On Temperament, Steps and other Apparatuses of my Choreographic Practice

Samuel Feldhandler

Contents

A description

Similarly to how I write dance, my approach to writing this essay will be *descriptive*, in such a way developed by Simon Hecquet and Sabine Prokhoris in their book *Fabriques de la Danse*[1] . Description for them is a way to construct gazes or manners of seeing[2] and not merely the communication of a preexisting gaze. In such, it is a mode of giving accounts to another as well as to oneself. In this giving of accounts, my aim is to dissect some of the choreographic apparatuses I have been developing throughout the years, analyse what they do and if they are useful in fulfilling what I want my work to do. This essay will consider my entire body of works and will especially focus on the current work *'d he meant vary a shin's*, a dance trio for Eva Honings, Lena Schattenberg and myself.

Let me then start by preparing a descriptive tour through the apparatuses that are used within my work. It is important to note the strong influence my social background has had on my choreographic practice. I come from a family of classical and contemporary musicians in France. Names like Johann Sebastian Bach, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart or John Cage have been in my life since before I can remember. My entry to dance occurred through tap dancing and the movie *Billy Elliot* at the age of 10. Then I orientated myself towards becoming a contemporary dancer at the age of 15 when encountering the work of Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker. Even though I think of myself without hesitation as a dance maker, the way I relate to dance making is essentially through the translation of specific practices of music composition. This translating was intuitive at first but over time, the practice became more and more honed and is now to the point where I explicitly

---

[1] Simon Hecquet and Sabine Prokhoris, *Fabriques de la danse*, (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 2007), 27-51.

[2] In French *regard*.

investigate ways of translating musical forms within a dance context as my main approach to choreography. I accordingly situate myself as sitting in the middle between modes of production of music and dance. Particularly, I refer to my mode of dance production as writing dance and not as making dance, which has a very practical basis in that I literally write down dance on paper before interpreting it in space.

Musical techniques such as harmony and motives as well as structural forms like sonatas, fugues or canons are ways I engage choreography through a musical lens. For example, currently the choreographic work *'d he meant vary a shin's* investigates on the meta-form of theme and variations while focusing on the micro-forms of fugue and canon. This trio engages with a new configuration of forms while relying on forms and techniques I already know and feel at ease with[3]. This method of using past experiences while generating new tactics simultaneously is an approach I call *assuming temporary postulates*. Within this method I take for granted different matters of my work in different processes which allows me to construct a method of production that is consistent from work to work even though malleable.

A spatial harmony

As I began translating musical forms in a choreographic context, harmony was one of the first apparatus I was drawn to. Very different from the act of being harmonious, I have always been fascinated by the musical understanding of harmony as a sonic spatiality of "where one is" in the landscape of tonality. Considering this spatiality of harmony, I began to explore potential translations of harmony in a dance context. My first hunch in this process was inspired by De Keersmaeker's division of space through different geometrical phenomenon, such as the Fibonacci sequence. One of my first works, the quartet *For Four* (2014), was exploring the potentiality of this approach through a translation of the geometry of chess. I ruled out this approach in my subsequent works however because it did not provide me at the time with the potential for harmonic progression, which was important for my research. Indeed, harmony is not only about "where one is" in a given landscape, but through its ability to progress, it has the power of determining "where one is at which point in time". In this respect, it is important for me to be able to change instantly from a harmonic region to another. This instantaneous change was plainly impossible in my first approach, where harmony depended on where performers were situated in

---

[3] I have already worked with all these forms in the past, but never yet in that specific relationship.

the space. They could evidently not move from one opposite corner to another instantaneously without passing through the middle. I then decided to relate harmony to the directions which the performers face throughout a dance. I have since then questioned the two-dimensionality of this approach and thought of alternative translations for harmony, but have not yet physicalised them into practice. In such, my current harmonic method is my oldest postulate.

Following in the methods of orientating space from other dance systems[4], I divided the space into 8 facings similarly to compass directions, except relating to a frontal performance space. That division is based on frontal, profile and diagonal directions.

| 8 | front-left | 1 | front | 2 | front-right

| 7 | left | 3 | right

| 6 | back-left | 5 | back | 4 | back-right

In my experience, this system works primarily from the two axes of front-back[5] and side-to-side[6]; the diagonals[7] only emerging as constellations of these two primary dimensions. This primacy of the front and profile axes over the diagonals arises because the system anchors to a frontality mostly located at and enacted by the viewers[8]. The relationships of harmony in my work therefore work through a closeness to or distance from a viewer enacting a front. In this sense, | 2 | is more frontal than | 4 |, but less frontal than | 1 |.

