn.*, II.9 (33), Plotinus actually pits the musician's aesthetic emotion against the crudeness of the Gnostics, who fail to see through sensory beauty and recognize the traces of the original and intelligible perfection. Only those who are aware of the higher harmonies and numbered measures of the

¹⁶ *Enn.*, I, 2 (19) analyzes the scale of virtues. Briefly speaking, according to Plotinus, the four cardinal virtues of *Republic* IV are to be found on two levels in the soul. On the lower level, they manifest themselves as the civic or political virtues, and their role is simply to discipline the soul, whereas on the superior level, they are no longer linked to the exercise of a practical activity, but are identified with contemplative activity. The latter are the virtues of the philosopher, who strives to achieve the goal of "becoming like god", as stated in the *Theaetetus*. Thus, courage, as a cathartic virtue, in the upper dimension of the soul, does not consist in performing an act of bravery, but is "freedom from affection, according to the likeness of that to which it looks, which is free from affection by nature", *Enn.*, I.2 (19), 6, 25-27. By prioritizing the levels of virtues (civic and cathartic), Plotinus articulates the different definitions of virtue that Plato gives in the *Republic*, where their role is to lead the lower and desiring parts of the soul to obey the upper part, and in the *Phaedo*, where the virtues are defined as the purifications of the soul. For more on this, see D. O' Meara (2003), pp. 40-44; J. Wilberding (2008), pp. 380-385; J.-M. Cooper (2012); Ch. I. Noble (forthcoming).

¹⁷ On this, see P.-M. Morel (2002).

¹⁸ *Enn.*, VI.7 (38), 6, 3. See E. K. Emilsson (1988). The interpretation of the sense-perception process in Plotinus is a very delicate question which has been subject to much debate in secondary literature. This problem goes far beyond the limits of the present paper. I merely indicate that, in his latest book, E. Emilsson, (2017) has nuanced his previous reading, according to which the soul activates innate concepts in every act of sense-perception.

¹⁹ On Plotinus' interpretation of recollection, see R. Chiaradonna (2019) and A. Michalewski (forthcoming).

intelligible can be moved by harmonious sounds in the sensible world and be led, via this experience, to the recollection of truth.²⁰ This insensitivity of the Gnostics with regard to the beauty of the sensible world is the corollary of their inability to elaborate a theory of virtue, of its acquisition and of the process of the purification of the soul, as pointed out in *Enn.* II. 9 (33), 15.

Music, then, is mainly significant as a stepping stone –most importantly considering where it may lead the souls. What really matters is the contemplation of what is ‘there’ (*ekei*). If we follow Porphyry’s classification, the treatises lay out the various stages of the soul’s ascent towards the higher principles. Plotinus demonstrates in *Enn.*, I.1 (53) that human nature is essentially intelligible; in *Enn.*, I.2 (19), he shows how the virtues could work as milestones in the soul’s cathartic progress; in *Enn.*, I.3 (20), the methods of ascent are adapted to different natures; finally, in *Enn.*, I.4 (46), Plotinus concludes with a musical analogy to illustrate the way in which, in a sense, the body can serve as an instrument of the soul. He compares the individual soul’s relation to the body to a singer using his instrument for accompaniment.²¹ Though the lyre was once useful, the soul of the sage sings a better song without the accompaniment of the body. This higher kind of music is played without the mediation of instruments, just as the activities of the higher part of the soul are exercised without the body.²² When the soul reaches the intelligible realm, the body, which is a mere instrument of the soul, is cast aside as it now practices a higher kind of activity, without accompaniment.²³ Plotinus’ comparison of the body to a lyre recurs throughout the treatises: for instance, in *Enn.*, II. 3 (52), 13, Plotinus notes that a sick body is an impediment to the soul’s activities, just as a poorly strung lyre affects the musician’s performance.²⁴ In a way, these last lines of *Enn.* I. 4 (46) indicate that the supreme goal of music, while relying on the sensible, is to lead the soul of the *mousikos* to grasp the order and rationality that structure and lay beyond perceivable sounds, and to gradually detach his soul from sensible exteriority.

2. Musical images and their use

There is a reason why music represents such a privileged example of the use of sensible beauty as a step towards the soul’s contemplation of its own interiority: harmony is that which makes most visible the unity and internal structuring of multiplicity, in other words, the simultaneously unifying and productive activity of Forms. In passages where harmony is not addressed as such, but as part of a discussion on music, Plotinus employs related images to illustrate various types of regulated correlations and proportions. In a more general context, such as the opening chapters of *Enn.*, I. 6 (1), the imagery of harmony and consonance serves to express the participation of sensible things in the intelligible Forms.²⁵ Elsewhere, the images evoke the harmonious arrangement of various parts, either in an individual body or in the body of the universe, but also the correspondences between

²⁰ *Enn.*, II.9 (33), 16, 40-47: ‘They feel a kind of disturbance and come to a recollection of the truth (εἰς ἀνάμνησιν ἔρχονται τοῦ ἀληθοῦς)’. Unless otherwise indicated, I refer to Armstrong’s translation.

