

Beauty/Schönheit/Skönhet An Artistic Research Project in Music and Dance

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Abstract

In an artistic project we investigated the points of contact between choreography and music composition in a listening stance, where the meeting between the artists was visible and audible. Collective creative processes arose from this attitude of listening. One way to bring forth the listening stance – and not only unidirectionally, as when a choreographer uses a through-composed piece of music – was to let a composer write music to a dance, choreographed in silence. The performance gave the opportunity to change rituals around listening that are predominantly current in an attempt to resuscitate the eyes, ears, inner and outer attention to a reflective listening; to take these thoughts where the body goes and break the patterns of embodied and cognitive ways of thinking. In a position of stillness, one can renew, breath, give and open up to new opportunities. The cognition/corporeality of the dance became a way to listen to music.

Keywords: artistic research, listening, choreomusic, Jaques-Dalcroze, music and dance

1 Introduction

This article concerns an artistic research project, *Beauty/Schönheit/Skönhet* (Beauty/Schönheit/Skönhet, 2014a; 2014b) where we want to emphasize the complexity in listening in the artistic processes that emerge in both dance and music, and the space in between.

The project concerns in gesture in music and dance, and more specific, the similarities and differences between the audible in music and the physically audible in dance. It refers to a phenomenological discourse within the philosophy of hearing, which highlights the aesthetic and social implications of listening and thus also illuminates hierarchical aspects. Contrary to how the eyes relate the world through objectification and classified distance, the hearing is directed towards proximity and procedural openness. Listening is a fundamental phenomenon in human relations (Wallrup, 2002). Music often serves as a structural basis, which gives form and shape to the dance/music as a whole (Olsson, 1996). This approach requires a choice of strategies that build on the understanding that it is both possible and appropriate to contemplate these questions in artistic practice. A practice where dance and music work together, and the artistic research happens *in* and *through* the art. We want to develop a theoretical field as well, which can be relevant to and enriched by these artistic fields.

With these concepts of listening in the artistic research environment, and in the academic, philosophic and scientific world, it is important that listening is made visible and audible in a broader sense. We use the artistic expression, dance and music, in order to demonstrate a new way of creating meaning through a common denominator listening.

1.1 Aim

The project aimed to find structures where choreography and music composition could be made visible in relation to each other in a listening attitude, where both art-forms had the musical element as a common denominator.

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Questions that were important to deepen the theoretical aspects of the project were:

- What methods were developed for choreographic creation that embody the qualitative aspects of movement in relationship to the movement within music?
- What methods were developed for compositional creation that embody the qualitative aspects of sounding in relationship to the sounding within movement?
- What new artistic forms emerged through this listening interaction?

2. Background

In this project listening is a key concept. To deepen and broaden understanding of the usage of this concept, we take up a philosophical discussion around the sense of hearing that has emerged during the last decades and intensified the last ten years. This discussion has mostly been in connection with phenomenology, either within the tradition or in critique of it. However, the common point of departure is that listening has had a hidden place in philosophy, where sight quickly is established as the primary sense in that which came to be called “ocularcentrism” (Espinet, 2009). David Espinet takes up the question of the restoration of listening in the development of philosophical theory. In contrast to an often visually influenced epistemological tradition that neglects listening, patterns of experience in listening are shown to be crucial, even to Heidegger's (1972) thinking.

The listening and the thinking are developed in a differential interplay – as reflective listening – which is open for the unexpected. But reflective listening is still embodied. In its visceral *existence* the reflective listening has listen beyond the comprehensible before an incomprehensible feeling, like a completely different language. The experience of listening creates a separate openness that makes it possible for a new/different way of thinking.

Listening and thinking develop in a differentiated interaction – as thinking listening open to the unexpected, who in its bodily existence has to listen beyond the comprehensible, in front of an incomprehensible feeling as a completely different language. The experience of listening creates a particular openness that enables a new different way of thinking.

Music is an activity for the whole nervous system, whose impulses organize bodily activity. These activities can both be outer (movement/dance) and inner (emotion). In order to internalize the music through the whole person, a natural connection between music and movement/dance is needed. All musical sound is created through movement, which means that it is possible to understand the human body as a musical instrument. Through practices in eurhythmics, plastique and ear training, music is placed in the whole person. Movement/dance is an equal part in this language, music/rhythm, where the movement of the body is used to represent the musical element (Jacques-Dalcroze, 1920).