Up to this day, I work from the idea that hierarchic importance is directly related to an amount of repetitions. This hierarchy comes from harmonic rules of classical western music, which in turn come from the overtone series and the physical properties of sound. For a simplified example within my choreographic harmony, if a progression goes through | 2 | once, and through | 5 | twice,

---

[4] Similar divisions of surrounding space are used in various systems such as Laban's kinetography and classical ballet technique.

[5] | 1 | — | 5 |.

[6] | 3 | — | 7 |.

[7] | 2 | — | 6 | & | 4 | — | 8 |.

[8] Because frontal dance performance is the medium I use the most, my mode of harmonic production thinks frontally. This frontal thinking does not prevent a work to be in a non-frontal setup, like the duet *Fermata* (2017). Even though it might be composed with a specific front in mind, there are as many micro-fronts in the actual performance as there are viewpoints.

the harmonic region of | 5 | is more important than | 2 |. I would then say that the dance in question is in the key of *back[9]*.

   As a performer within the dance, harmonic progression gives me a physical understanding of a certain hierarchy of directions, based on a sense of frontality, but in which the frontal direction no longer dominates. Harmony thus informs my relationship to my surrounding. For the viewer watching the dance on the other hand, harmony contributes to an understanding of a hierarchy of visibilities and non-visibilities. Depending on where the performer is facing, I as an audience member get to see and not see different parts of her body. For the above mentioned example in the key of *back*, I would be seeing the performer's back (| 5 |) twice more than I would her left slightly profile side (| 2 |).

This method of orientating bodies in space reminds me of the use Gilles Deleuze makes of the differences between the European and Japanese postal systems to explain leftist perception[10]. More precisely, he focuses on the outward direction of the European system versus the inward direction of the Japanese one. In order to describe a postal address, Europeans start from themselves, and then zoom out to the street, city, country, etc… while Japanese start from the outer regions, to their city, streets, and finally end with themselves. Deleuze relates the latter as the leftist mode of perception. It is not his conclusions on the matter I am interested in, but rather the different organisations of persons within spaces that he talks about. Even though the conditions are certainly different, since postal systems describe fixed positions whereas my understanding of spatial harmony is as an impetus for changes of positions or situations, I do find some resonances between the two. My approach to harmony through facings aligns with the outward European organisation of persons within space. The Japanese postal system could be associated with De Keersmaeker's geometric approach as bodies and movements orientate from the edges of the space. That is not to say placement of bodies in space is inexistent in my harmonic thinking, but that it is never directly effected by my choices. I am not deciding where in space sections of material should start and where they should end. Instead, spatial placement is solely affected through the facings of the harmonic progression and the spatial particularities of the given steps. As a practical example, if a phrase moves backwards and I face right (| 3 |) while performing it, I

---

[9] Most of my work to this day has been in the keys of *front-left* (| 8 |) or *front-right* (| 2 |). *'d he meant vary a shin's* will be in the key of *front* (| 1 |). It is the first work I write in the key of *front* since I started working with this method.

[10] Gilles Deleuze, "G pour Gauche", *L'abécédaire de Gilles Deleuze*, DVD, dir. by Pierre-André Boutang, Paris: Éditions Montparnasse, 1996.

will be travelling to the left of the space. Because we work in limited spaces, practical compromises are sometimes required to make harmonies work. It has been frequent that parts of a score push a performer offstage, theoretically straight through a wall, by continually making her travel towards a single direction. The way such situations are mostly solved is not through changing the harmony, but through finding ways of adjusting the spatial displacements of phrases without altering their structures and particularities.

A temperament

After spatial harmony, one of the apparatuses that have been accompanying me for the longest at this point in my process is a division of body and space which I refer to as a *temperament*. My use of the term temperament diverges substantially from the usual context in which the term is mostly understood. I am using temperament for its structural potential, and not from an emotional or psychological frame of reference. Etymologically, temperament comes from the latin *tempero*, to divide or moderate, which in turn comes from the latin *tempus*, time or season (proper time, proper season). My take on this etymology is that temperaments can divide matter and, by doing so, give time to and make space for various micro-matters within. In my case, temperament divides a human body and its surrounding space, which allows for new specific arrangements of movement to emerge.

I believe this specific understanding of temperament can be seen throughout contemporary dance's history in the twentieth century, though it was not addressed this way. Choreographers like Merce Cunningham, Trisha Brown, William Forsythe or Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker, whose methods have been very influential for me, have made extensive use of what I would call *tempered* systems on which they build their choreographic grammars and materials.