²¹ *Enn.*, I.4 (46), 16, 24- 29. Cf. P. Hadot (1997), pp. 175-176.

²² On the silence of the soul as it separates itself from the body, see *Enn.*, V.1 (10), 12,14-20.

²³ On this, see J.-L. Chrétien (1997), pp. 37-38.

²⁴ *Enn.*, II.3 (52), 13, 45-47.

²⁵ See A.-L. Darras-Worms (2007), p. 159.

individual souls and the bodies that are the most suitable to receive them.²⁶ In the treatises on providence, Plotinus adapts a traditional Stoic model to his perspective as he repeatedly invokes images of harmonious unity to express the universal sympathy between the various parts of the world.²⁷ Finally, as will be discussed below, the motif of musical harmony illustrates the impassibility of incorporeal beings.

For Plotinus, the rhythms of dance and the ordered measures of human choreographies serve as illustrations of the order and regularity of the universe.²⁸ This becomes truly obvious in *Enn.*, IV.4 (28), 33, in which the image of dance is omnipresent. Plotinus, in this chapter, highlights the harmonious correspondence between the arrangement of celestial movements and sublunary state of affairs. This accordance is compared, at the beginning of the chapter, to the one between the movements of dancers and the musical accompaniment²⁹. Through this, Plotinus exemplifies the concomitance of and parallelism between these celestial motions and mundane events. But, from l. 11 on, the image of dance also serves to illustrate something else: the deep unity of the heavenly body, compared to a unique, single dancer. Indeed, borrowing Plato's imagery of the choral dance of the stars from *Timaeus* 40 d, Plotinus transposes this image into a comparison with a solo dancer: the dance of the heavenly body is the dance of a single living entity³⁰, the courses of the stars being analogous to the movements of the dancer's limbs, each involved in the general dance³¹. After having described the activity of the performer, whose movements must conform to the requirements of the ballet, Plotinus indicates that the choreography of the performer is accomplished, so to speak, automatically. Then, quite intriguingly, he gives an account of the dance from the performer's perspective and states that his intention is focused on something else (ἡ μὲν προαίρεσις τοῦ ὀρχουμένου πρὸς ἄλλο βλέπει). In this passage, Plotinus points out that the dancer who is concentrated performs his choreography without paying attention to each of his steps as he

²⁶ *Enn.*, I. 9 (16), 1, 5-7.

²⁷ *Enn.*, II.3 (52), 12, 32; III.2 (47), 2, 29-33; 16, 37-47; 17, 59-64; IV.4 (28), 8, 55-57. On this, see D. Clark (2016), pp. 106-109.

²⁸ Many studies from secondary literature have been devoted to Neoplatonic critique of the imitative arts, especially the critique of theatre and pantomime insofar as they exalt the passions. My perspective here is different. My aim, in this chapter, is to show how Plotinus, in certain contexts, without making an axiological judgment on the nature of artistic representations, uses them to philosophically illustrate certain aspects of his philosophy. For a detailed study of images related to pantomime in Neoplatonism, and in particular its uses in Plotinian cosmology, see A. Sheppard (2017).

²⁹ *Enn.*, IV.4 (28), 33, 5-12 : "(...) according to every figure of the heavenly circuit there is a different disposition of the things which it governs, as if they were performing a single ballet in a rich variety of dance-movements. In our ballets, too, there is no need to mention, since they are obvious, the external elements, the way in which piping and singing and everything else which joins in contributing to the total effect of the performance change variously at every movement". The formulation "in our ballets" (ἐν ταῖς παρ' ἡμῶν ὀρχήσεσι) could indicate that Plotinus was acquainted with these spectacles. On this, see K. Schlapbach (2018), pp. 143-144, who studies also the reappraisal of this comparison between the theatrical drama and the workings of the universe by Augustine.

³⁰ The pantomime (ὄρχησις) is a mimetic dancing performed by a single dancer (for the classification of ὄρχησις in the scale of arts, see *Enn.*, V.9 (5), 11, 1-6).

³¹ For a comparison of the dancer's anatomical movements in this passage of Plotinus and in Galen's treatise, *De sanitate tuenda*, see R. Webb (2008), p. 67.

performs them.³² According to J. Wilberding, in this passage, Plotinus exemplifies a case of "automatic action" and "emphasizes that an action that is not preferred (*proègoumenon*) does not produce a conscious perception". The heavenly bodies, like the artist, "execute these motions in such a way that they are not preferred, and this is precisely the kind of sensible activity that is compatible with their perpetual contemplation, since it does not draw their attention to the sensible world"³³. The dancer does not think consciously of the execution of steps, as a result of his perfect mastery of his art, and focuses his attention on something else³⁴. The movements of the celestial bodies are not presented as deliberate ones, but as being produced automatically; and just as music accompanies the dancer's gestures, world events are linked to the movements of the stars. However, this parallelism does not imply that the celestial motions exert mechanical causality (in that they do not operate upon sensible things) or deliberate causality.³⁵ Yet, in the same way as certain dance figures are associated with particular feelings such as fear or joy, certain configurations in the heavenly motions can also be correlated with particular events in the passive regions of the universe. The image of the dance thus serves to highlight two main elements, the first being the regulated correspondence between the celestial motions and the world's events; the second being the nature, both spontaneous and necessary – and at any rate, *infra*-voluntary –of the heavenly motions.