Jacques-Dalcroze claimed that musical expressiveness could be taught and does not depend solely on natural talent and also that prominent musicians often had an instinctive physical connection to music. He trained students in each of the musical elements so that they could represent these elements physically. This physical listening resulted in a virtual lexicon of musical translated movements as follows (Jacques-Dalcroze 1920, p. 150 in Jaresand & Calissendorff, 2013, p. 190):

"Music	Dance
Pitch	Position and direction of gestures in space
Intensity of sound	Muscular dynamic
Timbre	Diversity in corporal forms
Time	Time
Rhythm	Rhythm
Rests	Pauses
Melody	Continuous succession of isolated movements
Counterpoint	Opposition of movements
Chords	Constellation of associated gestures/movements
Harmonic successions	Succession of associated movements
Phrasing	Phrasing
Construction/form	Distribution of movements in space and time
Orchestration	Opposition and combination of diverse corporeal forms"

The training of the body includes movement from breath, gravity, rotation and exploration of the body's center in relation to the periphery. The training also helps to develop a sensibility in the nervous system. Jacques-Dalcroze method aims, on the one hand, to create a number of automatisms and a solid context in muscle function and, on the other hand, to establish and protect communication between our spirit's two poles, body and mind, and expand our natural rhythms.

3 Method

Those who took part in the project were a choreographer, a composer, a conductor, 16 dancers (three soloists and 13 company dancers) KammarensembleN (Swedish Chamber Orchestra, 18 musicians), a string quartet and a researcher. The research thereby involves collaboration between experts with complementary skills, experienced artists and researcher. The researcher observed the rehearsals, which were videotaped, and had conversations with all contributors.

This collaboration, will create the opportunity to gain empirical knowledge which could otherwise be difficult to attain through the more unilateral perspective of conventional academic research. Since the project is an artistic research project, it could only take the form it did. The research is *through* art which does not make it possible to distinguish the explicit research methods from the artistic process as they are interwoven. This also means that all contributors were involved in the artistic process that also became part of the method. Although the research methods are qualitative with observations and interviews (Bryman, 2008), the presentation of the results from the project are not in the traditional way of qualitative research. The concept of reflective listening is, for all participants of this project, an important parameter as a methodology for analysing how music and dance inter-operate, and how choreography creates a kind of listening, which can transform music into a physical experience.

3.1 Artistic process - implementation

The project was comprised of choreography for sixteen dancers and music in two parts: a newly written work, *Force and Beauty* by Sven-David Sandström, for KammarensembleN and solo violin, and a string quartet, *Fragmente-Stille, An Diotima*, by Luigi Nono.

In an initial stage, the dance was choreographed in silence, which the composer listened to and created a sounding counter-voice for. This was a way to emphasize the open listening attitude, not only uni-directionally, as when a choreographer uses a through-composed piece of music, but to let the composers write music to dance, choreographed in silence. It was the dance's intrinsic rhythm, melody, dynamic, the orchestration of the dancers, that became the inspiration and frame for the composition of the music. The dance created a voice to the music and the music gave a voice to the dance. Then two independent musical artistic expressions emerged, woven together.

4 Results

4.1 Methodology development for composition

When composing to dance one should have a pre-understanding that the music is part of a dance and music performance and therefore have a communicative relationship, and take a listening attitude towards the structure and content of the performance. It is also important to know what function and what relationship the music will have to the dance. Should it be a carpet of sound, a creator of a mood, an atmosphere or should the music clarify or enhance the dance expression? In this project the music was a counter voice, either as a voice for the choreographer to have as a frame for the dance, or as a counter voice in music to a pre-choreographed dance. This means that the composer must listen to the physical expression, the music of the dance and analyze its structure and make a composition with this "dance score" as the starting point. While experience a movement in space one can either *see* the contours and hence the form of the body or *hear* the nonsounding music that comes out from the vibrations in space, the air, made by the movements. In this process of creativity, the sounding music must be open to the music of the dance, to hear the "dance score", and have this score as a frame for the sounding composition. The choreography should then be open for interpretation in accordance with how a music score is interpretable for the conductor and the musicians.

4.1.2 Nono

The string quartet *Fragmente-Stille, An Diotima*, can be divided in four parts, and the choreographer changed so the last section to become the first. Thus, there was a clean, direct start to the performance.