I take the term temperament from music history, in which it represented a major breakthrough for western baroque music, unleashing an entirely new potential for the complexity of harmonic composition. Temperament became common practice in western classical music roughly in the early eighteenth century[11]. Before that, and due to the physical properties of sound waves, musical instruments were tuned in such a way that they could play in only one or a few different keys at a

---

[11] This time frame is deduced from the work by Johann Sebastian Bach *The Well Tempered Clavier*, of which the first volume was composed in the year 1722. *The Well Tempered Clavier* was one of the first and most influential attempt of bringing all twenty-four western keys within one singular work.

time. In order to change key, the whole instrument had to be retuned to that specific key[12]. What temperament did was to moderate slightly the 'naturally pure' intervals to create a normalised tuning system within which each and every tonal key could be played. At first, this normalisation allowed more complexity in modulation and harmonic potentials[13], and ultimately, it permitted musicians to take more and more distance from easily recognisable keys, finally leaving the tonal system altogether in the early twentieth century.

I call a tempered body a human body that has been divided into equally important parts and which becomes the sum of these parts. For my choreographic work, I have divided the body in twenty potential places for movement initiation. In this system, the trunk is composed of four units: the head, the chest, the belly and the crouch; the sixteen places left to complete the divided body are the extremities as well as the main joints for movement, namely the shoulders, elbows, wrist, fingertips, hips, knees, ankles and feet. For my practice of inversion, which I will discuss later, I have numbered these body places from one to twenty:[14]

(1) *head*	(2) *chest*	(3) *belly*	(4) *tail*
(5) *left shoulder*	(6) *right shoulder*	(7) *left elbow*	(8) *right elbow*
(9) *left wrist*	(10) *right wrist*	(11) *left hand*	(12) *right hand*
(13) *left hip*	(14) *right hip*	(15) *left knee*	(16) *right knee*
(17) *left heel*	(18) *right heel*	(19) *left foot*	(20) *right foot*

This specific division of the body is drawn from kinetography, a method for dance notation developed by Rudolf Laban in the early twentieth century, which is often referred to as Labanotation[15]. In kinetography, the tempered body works within an equivalently tempered

---

[12] This was especially true of and important for keyboard instruments, where the player has no control over the pitch of each tone in real time and for which a complete retuning takes a substantial amount of time.

[13] A single musical piece did not anymore have to refrain itself to the realm of only a handful of keys, but could 'modulate' through the entire tonal system.

[14] In the continuation of the essay, as in the following chart, tempered places in the body are indicated with the use of parenthesis. This notation is derived from the way I write down dance material on paper, where I circle body places.

[15] Ann Hutchinson Guest, *Labanotation: The System of Analyzing and Recording Movement*, (New York: Routledge, 2011), 218-219 & 196-199.

surrounding space[16]. That space is made of three dimensions together forming 27 directions which, like the places in the body, I have numbered from one to twenty-seven:[17]

[1] *left-front-up*   [2] *front-up*   [3] *right-front-up*

[4] *left-side-up*   [5] *up*   [6] *right-side-up*

[7] *left-back-up*   [8] *back-up*   [9] *right-back-up*

[10] *left-front*   [11] *front*   [12] *right-front*

[13] *left*   [14] *center*   [15] *right*

[16] *left-back*   [17] *back*   [18] *right-back*

[19] *left-front-down*   [20] *front-down*   [21] *right-front-down*

[22] *left-side-down*   [23] *down*   [24] *right-side-down*

[25] *left-back-down*   [26] *back-down*   [27] *right-back-down*

From my experience of working within this tempered spatiality, I find dividing the space in this way radically changes my understanding of movement. This approach complicates movement by transforming a single piece of information into a triple one. In other words, directions are no longer just "towards there", but become a combination of "towards there", "towards there" and "towards there". For example, the direction [19], which is the diagonal to the left, front and down, is no longer a known and trusted diagonal, but becomes the active combination of horizontally left, sagittally front and vertically down[18]. In this framework, singular directions turn into assemblages of dimensions. At the same time however this assembling of dimensions also simplifies movement, as the three primary dimensions can describe all of the twenty-seven space directions on their own. This simultaneous complication and simplification of movement is especially

---

[16] Ibid., 20-22.

[17] In the continuation of the essay, as in the following chart, tempered directions in space are indicated with the use of brackets. This notation is derived from the way I write down dance material on paper, where I frame space directions in squares.