The numbered rhythms of dance illustrate the kind of necessity that governs not only the celestial motions, but also the souls' descent into bodies. In *Enn.*, VI.7 (38), Plotinus resorts to the image of choral dancing in order to remind us that procession is always a global activity, and that individual souls do not independently descend into their respective bodies. In chapter 7 of the same treatise, Plotinus notes that, when an individual soul is about to animate a particular body, it follows the traces laid out by the universal soul, submitting itself, as it were, to the organizing principle of the universe, 'as the dancer does to the dramatic part given him'.³⁶ Only through an awareness of the intelligible realm, in its entirety and its numbered harmony, can one apprehend the relation of particular entities to their distinctive intelligible principles. Among the rhythmic metaphors developed to illustrate the regulated activity of incorporeal realities, that of dancing in a circle is worth mentioning: music, with its rhythmic patterns imitating the harmony of the intelligible world, sets the soul on its path back to its source –and once the soul has begun to look towards its principle, this contemplation is evoked in terms of dancing. For instance, in *Enn.*, VI.9 (9), 8, 37-45,

³² *Enn.*, IV.4 (28), 33, 17-25 : "The dancer's intention looks elsewhere (*πρὸς ἄλλο βλέπει*); his limbs are affected in accordance with the dance and serve the dance, and help to make it perfect and complete; and the connoisseur of ballet can say that to fit a particular figure one limb is raised, another bent together, one is hidden, another degraded; the dancer does not choose to make these movements for no reason, but each part of him as he performs the dance has its necessary position in the dancing of the whole body". Plotinus here does not specify what the object of the dancer's concentration may be. According to R. Webb (2008 a), who has devoted a study to the pantomime from the performer's perspective, p. 57, *πρὸς ἄλλο* may be referring "to the story and the character".

³³ J. Wilberding (2008), p. 388.

³⁴ According to J. Wilberding (2008), pp. 388-389, this case of 'automatic action' carried out by the astral dancer can serve as a model for the action of the wise man who, while directing his intellect towards the intelligible order, is at the same time engaged in the sensible world.

³⁵ See J. Guitton (1933), p. 97.

³⁶ *Enn.*, VI.7 (38), 7, 16-17.

Plotinus compares the One to a coryphaeus, with the individual souls dancing around him like a choir:

But we desire it, so we are around it. And we are always around it but do not always look to it; it is like a choral dance: in the order of its singing the choir keeps round its conductor but may sometimes turn away, so that he is out of their sight, but when it turns back to him it sings beautifully and is truly with him; so we too are always around him – and if we were not, we should be totally dissolved and no longer exist – but not always turned to him; but when we do look to him, then we are at our goal and at rest and do not sing out of tune as we truly dance our god-inspired dance around him.

The soul's dance around its principle echoes, in turn, the ordered unfolding of the divine intellect according to the intelligible number, which itself precedes numerical multiplicity. As discussed in *Enn.*, VI. 6 (34), the essential and intelligible number, prior to the quantifiable and the measurable, is what underlies the inner structure of the divine and intelligible realm. Plotinus employs the images of the circle and the sphere in order to evoke this unfolding of the intelligible world according to the substantial number. Conversely, the beginning of *Enn.*, II.2 (14) indicates that the circular motion of the heavenly body originates from a movement of mimetic tension towards the divine intellect. As S. Slaveva-Griffin notes, "the dancing scenes in the *Enneads* are literary metaphors of the harmonious universe, but at a deeper level, there is a certain literalness to them that conceptually reveals the inherent ontological roles of substantial number in the structure of the intelligible. This ontological movement of number, which organizes the *kosmos noetos*, originates and directs the circular cosmic dance of intellect and soul"³⁷. Images derived from rhythmic arts thus work as a complement to the actual discussion of the nature of such arts, as they express the mimetic tension of generated entities towards their generating principle – whether it be the motions of the stars imitating the structure of the divine intellect, or the individual soul's return to its origin.

At the end of this overview of the passages in which Plotinus illustrates the causal relationships between the different ontological levels using images borrowed from the art of dance, we see that the notion of rhythm occupies an important place. My hypothesis is that if the rhythm of music or dance is an example preferred by Plotinus to illustrate cosmological processes, the very notion of *rhythmos* has an even broader scope. Referring to the origin of what, from a unity, guides the organized and structured development of a multiplicity, *rhythmos* plays a role similar to that of numbers. Just as it is necessary to distinguish between the arithmetical number and the intelligible number, which is at the very root of the organization of intelligible Forms,³⁸ I hypothesize that it is possible to detect in the texts of Plotinus a distinction between the rhythm found in sensible harmonies and an intelligible rhythm at the source of the regulated deployment and productive power of intelligible realities.

