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# Performing listening

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## Abstract

Whenever a dance performance relies heavily on group dynamics, the ability of each dancer to attune to the working group can be critical to ensuring its quality. The question posed in this text is therefore: can attuning be considered a practice in dance? And if so, what forms of exercising attuning can dance possibly offer? Dancing partners seeking mutual attunement bring into play a set of skills that I propose to enclose in a performative mode called "performing listening". I define listening as a performative state of high sensitivity to the ensemble of information that is available while interacting with others. Therefore, I propose interaction performances as processes of corporeal communication enabled by dancers' ability to work with the stimuli emerging in situ and in highly diversified physical conditions. Contemporary dance offers various forms of exercising attuning through which the dynamics of performative listening can be exemplified. Examples drawn from the practice of Contact Improvisation, Passing Through and the work of the dancers in William Forsythe's *Duo* and *N.N.N.N* are taken as case studies to reflect on different ways of setting up corporeal communication. Particular attention is paid to interactions that are not reliant on touch, in which communication between dancers occurs at distance. Contributing to the investigation of these phenomena is entrainment theory, an interdisciplinary field of study that focuses on the processes through which interacting rhythmic systems stabilize over time in different forms of synchronization. Entrainment theory offers an opportunity to understand non-touch-based interactions in dance as reliant on rhythmic skills, suggesting the potential to conceive forms of exercising attuning as musical games. I then propose a practice-oriented investigation of the notion of musicality, focusing on how musicality can be felt and enacted by dancers both in solo and interaction settings. In conclusion to this text, I propose to look at attunement practices as facilitating an "area of experience" in which communication can be rehearsed and enacted in the form of dance.

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*“What does it mean for a being to be immersed entirely in listening, formed by listening or in listening, listening with all his being?”*

(Jean-Luc Nancy, 2007)

## 1. Introduction - Moving together

The following text is based on the experience of a lecture-performance I held in July 2021 at Anton Bruckner University. On that occasion, I was interested in discussing with those present what interacting via movement implies and therefore reflect on the skills that dancers bring into play when performing with others. My fascination for the interactive dimension of dance originates from the intense feeling of mutual attunement that is sometimes generated when performing with others. We perform together and may feel in tune. On what might this depend on? Is it just a matter of chemistry between me and my colleagues? Is it because we work together and have known each other for a long time? Certainly, these factors, as well as many others, play a key role in determining mutual attunement. Reasons underlying it can be so varied, highly subjective and situation specific. For instance, one day I may feel particularly tired or unfocused, and my responsiveness in performance will inevitably be affected. And the same can happen to my colleagues. The multitude of factors involved in feeling mutually attuned makes this experience very complex to discuss. I therefore ask myself whether mutual attunement can be considered an object of study within the specialized discourse of dance; whether we can really discuss it by focusing on dance practice and processes. After all, when it comes to dancing, feeling in tune remains a familiar experience to many of us. We think of festive occasions when we dance together to our favourite songs. These moments often end up generating a strong and shared sense of togetherness. Music transports us, it makes us move together. It makes us feel attuned. Nevertheless, things may get more complex when it comes to professional dance contexts. This is because professionals are asked to ensure repeatability of performance situations that are staged in the most diverse forms. Sometimes they are accompanied by music, sometimes not. In the end, however, if a choreographic work relies heavily on group dynamics, a certain ability to attune to others may be crucial to ensure the quality of the performance.

Can attuning be practiced in dance? If so, how? Underlying these questions lies a desire to discuss mutual attunement as something that can be rehearsed. A potential synonym for attunement that recurs very often in some contemporary dance contexts is

“connection” (see Waterhouse, 2014). When we perform together, we may or may not feel connected. I remember how, during some rehearsals with the Salzburg company CieLaroque/Helene Weinzierl, the group sometimes felt poorly connected. Sometimes someone would catch a choreographic cue too late, sometimes too early, sometimes it happened that we bumped into each other, etc. Something was clearly not working as it was supposed to. What often emerged from a group discussion was, in fact, a shared perception of “disconnection”. And without such an experience, probably no reasoning would have started. Feeling disconnected offered us the opportunity to ask how to act further so that everyone could return to listening. And when dancing is a profession, returning to listening happens through rehearsal and work. Initially, guiding such a process may be practical reasoning, the logic model for which is interestingly illustrated by American philosopher David Carr:

"I intend to change the oil in my car; if I remove the drain plug, I'll be able to change the oil; There is no way to change the oil without removing the drain plug; I will/must remove the drain plug." (Carr, 1978, p.6 as in Pakes, 2017, p.4)