[18] Dimensions can also be inactive, or at a degree zero. For example in the direction [10], which is the diagonal to the left and front, the vertical dimension is not mentioned because it is at a degree zero, neither up nor down. However it stays present in the direction [10], which remains a triple piece of information.

important for the development of a technique to facilitate the transmission of my work to collaborators.

My choreographic writing, like Laban's kinetography, works from the relationship between tempered body and space by pulling a body part towards a space direction. By binding a place in the body to a direction in space, I create my choreographic equivalent to a musical note, which I call a *step*. I can take an example from my current choreographic work *'d he meant vary a shin's* here, of which the first step is called *A.1*. The step *A.1* appears through the pull of the *right foot* towards the direction *left-front-down*[19]. Steps appear from within temperament while simultaneously making temperament appear. Steps and temperament are therefore entangled with one another.

At this point in my life, I have been through a certain number of normative systems, such as french and german public schools, music instrument classes, or a four year education in contemporary dance. What going through these systems did, and still does, is provide me with information on and facilitation for certain ways of moving. Yet what it also does on a less conscious plane is exclude other ways of moving and render their existence in my body impossible. Since the normative organisation of my body works with and through an exclusive field of possibilities, which informs all aspects of my movement, its simple removal is impossible. It is impossible because, since my body already is within a normative order (and cannot be otherwise), it holds nothing on its own to work against normativity. My approach to resist other normative orders is to introduce another directed normalisation and this is where my tempering of body and space can have a very practical part to play. Tempering body and space allows me as a choreographer to find new ways of organising and assembling body parts together. In other words, tempering the body in space helps me break down an older normative organisation of my body by normalising it again in a new way. Temperament does not have the ambition of being the one or most valid method to normalise bodies against normative orders. It is only one of countless means of normalisation.

In my experience as a dancer engaging with other peoples' works or improvising in different contexts, as well as being a part of a dancer's community, it quickly becomes visible what are my and my colleagues' styles. It is important to note that when I write about styles in this context, I refer to normative organisations or exclusive fields of possibilities in ways of moving. In such, what quickly comes to be visible is what is a part of different dancers' fields of possibilities and

---

[19] (20) / [19] — *right foot* moves *left-front-down*.

what is not. Thus similarities and differences become apparent, depending on which schools people come from, which time and place they were active at, etc…

By displacing the impetus for movement from within a body to a sheet of paper, what I found my tempering of body and space can do is disrupt the linearity of normative processes. I can remember countless occasions of thinking phrases arising from my tempered system were impossible to perform because I did not physically understand their logic right away. However after spending some time with these phrases and keeping at them, they always seemed most organic in my body. In this process of learning new material, there is always a very clear and concise moment in which my body starts making sense of this new tempered approach, in which I understand a new logic for movement. That moment is where normalisation materialises and where it operates a shift in my body's normativity. I have been working from within a tempered body and space for over three years now and I am just starting to notice how temperament effects a change in my ways of moving in other contexts.

A step

Step is a term barely used nowadays within the field of contemporary dance. Contemporary dancers talk in movements and in phrases, but hardly ever in steps. However, step is not an uncommon term in other dance fields, such as classical ballet or folk and urban dances.

The term step that I use is taken from the same source in western dance history that is often referred to as the origin of the term choreography. The work in question is the late seventeenth century book by Raoul Auger Feuillet entitled *CHOREOGRAPHY OR THE ART OF DESCRIBING DANCE, through characters, figures and demonstrative signs, with which one easily learns by him/herself[20] all sorts of dances[21]*. The context for this work on dance notation was social court dancing and a royal order from Louis XIV to "make understandable the art of dance on paper"[22]. Feuillet's choreography works in a very different mode than Laban's kinetography. Instead of starting from within the human experience and relating tempered body parts to surrounding tempered space, Feuillet starts from the space, which is represented by the sheet of paper, and notates spatial pathways within it. Pathways are notated with signs describing

---

[20] The original old french wording "de foy-même" is genderless.

[21] Raoul Auger Feuillet, trans. by the author, *Chorégraphie ou l'art de décrire la dance*, (Bologna: Arnaldo Forni Editore, 1983), cover page.

[22] Hecquet and Prokhoris, *Fabriques de la danse*, trans. by the author, 23-25.

what movements are to be performed at what point in the trajectory. Each of these signs is referred to as a step. This name comes from the particularities of the actual dance that this notation method was used for, in which every step was an actual step, as in a spatial displacement initiated in the lower body.