3. *Rhythm and harmony*

³⁷ S. Slaveva-Griffin, *Plotinus on Number* (2009), p. 119; see also J.-L. Chrétien (2001).

³⁸ *Enn.*, VI.6 (34), 9, 35-39.

According to the classification of arts established in *Enn.*, V.9 (5), 11, music is located at the bottom of the hierarchical order, which goes from the arts of imitation to the arts that are fundamentally turned towards the intelligible order – such as geometry or, to move even higher up the scale, wisdom (*sophia*). That being said, imitative arts do not form a homogenous category. While dance and pantomime are modeled on the sensible order alone, this is not necessarily the case for music or sculpture. There is a kind of music that is patterned after intelligible music³⁹. Through its harmonic regularities and its measured numbers, it helps the soul begin its progress towards the realm of principles. Now, the very phrasing of the passage in *Enn.*, V.9 (5), 11, concerning the place of music in the hierarchy, is somewhat a textual crux. The HS2 edition omits the interpolated clause in l.11, which is interpreted as a redundancy or an added gloss, a choice that can be traced back already to Mueller and Bréhier. In both HS1 and HS2, the end of the sentence is established as follows, with the reading ἀριθμὸν at l. 13:

HS1 :

[10] Καὶ μὴν καὶ μουσικὴ πᾶσα περὶ ἀρμονίαν ἔχουσα
καὶ ῥυθμὸν – ἢ μὲν περὶ ῥυθμὸν καὶ ἀρμονίαν, ἔχουσα τὰ
νοήματα – τὸν αὐτὸν τρόπον ἂν εἶη, ὥσπερ καὶ ἡ περὶ
τὸν νοητὸν ἀριθμὸν ἔχουσα⁴⁰.

HS 2 :

[10] Καὶ μὴν καὶ μουσικὴ πᾶσα
[περὶ ἀρμονίαν ἔχουσα καὶ ῥυθμὸν ἢ μὲν] περὶ
ῥυθμὸν καὶ ἀρμονίαν ἔχουσα τὰ νοήματα τὸν αὐτὸν
τρόπον ἂν εἶη, ὥσπερ καὶ ἡ περὶ τὸν νοητὸν ἀριθ-
μὸν ἔχουσα.

And certainly all music, since the ideas which it has are concerned with rhythm and melody, would be of the same kind, just like the art which is concerned with intelligible numbers⁴¹.

If we accept the HS2 text, as is generally the case in contemporary translations, the sentence implies that the art of music is to be linked to another *techne*, previously evoked in the chapter, that consists in connecting the visual perception of symmetrical relations and proportions, as presented in living beings, to the intelligible measures that lie at the source of all symmetry. The sentence, then, would align music, which is concerned with rhythm and harmony, with another *techne* dealing with intelligible numbers. This implies that not all music is an imitation of the sensible order; instead, insofar as it deals with numeric order and measure, music is indeed linked to the intelligible world, and it is expressive of its rationality. Now, at l. 13, following older editions,⁴² Bréhier adopts the reading ῥυθμὸν⁴³:

³⁹ The premises of this double conception of music are laid out in Plato's *Symposium* 187 e. See also *Laws* 655 a (where music is defined as a present given by the gods to order the behavior of men).

⁴⁰ Igal translates as follows : Puesto que toda musica versa sobre la armonia y el ritmo, aquella parte de la musica que estudia intelectivamente el ritmo y la armonia està allà por el mismo titulo que lo està el arte que estudia el numero inteligible.

⁴¹ *Enn.*, V.9 (5), 11, 10-13, HS2, transl. Armstrong.

⁴² Those by Perna, Creuzer, Mueller, Bouillet. Harder also adopts this reading.

Καὶ μὴν καὶ μουσικὴ πᾶσα περὶ ἁρμονίαν ἔχουσα καὶ ῥυθμὸν τὰ νοήματα, τὸν αὐτὸν τρόπον ἂν εἶη, ὥσπερ καὶ ἡ περὶ τὸν νοητὸν ῥυθμὸν ἔχουσα.

Il faut en dire autant de la musique qui réfléchit sur le rythme et l'harmonie : elle est analogue à celle qui a pour objet le rythme intelligible.

If one were to adopt this reading, this would be the only mention in the treatises of an ‘intelligible rhythm’, in the literal, non-figurative sense. In my view, however, Bréhier’s interpretation should be met with reservations. How could sensible music be of the same kind (τὸν αὐτὸν τρόπον) as its intelligible paradigm? I would argue instead that the two *technai* invoked in the passage have the same relationship to the intelligible, and that Plotinus is establishing a comparison between two distinctive kinds of art, not between an intelligible *techne* and its imitation in the sensible world. Aside from editorial concerns, it seems to me that ῥυθμός and ἀριθμός here hardly differ in meaning: both define intelligible rhythm as number. To be concerned with intelligible rhythm is to practice mathematics. The music of the sensible world does not equal the true kind of music, utterly dedicated to the art of number and rhythmic proportions.⁴⁴ When composed according to the principles of mathematics, music does not rank among the imitative arts of the sensible realm, but rather among the arts directly modeled on the intelligible order. This kind of sensible music, which expresses intelligible measure and harmony of a higher, intelligible, music, is precisely the one capable of setting the soul in motion towards the recollection of its authentic nature. The soul itself is ‘number and harmony’, as defined in *Enn.*, VI.6 (34), 16, a passage echoing the Pythagorean tradition, as well as Plato’s discussion of the mathematical and harmonic structure of the soul in *Timaeus* 36 a - 37 a⁴⁵.