The original first part of the quartet has a hidden, tentative speaking aspect that carries the dramaturgical risk of giving a narrative entrance, thus estranging the participants from reflective/physical listening (see Jacques-Dalcroze, 1920). Instead, a non-narrative dramaturgy arose, based on an arhythmic temporality that opened the possibility for the creation of meaning. Luigi Nono makes the differentiation of sound materials understandable for the listener through the lengthening of sounds and the use of silence. The listener is not overwhelmed with information, but has the chance to reflect on every sound or constellation of sounds. Silence can challenge the listener to discover her or himself. It is the understanding of this reflection in our inner self, in silent space and memory, reflection and self-insight that opens up the element of the *fermata*.

The feeling of slow fragmentation through painful hesitation.

Nono's usage of the silent Hölderlin quotation in the quartet can be understood as a continuation of an approach to text and meta-musical meanings that underline Nono's work in all his periods. Then the Hölderlin quotation becomes more of a context than a text. By connecting his string quartet with the image of the fragmented, cryptic poetry of Hölderlin – through the title (*an Diotima*) and through the mystical existence of the silence quotation in the notation – a suggestive inter-aesthetic constellation is created. His primary focus was not to interpret a text, but to create a humanly responsive context for his work. Paul Griffiths (2011) describes it thus:

... the political intention in *Fragmente-Stille* is as vital and actual as it was in the revolutionary frescoes of a decade before. But the manner has changed from rhetoric to silence, from persuasion to listening. Good listening was, for Nono in this last decade, a political act—good listening that would be searching for the other, and not only for echoes of the self. (p. 318)

The "dance score" was written in the string quartet parts, where the same possibility for cognitive/bodily reflection in the stillness emerged. The dance created a counter-voice to the quartet in a state of reflective listening. The feeling of slow fragmentation through painful hesitation.

4.2 Methodology development for choreography

In the project the choreographer leads the work and catches initiatives, characteristics and artistry of the actors through following activities: design movement's graceful and musical value in relation to the musical vision for the performance. This is an activity as specific and thorough as in the design of an orchestral work; both musically and spatially, to explore knowledge about the counterpoint, phrasing, cooperative polyrhythmic movements and harmonization of the dance. It is also about the relationships between movement, body positions, levels, and the space that surround them. The aim is also to train the dancers listening in being inside of and facing the music with the musical integrity within the dance, without being controlled by or follow impulses directly *from* the sounding music.

This means close cooperation, which in a spirit of curiosity allows composers to appreciate that their work is being interpreted as a counterpart in dance and that the musicians are willing to open their listening towards the dance. This requires that the choreographer has a large network of not only dancers, but also of musicians and composers. The role also includes getting the visual scenic expressions (light design, set design and costume) to enhance the musical values, so you can avoid a storytelling that possibly alienates the mutual listening.

The artistic choices of the choreographer in this project was also to create a sketchlike "dance-score" from a music score, a kind of two voices harmony. In this coexistence, the music score, is then interpreted and expressed in dance. The challenge now is to find a flow in a give-and-take in the interpretation of the sounding score according to: instrumental groups, solo parts, volume, timbre, time, rhythm, pause, melody, counterpoint, harmony, phrasing, structuring, orchestration. And how the dance will be structured: number of dancers, quality of movement, muscle dynamics/tonus, diversity in corporal forms, duration, rhythm, phrasing, continuous succession of isolated movements, the distribution of movements in space and time, varied movements in the opposition and combination, succession of associated movements. The choreography is then further developed in silence, to find its "own music" within the dance, a process in which the dancers are co-creating alongside the choreographer, creative by their individuality, experiences, imagination and knowledge. This is indispensable for the artistic expression of the performance. There are also relationships between the rhythms of the dance and rhythms of the music, the sound volume and size of the choreographic gestures, the musical textures such as polyphony, homophony with its special organizations of instrument voices and the analogue choreographic organizations of the dancers, the timbre of the instruments or sounds and characters of the individuality of the dancers (see Background).

The dancer listens to the music *through* the dance sequence created in silence, and thus an artistic meeting occurs with the listening as the common denominator. This cooperation should be carried out with great accuracy, especially with the regard to the interception of the quality of the non-psychological movement that arises in the work of the musical elements transformed into dance. The process also includes an accuracy of timing with regard to the appropriation of the movement.