While analysing the similarities of mechanisms in Laban's kinetography and Feuillet's choreography, Hecquet and Prokhoris come to the conclusion that "the step (…) is nothing else than what carries out the relationship between positions"[23]. Instead of steps carrying out relationships between positions however, I like to think of them as carrying out the relationships between situations; a situation in my work being a set of specific tempered spatial pulls on and from specific tempered body parts. To take the example of *A.1*[24], the first movement of *'d he meant vary a shin's*, the aim is not to reach a fixed point with the *right foot* that is located somewhere *left-front-down*, but to pull the *right foot* towards the direction *left-front-down*. It is not about the position, but about the action. With this distinction in mind however, Hecquet and Prokhoris' remark on steps can still be highly helpful for my thinking of steps.

Hecquet and Prokhoris' observation comes from the importance of the previous step for the particularity of the next step. As an example, if the step *A.1* binds my *right foot* with the direction *left-front-down*, the actual movement that emerges will be very different whether the previous step led my *right foot* to *right-front-down*[25] or to *left-front-up*[26]. It would be a sideways movement of my foot in the first case, while it would be a downward one in the second. The importance of this conclusion lies in the understanding that steps are materials of in-betweenness and not of finiteness.

To recapitulate, *A.1* is the first step of *'d he meant vary a shin's*; In its basic, primary form, it is composed of the body place (20) (*right foot*), the space direction [19] (*left-front-down*) and a timing of one whole count. In its different iterations throughout the score, it will sometimes appear in its basic or primary form and sometimes as *M-A.1*[27], which is mirrored through the sagittal axis.

---

[23] Hecquet and Prokhoris, *Fabriques de la danse*, 84.

[24] (20) / [19] — *right foot* moves *left-front-down*.

[25] (20) / [21] — *right foot* moves *right-front-down*.

[26] (20) / [1] — *right foot* moves *left-front-up*.

[27] (19) / [21] — *left foot* move *right-front-down*.

Even though they are not present in *'d he meant vary a shin's*, other possible iterations could be *hM-A.1*[28], which is mirrored in body and space through the horizontal plane, *bM-A.1*[29], which is mirrored in the body through the midline, and so on. Parts of steps can also be added or subtracted, such as *A.1 + A.3*[30] or *A.1 + A.3 - (11)/[26]*[31]. Even though these alterations occur from within my specific tempered system, they still represent very classical ways of handling dance material, which I can relate to numerous processes of other choreographic work in which I have been involved.

An inversion

The most recurring altered iteration of steps are without doubt what I call *inversions*. These function through an entirely different logic than the alterations I have just written about and are a very key part of my work. In music, an inversion is a specific technique for varying material. It functions by mirroring, or inverting, the movement in pitch of a musical phrase. As an example, if a primary musical phrase goes up two tones and then down one tone, the inversion will go down two tones and then up one tone. It is not to be confused with reversion or retrograde, which mirrors a musical phrase in time or plays it backwards. To make matters simpler and use the commonly understood metaphor that pitch is vertical, I could say an inversion puts a musical phrase upside-down. By doing so, it rewires all the components of the said phrase and effects a change in that phrase's quality, while keeping all of its structural features.

I have translated inversions within my choreographic practice through a system inspired by the method of deducing an inversion in serialism[32]. As a result of assigning a number to each body place and space direction, I am able to mathematically link each of these places and directions to one other one. This linking works in such a way that the sum of a place or direction's number with its linked other equals the total amount of places or directions within the respective gamut ((20) places for the body and [27] directions for the). As an example, the inversion of the fourth

---

[28] (20) / [25] — *right foot* moves *left-back-down*.

[29] (19) / [19] — *left foot* moves *left-front-down*.

[30] (20) / [19], (12) / [1] & (11) / [26] — *right foot* moves *left-front-down*, *right hand* moves *left-front-up* & *left hand* moves *back-down*.
A.3 being another step of *'d he meant vary a shin's* composed of the relationships (12) / [1] and (11) / [26].

[31] (20) / [19] & (12) / [1] — *right foot* moves *left-front-down* & *left hand* moves *back-down*.