Another passage in *Enn.*, V.8 (31) – immediately preceding *Enn.*, V.9 (5) in the Porphyrian order – offers further insight into the issue of intelligible rhythm. In the opening lines of the treatise, Plotinus employs the hapax ἀρρῦθμιστος. This term, extremely rare in the philosophical lexicon, is borrowed from Aristotle⁴⁶ – and in fact had hardly ever appeared in philosophical writings ever since, apart from its use in Alexander of Aphrodisias’ *Quaestio* I, 10, on the issue of the material nature of celestial bodies.⁴⁷ In this deliberately aporetic discussion, Alexander asks

⁴³ This is also the reading in MS Q (*Marcianus Graecus* 242) in the **z** family, and in mss. **A, F, E** in the **w** family.

⁴⁴ See V. Jankélévitch (1961), p. 172. An alternative to such a conception of music, in which the sounds of music are the expression of a transcendent, superior order, can be found in the essay by F. Wolff (2015), which seeks instead to articulate the essence of music in terms of a purely sensible internal order. Wolff understands the art of music as capable of creating a kind of autonomous sensible world, governed by its own dynamics, and not derived from any pre-existing harmony.

⁴⁵ This definition of the soul, Plotinus notes, should be clearly distinguished from erroneous conceptions of the “soul-harmony”: the passage of *Enn.*, IV.7 (2), 8⁴ intends to outline an authentic, Pythagorean definition of the soul as harmony, which is the only correct one, distinguished from erroneous readings of it.⁴⁵ Following those misleading interpretations, to define the soul as harmony would be to consider the soul as a bodily entity or as the result of a certain bodily disposition; but such a conception of the soul-harmony, Plotinus notes, necessarily implies the prior existence of another soul, from which the individual soul would derive its unity – thus paving the way for the Third Man Argument. On this issue, see M. Baltes and C. d’Ancona Costa (2005) and A. Longo (2009), pp. 187-191.

⁴⁶ *Met.*, 1014b 28 and *Phys.* II.1, respectively.

⁴⁷ Alexander, *Quaestio* I.10. See, on this, M. Rashed (2007), pp. 183-184.

whether the substrate of celestial bodies can be called ‘matter’. He develops arguments *pro* and *contra*, playing on two distinctive meanings of the word ‘matter’, each designating distinctive cosmological functions. If, on the one hand, matter is defined as the substrate of the contraries (μόνον τὸ ἔσχατον ὑποκείμενον τῶν ἐναντίων), then the celestial bodies cannot be said to have ‘matter’.⁴⁸ If, on the other, matter is defined as ἔσχατον ὑποκείμενον ἀρρυθμιστον καθ’ αὐτό – or, to quote from M. Rashed’s translation, ‘le dernier substrat inorganisé par soi’⁴⁹ –, then they can be considered as having ‘matter’.

At the beginning of *Physics* II, Aristotle starts his enquiry on the different meanings of ‘*physis*’. One of the possible meanings of the term is nature as matter, as defended by Antiphon. It is in this doxographical context that the adjective ἀρρυθμιστος is employed.

Some people think that the nature and reality of a thing which is due to nature is the primary constituent present in it, <something> unformed in itself (ἀρρυθμιστον <ὄν> καθ’ ἑαυτό). Thus in a bed it would be the wood, in a statue the bronze. It is an indication of this, says Antiphon, that if you bury a bed, and the decomposition gets the ability to send up a shoot, what comes up will not be a bed but wood: this seems to show that the disposition of parts customary for beds and the artistry (τὴν κατὰ νόμον διάθεσιν καὶ τὴν τέχνην) belong only by virtue of concurrence, and that the reality (οὐσίαν) is that which perpetually persists uninterruptedly while being affected in these ways.⁵⁰

According to Antiphon⁵¹, nature consists in the substrate, not in the form of things, the latter necessarily holding a secondary position in relation to matter. In his translation of the passage, G. Romeyer-Dherbey chooses to treat the ἀ- not as denoting a lack, but rather as indicating the primordial and original nature of the matter⁵²; he thus translates ἀρρυθμιστος as ‘affranchi de tout *rhythmos*’ and ‘libre de structure’ so as to remind us that, according to Antiphon, *physis* is the primitive core of things, which precedes the form, and which exists in natural beings as well as in artificial ones. The example of the bed that is buried in the ground and, by decomposing, ends up producing more wood, clearly shows not so much the superior status of *physis* over *techne*, but rather the anteriority of τὸ ἀρρυθμιστον over the form. This example illustrates the distinction between that which possesses a durable *ousia* – for instance, wood – and composite entities, deriving their arrangement (διάθεσις) from human convention or art – for example, a bed. In his commentary *ad. loc.*, Simplicius suggests an alternative reading of the phrase, ‘κατὰ νόμον διάθεσιν’:

Some write the ‘formal construction’ <κατὰ ῥυθμὸν> instead of the ‘conventional construction’ <κατὰ νόμον διάθεσιν> – which is more comprehensible, since the shape is called ‘form’ (ῥυθμὸς γὰρ ἢ μορφή λέγεται)⁵³.