The conclusion of Carr's model is an action that we understand as necessary to achieve our goal: changing the oil in the car. What happens if we try to apply this reasoning to the rehearsal situation described above? For example, if I am too late in catching a choreographic cue provided by a colleague, will I simply have to act more quickly next time? Or will she/he have to slow down and wait for me? Would this make us feel more connected then? While it is tempting to say that such strategies can solve the situation, it might do so only temporarily. Surely by catching the cue with the right timing, we may feel like “more together”. However, the very same choreographic work is each time subject to minimal or considerable variations in performance that are unpredictable and strongly situation dependent. Therefore, it is not necessarily the case that such a strategy will help us to perform more attuned or connected next time. One day it may work, the other day it may not. On another day, my partner may feel more tired than usual and therefore give the same cue a moment later. Another discussion may then arise, and rehearsal starts anew. In all cases though important to my discourse is to note that whenever we feel disconnected in performance, a dialogue may start and practice steps in. This is a fruitful moment. It is a learning process. Dancers in the studio are called upon to do something, to regroup, to discuss and implement practical strategies to figure out what

works the best. What kind of know-how is emerging in dancers rehearsing mutual attunement? And what modes of exercising mutual attunement can dance possibly offer?

## 2. Perceptions as working (im)materials

To begin with, let us allow ourselves to propose interaction performances as forms of bodily communication. If we take this for true, we might intuit how exercising mutual attunement means developing strategies to refine our "listening", that is, our sensitivity to the stimuli produced and available while performing together. Interacting dancers are therefore challenged with their ability to transmit, receive, and process information in movement so that they can act and react accordingly each time. How do these processes translate into dance practice? Which skillset are dancers developing when it comes to exchanging information via movement? Professor and dancer Chrysa Parkinson's reflections on performing with others may be helpful in establishing a starting point. In an interview published on the online podcast AUDIOSTAGE (2016), Parkinson says that after experiencing dance work in groups for a long time, dancers can reach a certain degree of awareness of how to manage themselves within it and how to act accordingly. Performing with others may, in fact, raise relevant questions: how can I best coordinate with others? Have my colleagues perceived what my intentions are? If not, how can I make my intentions clearer? The emergence of such questions reveals a chain of thoughts that can be triggered when it comes to seeking for attuned work. So, what aspects of performing should dancers focus on to render communication clearer through movement? If we allow ourselves to treat attunement exercises in dance as communication exercises, we might see the need to talk about qualities that exceed the physical dimension of dancing, while ultimately being embedded in it. In this direction, it is particularly interesting to observe the way Parkinson suggests, from my perspective, an "expanded" notion of dance technique. Dancers' know-how is based not only on their motor skills or physical fitness (coordination, balance, strength, flexibility etc.) but also on their ability to work with the set of information surrounding the experience of dancing. Parkinson says that the variety of perceptual activities involved in dance processes can be considered as working materials. In other words, she seems to suggest that perceptions can potentially become core focus of a dance practice. Let us take the experience of touch or proximity as an example. We human beings rely on perceptions related to touch or proximity daily. We act in various situations by relying on our ability to process information through sensing. We make our way through a crowded place while avoiding accidents; we interpret people's responses by

sensing their bodily tension in each physical contact we engage. However, as Parkinson suggests, it is not so straightforward to think of such skills as labour, as something that can be refined, not in the same way that one might think of improving physical fitness. Contemporary dance practices, however, offer numerous examples in which perceptual skills play an important role in setting communication between dancers. Think of those practices such as Contact Improvisation, in which skills related to how to work with bodily weight and via touch are essential to enable information exchange among practitioners. Or think of David Zambrano's *Passing Through*, in which proximity and spatial awareness are crucial elements for the dancers to take decisions in very dynamic situations.