[32] Serialism is a method for musical composition of the twentieth century in which material is organised and developed through the use of series and matrices. It is a highly mathematical approach to composition.

movement of *'d he meant vary a shin's A.4* —(2)/[3] would be *I-A.4* —(18)/[24]; that is because the body places (2) plus (18) equal (20) and the spatial directions [3] plus [24] equal [27].[33]

Inversions combine a classical mode of composition through personal taste and memory with an algorithmic approach, less directly affected by my own body's needs. When writing primary phrases, I am thinking from within the tempered system, which already helps me in taking some distance from my normative habits of moving. However, I remain in an environment in which I make direct choices of specific movements over others. I have the power to choose what I do and what I do not do. The possibility of choice can be seen with steps that are very present throughout my work, like arm movements of hands leading towards opposite corners[34], which clearly represent some of my movement affinity. To the contrary, steps that are practically absent from my primary phrases up to this day are leg movements upwards and to the back[35]. When transforming phrases through inversion however, movements are rewired in a mathematically controlled, yet not premeditated way. It brings me places I would not be going to otherwise, while at the same time retaining the primary phrases' structural features. As an example, if in the primary phrase three movements in a row initiate in the left elbow (7), three movements in a row will initiate in the left hip (13) for the inversion.[36]

If temperament operated a shift from normative orders, inversions have the potential to make a shift with regards to agency. Karen Barad speaks of the act of agency as "reconfiguring the material-discursive field of possibilities in the iterative dynamics of intra-activity"[37]. If I consider my body as a material-discursive assemblage, consisting of intertwined and entangled matter and discourse, inversions allow me to reconfigure the dynamic movement possibilities in a way Barad explains as agency.

Through the method of inversions, the steps' mode of production is displaced in the middle between me as an author/subject and an algorithmic system. It would be exaggerated to say that I

---

[33] Another way to make this calculation is to subtract the place and direction numbers of the primary step to the total amount of places and directions of the gamuts. For *A.4*, it would be (20) – (2) = (18) and [27] – [3] = [24].
There is one exception to this system, when the original number already equals the total amount of the gamut. So to take the example of *A.1* —(20)/[19], the inversion would be *I-A.1* —(20)/[8]. This exception has to do with the lack of 0 in my system. This lack of 0 and 'glitch' in my mode of producing inversions is a part of my postulate making practice.

[34] Such as (12) / [1] – *right hand* moves *left-front-up* or (11) / [3] – *left hand* moves *right-front-up*.

[35] Such as (19) / [7] – *left foot* moves *left-back-up* or (20) / [8] – *right foot* moves *back-up*.

[36] Because (7) + (13) = (20) or (20) – (7) = (13).

[37] Karen Barad, "Posthumanist Performativity: Towards an Understanding of How Matter Comes to Matter", *Signs* 28, 3 (2003): 822-823.

as an author loose all agency in favour of the algorithm, as all the algorithm does is transform primary steps which I authored. I therefore still have an indirect form of control over inversions and can influence the outcome through changing the input. But, inversions remain potent in displacing agency in my work as long as I do not become skilled enough within the system so I lose the ability to not control the whole picture. As soon as I become able to plan ahead entire phrases in parallel with their full inversions, I close the door for otherness and disaffinities to enter the material. After three years of working with inversions, I have become fluid in transcribing inverted phrases at reading speed, but I am not yet able to perform them fluently from reading primary phrases alone. Consequently, I surmise inversions still have a few years of potency ahead in which they can maintain the power to displace agency before I become too skilled and overrule them as choreographic agents that positively reconfigure the dynamics of my choices.

A silence

After all the noise made by temperings, steps and harmonies, my next move in this essay will be going in the direction of searching for silence. For a while now, I have been interested in the problematics of translating a musical silence, or rest, within a dance context. I am most curious about the potentiality of musical rest compositionally. Sonic instruments have the possibility of completely disappearing from and reappearing into the sonic space. This possibility means that, in addition to the ability of rests to create breathing space within musical phrases, they also allow the arrangement and combination of instruments to change instantly. A quartet can instantaneously become a solo, which can turn into a trio, etc.

This disappearance is much more complicated to achieve in a choreographic context as a body remains always present, even if it stops performing steps. Simple stillness is not enough, as a motionless body can still remain eminently present in a performance space. The classical theatre technique of the offstage comes to mind, but it does not satisfy my expectation of silence either. As with harmony, I am most interested in the instantaneity potential of silence, which is overwritten as soon as the body in question needs to travel to a specific location in order to be silent.

It seems unthinkable for me to embark on a quest for silence without mentioning or using Cage's work on musical silence. One of his major findings in his quest for sonic silence is that it cannot exist for the human experience. Even in the most researched silent spaces, sound is still

emitted by our own organs[38]. Next to this impossibility of silence, I am thinking of something Malin Arnell told me during a session in which we discussed my work: that everything one does pushes something else out of the space and renders existence for that other thing impossible. With this understanding, silence becomes not a goal, but a mode of performance which is also a practice of inclusion. By being silent, a body allows the activity of other bodies to be perceived and present.