⁴⁸ Alex., *Quaestio* I.10, 20, 29.

⁴⁹ Alex., *Quaestio* I.10, 21, 2.

⁵⁰ *Phys.* II.1, 193 a 9- 17, transl. W. Charlton

⁵¹ É. Benveniste (1966), p. 332, thinks that this term was coined by the sophist Antiphon and borrowed by Aristotle.

⁵² G. Romeyer-Dherbey (1985), pp. 95-97.

⁵³ Simplicius, *In Phys.*, 275, 5.

Simplicius admits that he prefers the second option, κατὰ ῥυθμὸν, which he finds clearer and more appropriate, while also reminding us that *rhythmos* might mean ‘form’. The equivalent meaning of “form” and “*rhythmos*” is acknowledged by Aristotle himself. In *Physics* VII, he opposes what is deprived of form to what ‘has been completely shaped or arranged into a structure (τὸ μὲν γὰρ σχηματιζόμενον καὶ ῥυθμιζόμενον)’.⁵⁴ What he stresses here is the fact that we do not name singular realities after their material causes, but rather define them according to their form. And in two doxographical passages of the *Metaphysics*⁵⁵, in which Democritus’ theories are exposed, *rhythmos* is presented as a synonym of ‘form’.

This overview of the uses of ἀρρυθμιστος and of ῥυθμὸς helps understand why, at the beginning of *Enn.*, V. 8 (31), Plotinus employs this term. At the beginning of chapter 1, Plotinus reminds us that the origins of sensible beauty are to be found in the structuring and ordering power of form. Beauty manifests itself in a work of art when the raw material is shaped into form, which ultimately expresses the unity of the intelligible order. Plotinus gives, as an illustration, the example of two blocks of stone, one shaped by the artist and the other shapeless.

Let us suppose, if you like, a couple of great lumps of stone lying side by side, one shapeless and untouched by art (τοῦ μὲν ἀρρυθμίστου καὶ τέχνης ἀμοίρου), the other which has been already mastered by art and turned into a statue of a god or of a man, of a Grace or one of the Muses if of a god, and if of a man, not just of any man, but of one whom art has made up out of every sort of human beauty. The stone which has been brought to beauty of form by art will appear beautiful not because it is a stone – for then the other would be just as beautiful – but as a result of the form which has been put into it.⁵⁶

The carved block has received a form given by the sculptor, insofar as he has mastered a *techné* linking him to the intelligible. This is why the work is beautiful: it is not an imitation of the sensible world, but an expression of the intelligible realm mediated by the sculptor. By contrast, the raw block of stone is utterly devoid of *rhythmos* – but not because it is formless, since it does possess a certain quality, insofar as it is a certain type of stone. Rather, it is ἀρρυθμιστος as it does not partake in *techné*. The form in the sensible realm is inferior to the Form which remains in the intelligible – the generating principle being always ontologically superior to generated realities: ‘For a thing is weaker than that which abides in unity in proportion as it expands in its advance towards matter (Καὶ γὰρ ὅσῳ ἰὸν εἰς τὴν ὕλην ἐκτέταται, τόσῳ ἀσθενέστερον τοῦ ἐν ἐνὶ μένοντος).’⁵⁷ The formula μένοντος ἐν ἐνὶ here is the definition of eternity given by Plato in *Timaeus* 37 d6 – a passage that Plotinus discusses in *Enn.*, III.7 (45), 6, defining eternity as life that abides in unity, always standing in and being directed towards the One. What remains in eternity, that is, in the intelligible realm, is superior to what is manifested in the sensible world, which is a weaker and inferior kind of form.

⁵⁴ Ar., *Phys.* VII. 2, 245 b 9-10.

⁵⁵ Ar., *Met.*, 985b14; 1042 b 16.

⁵⁶ *Enn.*, V.8 (31), 1, 7-15. This is a striking example of Plotinus’ assimilation of Aristotle’s writings; when evoking an untouched block of stone, Plotinus naturally employs a rare term, with only two occurrences in Aristotle’s texts. This is actually not the only time that Plotinus retrieves rare terms or hapaxes of Aristotle’s. Another instance is to be found in the opening of *Enn.*, III.8 (30), in which Plotinus associates the adjective *ellogos* to its antonym *alogos*. This is a clear echo of a doxographic passage in the *Metaphysics*, in which Aristotle refers to Eudoxus’ classification of the heavenly spheres. I am grateful to V. Gysembergh for drawing my attention to this passage.