### 3. Mutual attunement – tactical negotiations

In some dance practices, certain perceptual skills may be more central than others, such as those linked to giving and receiving weight in Contact Improvisation. As C.I. practitioners learn what entails giving and receiving weight, weight-sharing exercises may become more and more effortless. In that moment, C.I. partners may start to feel in tune, most likely this experience being perceived as a pleasant one. Weight-sharing exercises may be considered in this way one of the many modes of exercising attunement. Dancer Robert Turner (2010) states that the idea behind Contact Improvisation practice is to search for an experience of movement in contact with others that is “pleasurable, highly stimulating, elemental” (Paxton, 1993, p.64, as in Turner, 2010, p.123). Attunement exercises, such as weight-sharing, may turn out to be enjoyable experiences once we understand what is implied. A skill gap between practitioners may influence attuned work in a certain way though. More muscle tension than necessary on one side can make the body stiff and prevent smooth interaction. And the same applies to the opposite. In cases of interaction where compactness and strength are functional to create dynamic movement, too much relaxation may impede generating speed. We could then argue that the individual's ability to manage degrees of muscle tension within the relation is determinant in generating different types of interactions in contact. We could then begin to consider forms of exercising attunement as inevitably bound to some sort of negotiation skills as each partnering situation asks for a specific way of acting. Each partnering exercise establishes communication dynamics as specific and as different as we are as individuals. Differences in individual factors, subjective (skills, motivation etc.) or objective (weight, height etc.), play a key role in setting modes of corporeal communication. Each time we must put ourselves in a listening mode according to the person we are working with. In any

case, in seeking mutual attunement, both parties would have to put themselves out there by taking equal responsibility to the best of their abilities. Attuning in this way seems to imply a certain mindset of working horizontally. Sometimes, all it takes is one or the other to do too much or too little for this feeling to be compromised. And even when considering situations of similar technical abilities, attuning is still not a given. As said, conditions vary each time. The search is always on the move. Mutual attunement is hardly ever a given. And when we feel disconnected, new strategies may have to be implemented to keep the conversation going. In cases of dance practices that rely heavily on physical contact, such as Contact Improvisation (as well as many others), feedback as to whether we are working attuned to each other may be provided by how sensitively dancers work with the set of information exchanged via contact. Let us come back to the exercise of weight sharing. If we want to share weight, that is, two individuals leaning on each other off balance sharing their vertical axis, both will have to exert a similar pressure on each other's body to achieve stability. Too much or too little pressure will cause a shift. Of course, I may consciously decide, whenever I want, to exert more pressure than necessary. There is nothing impeding me to do that. I will be proposing in this way my intention to move on and create further opportunities for movement. I will be trying to communicate a new intention. In this very moment my partner sensitivity to capture such information, to sense my intention to move on, is decisive. According to how decisions are negotiated, new relations in movement will reveal. In several cases, interacting via contact can also result in situations of strong physical interdependence. If I find myself supporting the full weight of my partner in a lift, my decisions will be strongly influenced by that specific physical condition. If I want to avoid accidents, I will have to be listening to the possibilities that a certain physical situation enables. A too immediate movement could cause my partner to fall. I may have to make as sure as possible that my partner is ready to react. This does not mean that working attuned in dance must exclude any possibility of generating challenge or surprise. C.I. practitioners act sometimes very adrenaline driven. In C.I., dancers also train falling skills (such as the Aikido roll) to save themselves in case of the most unexpected. Unpredictability is an omnipresent factor within C.I. It is improvisation in relation after all. One can never fully predict what happens next. One can never fully predict how the other reacts. However, we can argue that dealing with more challenging decisions, such as creating surprise, may require a higher level of attuning skills and, if we want to keep working attuned, we may need to think collaboratively. In line with the collaborative attitude underlying attunement exercises is cultural theorist Gesa Ziemer's

study on the notion of complicity as a specific modality of acting together. In her article *Situational Worlds. Complicity as Model of Collaboration* (2011), the author articulates a discourse on the notion of complicity by referring to the performance *handundfuss*<sup>1</sup> (2006), a duo created by Swiss dance performer Anna Huber and percussionist Fritz Hauser. Ziemer states that “[...] complicity already begins when an individual form of expression is searched for and hence individual collective working structures established” (2011, p.243). The author considers accomplices as individuals who work in secrecy and choose each other based on a set of expertise that is functional to achieve a common goal. Although, as Ziemer suggests, the term complicity often carries with it a negative connotation - we can think of accomplices as individuals who come together to plan a crime - in her analysis we can identify how its principles can be well aligned with attuning behaviour within dance interactions. Referring to the ability to cope with unpredictable situations of an interactive working setting in dance, is Michel De Certeau's definition of “tactics” on which Ziemer sheds light. The term *Taktikè* denotes “the art of arranging and positioning (on a battlefield)” (2011, p. 240) and acting tactically seems to reveal a specific capacity to act in unpredictable (and potentially dangerous) situations: “a tactician takes the available powers, qualities and effects and organizes them quickly and according to the given situation” (2011, p. 240). Ziemer considers dancers to be skilled tacticians as they display high situational skills that enable them to generate potentials of acting according to what is available in that very moment. Tacticians (and dancers) are thus considered to be creative improvisers and skilled listeners.