As a conclusion to a lyrical flight on the silences, or gaps, in Stéphane Mallarmé's writing, Roland Barthes writes: "it is literature brought to the gates of the promised land: a world without literature, but one to which writers would nevertheless have to bear witness."[39] What would a world without dance be and how can we as dancing bodies bear witness to it? What mode of performance does it require and how is it practiced? Here Barad can again bring me helpful tools for thinking of a silent body. Her concept of intra-activity as constraining, but not determining seems relevant: "Intra-actions always entail particular exclusions, and exclusions foreclose any possibility of determinism, providing the condition of an open future"[40]. What sets of exclusion are needed to be presently absent and allow otherness to enter the space? Barad's definition of intra-action becomes a door for me to address silence in a different way.

In the first layer of my search for silence as a practice, I am drawn to classical theatre techniques dealing with directing the viewer's attention to a specific happening on stage. On a deeper level however, I am curious to investigate ways in which all the performing parts (dancers, lights, sounds, etc.) can be silent together and bring an otherness into the space. In this sense, being silent is not directing a viewer's attention to a known event in the space, but to an unknown otherness. We are practicing silence together with my collaborators by dancing Cage's *4'33"*[41] for each other. The reason we are using *4'33"* as an etude to understand how to be silent, or how to be presently absent, is because it works precisely by making space for otherness in the space through the removal of a performer's activity.

---

[38] John Cage, "Experimental Music", *Silence*, (Hanover: Wesleyan University Press: 1973), 8.

[39] Roland Barthes, *Writing Degree Zero*, trans. Annette Lavers and Colin Smith, (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1953), 59.

[40] Barad, "Posthumanist Performativity", 826.

[41] *4'33"* is a work by Cage premiered in 1952 by "David Tudor, pianist, who indicated the beginnings of parts by closing, the endings by opening, the keyboard lid. However, the work may be performed by any instrumentalist (…)". John Cage, *4'33"*, (New York: Henmar Press Inc., 1960).

An intra-pretation / a style / a literacy

After writing about silence and after experimenting with how to remove myself from the space, I would like to come back and write about interpretation. Once I have written a dance on paper, once the composition if done, it needs to be learned and performed, or in other words interpreted. In addition to thinking a silent body, I have pulled Barad's notion of intra-actions to help me rethink the concept of interpretation. In the same way that Barad supposes interactions do not consist of pre-existing matter and are therefore intra-actions, I would like to rethink interpretation as *intra-pretation*. Interpretation makes a split between an interpreter and something to interpret, a performer and a score, and it presupposes the two exist as whole entities before they can possibly encounter themselves. An intra-active interpretation, or intra-pretation, recognises an entanglement of performer, score and performance. Practically, it helps me approach the process of the transmission of my work to other performers and gives more awareness to diverse exchanges taking place during that process.

The first occasion on which I gained conscious awareness for the intra-activity of intra-pretation was during the working process of the trio *ohne Fuge* (2016), with Eva Honings, Anni Kaila and Lena Schattenberg. *ohne Fuge* is the first piece completely constructed on my tempered system. The rehearsal process was very dense and I did not have the time to work on everything that I wanted. I especially remember one step which one of the performers did in a way I did not like at the time and thought was "wrong". She was pushing the palm of her hand sideways while I thought that step should be performed by leading from the finger tips. Because of different circumstances and like many other details of interpretation, I never got to talk about this step during the process. I forgot about it in the midst of more pressing matters, but while talking about that work about a year later, I performed that same step and found myself doing it exactly how she had interpreted it and judging it as the "right" way to perform this step. Through intra-preting it, she has become a part of the step's historicity. It is now entangled with her intra-pretation, just as it is with mine, and any performance of this step emerges from somewhere in between our respective intra-pretations. Of course, thinking of intra-pretation is not a necessary prerequisite for this sort of exchange to take place, as they already took place before I started thinking about interpretation in this way. However, it can help me in being more receptive and preparing an environment which can allow more space for such exchanges to happen. Intra-pretation was present in a similar fashion when working on *Fermata* (2017), a duet for Schattenberg and myself. During the

rehearsal process of *Fermata*, when the writing of the piece was done and we were working in the studio searching for the right way to perform the score, the aim was to let the *style* emerge from somewhere in between our two approaches to the material. In the chapter on styles of her book *Poetics of Contemporary Dance*, Laurence Louppe situates style "in the margins of the visible, and often appear[ing] indirectly in the timing or spatial orientation of our movement. In fact, style is the subtext, that is the true text, which murmurs under the choreographic language"[42]. Instead of aiming to get everyone to perform in one supposedly specific and fixed way, I accepted the style of a work to be fluid and situated in between the respective styles of the performers present.