⁵⁷ *Enn.*, V.8 (31), 1, 26-27.

Before returning to a further account of the example of the two blocks of stone, Plotinus illustrates his theory of intelligible causality through an evocation of music – a metaphor perhaps motivated by the notion of *rhythmos* presented in the previous pages:

Every original maker must be in itself stronger than that which it makes; it is not the lack of music which makes a man a musician, but music, and music in the world of sense is made by the music prior to this world (οὐ γὰρ ἡ ἀμουσία μουσικόν, ἀλλ' ἡ μουσική, καὶ τὴν ἐν αἰσθητῶ ἢ πρὸ τούτου). But if anyone despises the arts because they produce their works by imitating nature, we must tell him, first, that natural things are imitations too.⁵⁸

Nature is an image derived from the intelligible and its productions are regulated according to models, the *logoi*, derived from the transcendent Forms. Art does not imitate nature, but nature and art both imitate the intelligible. No more than music imitates nature, but instead imitates an intelligible music from which it derives, Phidias' art is not inspired by the sensible, but is also derived from the intelligible. Sculpture is an art privileged for showing the emergence of Form in matter. Thus, this progressive and regulated deployment of the order amongst the lower levels is that of a *rhythmos*, source of an intelligible unity, which reaches all the way to the sensible.

In this passage, Plotinus stresses the instrumental role of the artist: the actual source of all sensible music is intelligible music, as performed by the musician. The musician only translates intelligible harmonies into sensible form; he is not the source of harmony, he only mediates and interprets the pre-existing harmony of the intelligible world.⁵⁹ This view is often stressed by Plotinus. For instance, at the end of *Enn.*, I.6 (6), 3, in a suggestively alliterative passage, he indicates that harmonies of sound originate in soundless harmonies (Αἱ δὲ ἀρμονίαι αἱ ἐν ταῖς φωναῖς αἱ ἀφανεῖς τὰς φανεράς ποιήσασαι)⁶⁰. The causality of intelligible harmony is immobile, like the causality of Forms, insofar as they are immutable and perfect realities. In *Enn.*, III. 6 (26), 4, dealing with the impassibility of incorporeals, Plotinus resorts again to a comparison in order to express the complete impassibility of the soul. The soul is a form, and as such, impassible. By its mere existence, it causes effects. In this, the soul is comparable to the harmony that causes the strings of a lyre to vibrate: the soul is the cause of the passions that affect the composite entity, without, however, being affected itself. In the same way as harmony causes vibration without vibrating itself, the passive part of the soul causes the motions that are associated with passions without being moved. The effect is on the strings, that is, on the sensible part of man, but not on harmony itself. Now, if it were not for the prior harmonic relations in the intelligible world, the musician could not produce anything, even if the musician so desired:

Τὰ δὲ αἷτια τοῦ κινήσαι ἀνάλογον τῶ μουσικῶ· τὰ δὲ πληγέντα διὰ πάθος πρὸς τὰς χορδὰς ἂν τὸν λόγον ἔχοι. Καὶ γὰρ κάκει οὐχ ἡ ἀρμονία πέπονθεν, ἀλλ' ἡ χορδή· οὐ μὴν ἐκινήθη ἂν ἡ χορδή, εἰ καὶ ὁ μουσικὸς ἐβούλετο, μὴ τῆς ἀρμονίας τοῦτο λεγούσης.

⁵⁸ *Enn.*, V.8 (31), 1, 30-34.

⁵⁹ On this definition of the artist that deprives him of a (strictly speaking) creative role, see J.-L. Chrétien (1997), pp. 95-96.

⁶⁰ *Enn.*, I.6 (6), 3, 28-29. On this passage and on Plotinus' re-appropriation of this motif, already to be found in Heraclitus, see. A.-L. Darras-Worms (2007), pp. 160-161.

The causes of the movement are like the player, and the parts on which the affection makes its impact might correspond to the string. For in the case of playing an instrument, too, it is not the tune which is affected, but the string; the string however, would not be plucked [in tune] even if the player wished it, unless the tune said that it should be.⁶¹

The musician contemplates and knows the proportions, the order, and the true measures of the intelligible, which he, in turn, translates into melodic sounds. He has a part in *rhythmos*, just as Phidias imposes *rhythmos* on the shapeless stone: *rhythmos* is the informing, configuring principle, bringing form to the shapeless *astheneia* of matter.