4.3 Interpreter, dancer

The role of the dancer is based on musical elements to improvise movement material, which is then modelled by the choreographer. The individuality of the dancer, the experience, imagination and knowledge permeates the material into the genre in which the choreographer is working. The dance sequence is based on the interaction between listening to the natural rhythm that occurs in the dance improvisation, and forming of movements by the choreographer in a musical listening purpose. The sounding metrics of the music are not controlling nor limiting. Then the dance sequence is danced to the sounding music, to listen for "meeting places" – tones – which through coincidence, intuition, knowledge and experience will occur. It is important to give the dance a scale of expressions in a musical cultivation, which gives the body both full control of all available elements of dynamic and agogic nature, and the opportunity to experience every nuance of the music in order to express them through the muscles. This investigation must be complemented with knowledge about agogic and spatial laws, to anchor variations in the time value through a physical listening.

The listening permeates every part of the process and should be analyzed as follow:

1. The dancer's own improvised sequence in relation to the intentions of the choreographer.
2. The co-dancers improvised sequences in relation to their own nature as a dancer.
3. The unanimous dance in relation to the sounding music.
4. The physical listening of the listening attention from the audience.

4.4 Interpreter musician

The role of the musician is based on listening on the interpretation put forward through the interaction between the co-musicians' value, the relevance of the interpretation to the meeting with the music of the dance and find a repeatability and in that a deeper listening to the dance. The music by Nono was composed with intervals of silences, in which the musicians can open up their listening out in the space of the dance. It means an expansion of the knowledge about the equal expressions of dance in relation to the sounding music. The musician can also leave the sheet music and add additional dimensions of inner and outer listening to their performance. Parts of this music was based on improvisational models, that lead to a greater interaction between the musician and the music of the dance, through a collective listening.

4.5 New artistic forms

The project aimed to find structures where choreography and music composition could be made visible in relation to each other in a listening attitude, where both art-forms had the musical element as a common denominator. Instead of performing both musical pieces, one after the other, they were performed in a dramaturgy where they were played at the same time, and each in their own time structure, giving dramaturgy to the performance. In combining the two music pieces, a "third" piece of music emerged for the dance, which partly gave a counter-voice and partly gave the primary voice of the music something to relate to. This meant that the conductor and the musicians in KammarensembleN and the string quartet were part of a musical whole, which also included the interpretation of the music by the choreographer and the dancers which became an independent voice.

In the meeting (see figure 1 below) between KammarensembleN, the string quartet and the 16 dancers, a listening emerged which was

- two-voice part – when one of the orchestral bodies played to the corporal music of the dance trio
- two-voice part – when one of the orchestral bodies played to the 16 dancers
- three-voice part – when one of the orchestral bodies played to sequences where the dance trio had one part and the other 13 dancers had another
- four-voice part – when the two orchestral bodies played in the determined time structure at the same time and each for themselves, to sequences where the dance trio had one part and the other 13 dancers had another.

The dance trio expands to a sextet on one occasion, and the dancers in the dance trio also make their own solos.

Specifically, in the dance trio and string quartet's opening sequence (13 minutes), one could decode a listening integration between the dancers and the musicians. In that part of the work there was an unprepared/prepared process where the intensive silences were followed by sounding and bodily discharges where a multiplicity of relations in different times emerged, developed and transformed. The outer structure was set, with an inner area of possible space for performance.

The time structure (see figure 1) was laid out as a dramaturgical frame for the performers to relate to, and the complexity in the interweaving of the different voices were intercepted and decoding by the listeners/spectators. The improvised temporality in the opening sequence, with the string quartet and the dance trio, were not possible for the most part in the continuation with the dancers and KammarensembleN. Instead, the greater emphasis lay with the dancers' interpretation of the sounding time of the music, which could vary as the piece unfolded and as a whole. Here the communication between the choreographer's and conductor's understanding of tempo in the different sections of the music was of great importance. The choreographer illuminated the dancers' musical approach with sequences of movement relating to the sounding music, and returned to the conductor. In some sequences, one or more of the musicians were free to follow the music of the dancers, and in the last sequence the solo violinist went out onto the dance stage and joined the dance trio. In this part, it was complexity in the consonant structure of the dance and the music that yielded the opportunity for new meaning and understanding for the listeners/spectators.