The style emerging from a singular work has a short temporality, materialising from the entanglement of people present in one space and time. However, it is itself entangled with a style of a longer temporality, emerging from the entanglement of everyone and everything taking and having taken part in a broader body of works. This broader style is itself again entangled with something that operates on another dimension, namely the *literacy* of work, or the style of writing. My specific literacy is omnipresent throughout my body of works, but it came to light in an unprecedented manner while working with Schattenberg on the solo *Sonata Nr.4* (2017/18). This piece is dedicated to the French choreographer Dominique Bagouet. It is based on the material of a dance phrase from one of his works, which I transcribed within my scoring system and which appears as a quote at the end of the piece. Schattenberg and I learned the solo separately, so as to experiment with transmitting a dance solely through its score and without showing any physical movement. Since there are countless different ways of actualising the score into movement, our respective versions of the same score are very different. In my version, I perform the quote true to how I know it from Bagouet, but since the score does not read the quote as such, Schattenberg performs it very differently and unrecognisably from the original phrase. Towards the end of the process, I was absent-mindedly watching her perform the solo while thinking about the scenic setting, when I suddenly felt a strong unexpected shift in the choreography. It took me a little time to realise she had been performing the quote at that moment. It was an important and beautiful moment, as I realised then how specific the literacy of my work is. Even though she performs the quote in the same manner as the rest of the piece, it is apparent the quote is different from the rest of the score, as I only transcribed it into my system, and not actually wrote it. More specifically, it

---

[42] Laurence Louppe, *Poetics of Contemporary Dance*, trans. by Sally Gardner, (Alton: Dance Books Ltd, 2010), 91.

becomes noticeable that the quote is built on a different formal logic than the material I wrote; it is from another literacy.

It is in the intra-actions between these literary and physical styles, between literacy and intra-pretations that authorship arises and that the work gains a signature. I can sign a composition or score as a singular artist, but when it comes to an actual physical performance, the location of authorship gets blurrier and shared by various interpreters both present and absent from the particular performance setting.

Samuel Feldhandler [43]

Lena Schattenberg [44]

Eva Honings [45]

Anni Kaila [46]

Thais Hvid [47]

Demian Haller

Charlotte Petersen [48]

---

[43] I wrote all of my work and, to this day, performed *B-Minor Sinfonia* (2012), *For One in Three, Sonata Nr.1* (2014), *Sonata Nr.2* (2016), *Fermata* (2017) and *Sonata Nr.4* (2017). I am also performing *'d he meant vary a shin's* (2018).

[44] To this day, Lena Schattenberg performed *For Four* (2014), *ohne Fuge* (2016), *Sonata Nr.2* (2016), *Fermata* (2017) and *Sonata Nr.4* (2017). She is also performing *'d he meant vary a shin's* (2018).

[45] To this day, Eva Honings performed *ohne Fuge* (2016). She is also performing *'d he meant vary a shin's* (2018).

[46] To this day, Anni Kaila performed *ohne Fuge* (2016).

[47] To this day, Thais Hvid performed *For Four* (2014) and took part in the process of *ohne Fuge* (2016).

[48] To this day, Charlotte Petersen and Demian Haller performed *For Four* (2014).

Bibliography

– Barad, Karen. "Posthumanist Performativity: Towards an Understanding of How Matter Comes to Matter", *Signs* 28, 3 (2003): 801-831.

– Barthes, Roland. *Writing Degree Zero*. Translated by Annette Lavers and Colin Smith. Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1953.

– Cage, John. "Experimental Music". *Silence*. Hanover: Wesleyan University Press, 1973.

– Cage, John. *4'33"*. New York: Henmar Press Inc., 1960.

– Feuillet, Raoul Auger. *Chorégraphie ou l'art de décrire la dance*. Translated by the author. Bologna: Arnaldo Rorni Editore, 1983.

– Guest, Ann Hutchinson. *Labanotation: The System of Analyzing and Recording Movement*. New York: Routledge, 2011.

– Hecquet, Simon, and Sabine Prokhoris. *Fabriques de la danse*. Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 2007.

– Louppe, Laurence. *Poetics of Contemporary Dance*. Translated by Sally Gardner. Alton: Dance Books Ltd, 2010.

Video

– Deleuze, Gilles. *L'abécédaire de Gilles Deleuze*. DVD. Directed by Pierre-André Boutang. Paris: Éditions Montparnasse, 1996.