Prior to any configuration, then, is the existence of a primary rhythm, at the source of the harmonious and eternal unfolding of the Forms themselves. This inner pulsation of the eternal, intelligible world is regulated by the essential number that governs the internal development of the intelligible hierarchy.⁶² Each Form, in turn, manifests a generative power that is linked to that of all other Forms. In a way, one could say that rhythm, understood as a substantial number, is the source of harmony, which itself consists in the power to order and unify the multiple. What sensible harmonies reveal, therefore, is the existence of numbered relations and proportions, which, in their turn, manifest the structuring, configuring, and generative power of the Forms, which ultimately derives from the One.⁶³

In *Enn.*, I. 6 (6), 1, Plotinus indicates that, although beauty is expressed by harmony, it cannot be reduced to a sum of harmonious proportions. More than being the unity of a multiplicity, it reveals itself in a single, pure tone – just as, visually, it reveals itself in primary color or in a flash of lightning. This critique of the definition of the beautiful as *symmetria*, as relayed, notably, by the Stoic tradition, is a kind of leitmotiv in the *Enneads*. According to Plotinus, to define beauty only in terms of the proportion of various parts is to deprive it of its essential and constitutive element: life. Here, Plotinus does not follow Polyclitus' canonic model, which defines the beautiful statue in terms of the commensurability of its parts with one another, as well as with the whole. As J. Laurent notes, Plotinus considers the classical ideal of beauty as a balanced arrangement of various parts to represent an extension of the Stoic postulate stating that the world is composed of various corporeal parts.⁶⁴ For Plotinus, beauty stems from the primordial unity, which is also the principle of intelligible life. Stoic corporealism is therefore inadequate for thinking properly the very nature of life, which is in the truest sense intelligible – all the rest is just a byproduct. Together with beauty, life is the primary manifestation of the supra-essential One. As Plotinus notes in *Enn.*, VI.7 (38), 22, if it were deprived of the illumination of the One, the Intellect would remain inert (*argon*),⁶⁵ incapable of awakening the desire of the soul. Life, even in its imperfect, sensible manifestations, is always more beautiful than an inert design, however balanced and well-proportioned it may be. A trace of this vitalism can be found in the priority that Plotinus gives to rhythm over symmetry and harmony. This point

⁶¹ *Enn.*, III.6 (26), 4, 48-53. The very same image, that is, the musician's subordination to the fixed, numeric proportions of intelligible harmony, is similarly used in *Enn.*, IV.7 (2), 8⁴, 20-21, in order to demonstrate that the soul, as an incorporeal entity, cannot possibly consist in a synthesis of discrete elements, according to the vulgar understanding of harmony. In the same way as the strings of a harp cannot be tuned of their own accord, the body is incapable of conferring unity upon itself.

⁶² *Enn.*, VI.6 (34), 9, 35-42.

⁶³ *Enn.*, I.6 (6), 3.31-33. See A.-L. Darras-Worms (2007), p. 160.

⁶⁴ J. Laurent (2011), p. 59. On this, see also J.-L. Chrétien (1990), pp. 320-321.

⁶⁵ *Enn.*, VI. 7 (38), 22, 11. See J. Laurent (1992), p. 158.

has been noted by F. Ravaisson, who remarks that, for Plotinus, *eurythmia*, in a sense, precedes symmetry. However, he seems to overextend this relation when he writes:

Les Grecs disaient ce qu'a répété Vitruve en l'appliquant à l'architecture : la beauté a deux parties, la symétrie et l'eurythmie, celle-ci supérieure à celle-là (...). Mais la symétrie ne suffit pas à la beauté ; il y faut de plus, a dit Plotin, la vie de laquelle témoigne le mouvement. Le mouvement s'estime par le temps et par le nombre. C'est ce que dit le mot eurythmie.⁶⁶

In fact, Vitruvius considers a masterpiece of architecture to be achieved when it shows both symmetry and *eurythmia* – the latter appearing as the visible expression of the former.⁶⁷ Plotinus, instead, prioritizes the rhythmic dynamics of form over the static balance of symmetry.

At the end of this study, we may note the following points. According to Plotinus, sensible music, through the order and structure it expresses – and which derives from intelligible music, which is purely order and proportion –, constitutes a first step for the individual soul in its ascent towards its origin. If, in a way, Plotinus, unlike the Middle Platonic exegetes, leaves aside the mathematical treatment of musical harmonies, he still considers music to be an art based on numbers. In the meantime, he develops a stylistic register of images related to music and the rhythmic arts to show the causal links between the different ontological levels. In this context, it appears that the notion of rhythm occupies a central place in his cosmological architecture. It is only through a consideration of the intelligible as a numerically ordered whole that one may apprehend the participation of singular things in their intelligible paradigms, and the descent of individual souls into bodies – this is what the imagery of rhythmic dance expresses, as an illustration of the measured harmony of all intelligible beings. The measured unfolding of the harmony of Forms is, in turn, dependent on an essential principle of unity, derived from the simplicity of the One – a primordial rhythm informing the multiplicity of the intelligible world. The irreducibility of beauty to a mere harmony may, in the end, be due to its fundamentally rhythmic nature, as it reveals the principle of unity that underlies every measured and consonant arrangement.

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⁶⁶ F. Ravaisson (1933), pp. 81-82.

⁶⁷ Vitruvius, *De architectura* I.2, 3. P. Gros (2006), p. 272, defines *eurythmia* as follows: 'une scansion satisfaisante de tous les éléments rythmiques – colonnes, ouvertures, vides et pleins – observables à la périphérie d'un monument ; c'est ce qui explique que l'eurythmie soit souvent liée chez Vitruve à la notion de *species* ou d'*aspectus*, et plus précisément à celle de *commodus aspectus*'.

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