Anna Huber's words in relation to *handundfuss* performance shed light, moreover, on another quality of attuned performance: "on stage we are linked by invisible threads. We hug before and after the performance, but on stage we hardly have any physical contact at all. Still, we know exactly what the other is doing" (Weber/Ziemer 2007, n.p., as in Ziemer, 2011, p.242). Huber's words reveal that sense of secrecy that makes attuned performances particularly intriguing. Intriguing because the mechanisms underlying communication between performers may be often elusive to an untrained eye. Huber and Hauser seem to be able to communicate in silence and at distance, feeling “linked by invisible threads”. True, Huber and Hauser's collaborative history play an important role in making this possible. On the other hand, we could also say that without their individual expertise on how to place themselves in relation to each other through their bodies, on how

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<sup>1</sup> Vimeo link to *handundfuss* (2006) full-length performance: <https://vimeo.com/283386653>

to generate each time the conditions for "invisible" communication to take place, such a sense of connection may not be possible. The case of *handundfuss*, an interaction performance between a dancer-percussionist and a percussionist-dancer, gives us a starting point to broaden the discourse on performing attuned to types of interactions that are not relying on physical contact. How do performers set up communication at physical distance? If not via contact, how could they possibly practice attunement in such situation?

#### 4. Invisible constraints

During a weight-sharing exercise, we saw how working attuned to the other can involve focusing on how individual decisions affect the relation. Each action causes a change in the physical relation, minimal or considerable, which attuned partners can convert in further possibilities for movement. Touch-based interactions put partners in the position of having to listen to the degrees of pressure exerted through physical contact so that they can keep acting in relation. In weight-sharing exercises, achieving stability will provide them with successful feedback. After all, the goal of such an exercise is precisely to achieve stability while remaining off balance. To do this, practitioners will need to act collaboratively; they will be communicating via contact, skin-to-skin. They will have to keep attuned to the ensemble of incoming and outgoing stimuli.

However, if we now imagine dancers improvising in silence and exclude the possibility of interacting via contact, on what would their attuned work be based? What aspects of moving in relation might they have to work on to work attuned to each other? Unlike physical situations of strong interdependence such as weight sharing sets, dancers interacting and improvising at distance have at disposal a wider range of possibilities in terms of how to act towards each other. They can work on proximity and distance as well as movement speed without affecting their interrelation as decisively as they would in weight-sharing conditions. We could argue therefore that a lower degree of physical interdependence may ask for the setting up of further strategies to trigger response. And response is necessary for the dancers to feedback attuned communication. If not in contact, what are the factors that put me and my partner in a position to communicate silently? How can we set up a bodily conversation at distance? The notion of enabling constraint, as defined by Erin Manning in *Relationescapes: Movement, Art, Philosophy* (2009), may set a relevant starting point to articulate a discourse in this direction. With such notion, Manning explains how dancing in relation to others may always ask for the

necessity to set a structured situation - a constraint - that is indispensable for putting the relationship in the foreground:

[...] In the relational movement I practice, which involves face-to-face walking, I use the structure of the walk as an enabling constraint. This constraint allows the movement to remain predictably connected to a face-to-face encounter. This makes clearly felt how the relation gives movement its force. Other forms of relational movement would have to design their own enabling constraints to foreground relation. A movement fully unstructured would likely not be capable of creating a sustained felt relation. (2009, p. 230)

Manning refers here to the practice of social Argentine tango, where face-to-face interaction takes place in physical contact as negotiation of weight shifts through walking. Like C.I., social Argentine tango is fully improvised. Tango dancers do not know what will happen next. However, the walk and physical contact remains for tango dancers a safe place. After all it is also what characterizes it as a dance practice. And shifting weight by remaining in contact represents the enabling constraint through which they work attuned. Walking in contact is what sets up the beginning of a communication between tango dancers. Skilful variabilities around the structure of walking can then unfold. Without the setting of such a constraint, a “sustained felt relation” between partners may not be created. Other constraints then may have to be implemented. We can argue therefore that setting enabling constraints implies the setting of a rule, the conditions, through which a specific manner of corporeal communication can then unfold, and attunement work can start. By setting a rule we are setting ourselves up in relation, ready to work together. Let us think again about C.I. The constraints suggested by C.I. allow practitioners to move onto common ground: moving in contact. In contact they will then begin to work attuned by implementing different strategies such as using leverages, giving and receiving weight, resisting or surrendering to tension etc. What comes out of this is unpredictable, but all unpredictability evolves from the shared understanding of what the practice is about. Constraints may be therefore understood in these cases as rules, as tasks, that are practice-specific and arbitrarily set up for the practitioners to explore and discover ways of moving in relation in its full potentials.