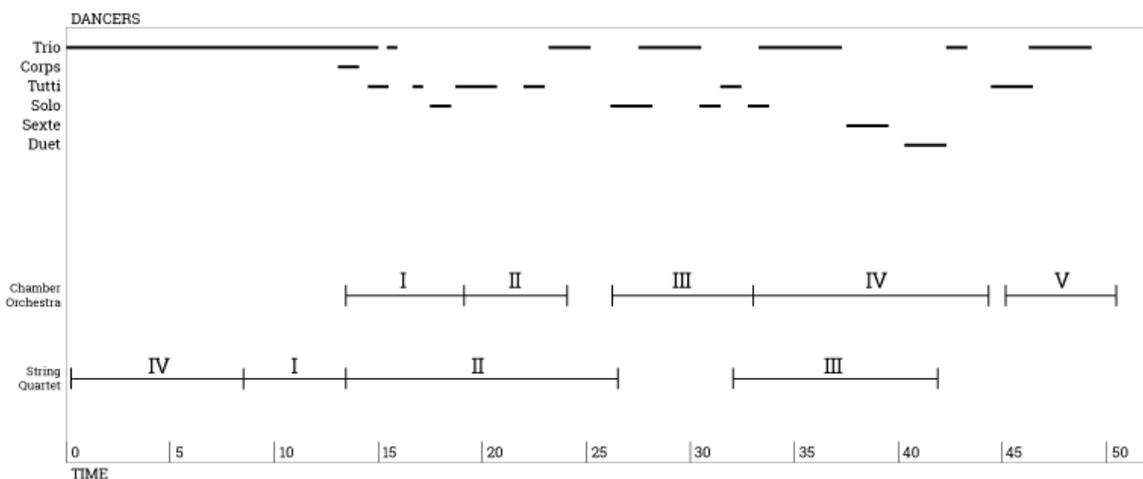


Figure 1. Graf showing time structure for the voices of the dance and the music

5 Discussion

The overall idea of the research program was that, with experience in choreographed dance, one can access a physical listening, forcing a particular kind of attention, which returns the music to a bodily experience.

The performance gave the opportunity to change the rituals around listening that prevails in an attempt to revive the ear, eye, inner and outer attention, into a listening thinking, to bring the conscious where your body goes, and break the habit, the expected. In a still position; reflect and breathe, and then let the body fall into new directions in space that will open up for new opportunities. The mind and corporeality of the dance and music become a way to listen and express music.

The research will lead to the transfer and exchange of skills and experience from the different fields, techniques and disciplines in the performing arts. The project also developed a systematization of the concept of choreography from a radical, unconventional perspective in the field of research. Artistic, pedagogic and organizational development and input are necessary for this process, with flexibility for new ideas and opportunities.

The opportunity afforded by the performing arts to illuminate human interaction in an intrinsic space can yield tools for the raising of competence in art in general. The main point here is to reflect both practically and theoretically, based on an understanding of quality and quantity, from a standpoint of critical listening.

Another point of departure is to reflect upon and elucidate the traditional, conventional methods of choreography, which are employed to meet pre-determined goals, and instead find new ways to take part in the collected resources for research. This includes reflection on how those resources are disseminated to create conditions for artists to work as independent, professional researchers. Artistic research can create remarkable connections between different disciplines, and through this it also develops the artist's individuality. Artistic research is invaluable in our complex information society, in which scientific and artistic skills are increasingly balanced on a more equal basis.

As the project has developed and addressed questions first and foremost, about the development of artistic methodology, it has also generated new questions to investigate:

- How will listening take on a larger meaning, be restored, take a greater place in artistic, philosophical and academic discussions; the curious and undecided listening, the hearkening?
- Is there the need for movement which is understood as music? What is the function of rhythm in that inquiry?
- Can the incomprehensibility in music be found in dance, or does dance have to be comprehensible because of its corporeality?
- Where in this process does the transition occur in the embodied listening from its own natural rhythm/temporality to the time of the stage?
- How does reflective listening emerge?

Movement lies at the heart of these concepts as the basis for all art forms, the feeling for space/time through movement. It is important to emphasize the study of the body's natural rhythms and, through their automation, create enduring rhythmic images in the mind, to connect muscle action with linguistic/musical processes. This includes to work against the shortage of interconnection between different attitudes and the absence of a continuous movement – a movement that we need to experience in every living manifestation of a continuous concept.

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