However, both tango and C.I. remain interaction practices that are based on physical contact. How might we now investigate further forms of exercising attunement at

distance? An example of interaction practice that does not set physical contact as a practice-specific constraint is Passing Through. On his website<sup>2</sup>, David Zambrano describes Passing Through workshops in this way:

[...] Zambrano asks the students to see the room full of pathways – infinite pathways passing through the walls, the floor, even the bodies. These pathways go in any direction and are filled with curves, large and small. Visible and invisible spirals are constantly passing through the students. Thus the “passing through” is created into a spontaneous composition. When the group becomes one mind, it can never get lost, there is never one person leading, everyone is following. The whole group is constantly traveling, weaving their bodies inside and out of their classmates and still always aware of the environment around them.

Looking at the practice of Passing Through<sup>3</sup>, we might be tempted to define it almost as an exercise in avoiding physical contact. Often practiced in large groups, Passing Through unfolds through a highly dynamic game of spacings that is activated by dancers in constant motion. The negative spaces available within the moving group offer each dancer as a possibility for movement, to move across such spaces so to eventually reconfigure further spatial situations. And such a mechanism generates continuous movement possibilities. It is highly generative. We could argue that spatial awareness in Passing through practice is one of its most central skills. And a shared understanding of how to work with space that the practice itself suggests is what allows dancers to work onto a common ground. It is what allows them to keep communicating, to influence each other. A shared conception of space (curved trajectories, spiralling paths) and the actual negotiation of space form the series of constraints that are specific to Passing Through. Each dancer is then ready to explore variability, free to decide how to engage with space, whether to move or stand still, whether to challenge proximity or play with distance etc. And because Passing Through is a highly dynamic exercise, being able to take quick decision is decisive to keep the work in relation attuned. Because of its dynamism, we may argue that collisions are very likely to happen. To avoid these situations, each dancer will have to act as a skilled tactician which is what makes Passing through a particularly adrenaline-driven practice as well as an enjoyable exercise. However, its fun does not lie obviously in

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<sup>2</sup> [http://www.davidzambrano.org/?page\\_id=276](http://www.davidzambrano.org/?page_id=276)

<sup>3</sup> I am referring to a public presentation of Passing Through performed on March 29, 2014, by PARTS students. This presentation was the result of an intensive workshop period on the principles of Passing Through held by David Zambrano, Nicholas Tiishang Aphane and Milan Herich. Here is a YouTube link to a video recording of the performance: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-QruxdbsCbM&t=943s>

colliding. Rather, fun in *Passing Through* lies precisely in the fact that dancers feel able to find ways not to collide; in other words, to acknowledge the constraints that the practice suggests and act accordingly and skilfully. *Passing Through*'s constraints bring participants together. What gives them the possibility to figure out how to act in relation and attuned. Constraints in these contexts may lead to creative places, to learning processes, confronting one's own abilities to attune to others. We may argue, to conclude, that practicing attunement in non-touch-based interactive settings may imply the establishing of a practice's own constraints as *Passing Through* well exemplifies.

## 5. Synchronous movement and attunement

We have seen how the quests for mutual attunement in interaction performance essentially place the dancer in front of the ability - and availability - to give and receive information and, most importantly, to negotiate them in motion. Such information exchange processes in dance are based on a sense-making that is filtered corporeally. In a sense, one could also define attunement practices as corporeal exercises that make interpersonal communication dynamics manifest. Similarly, Italian semiologist Ugo Volli states that "communication is first of all dance"<sup>4</sup> (2001, p.7, translated by the author), reflecting on the common ground that communicative processes and the experience of dance interactions may share. Volli's reflection draws on the work of anthropologist Edward T. Hall who, in *Beyond Culture* (1976), exposes interpersonal communication as a manifestation of synchronization processes relying on our abilities to discern rhythms. In the chapter "Rhythm and Body Movement", Hall argues that in every communicative exchange, humans show a tendency to "subtly" synchronize with each other without often even being fully aware of it. In this direction, Volli goes on to add that: "a word of one interlocutor corresponds to a micromovement of the other, a dynamic accent of a gesture is answered by a mirror gesture or at least a hint"<sup>5</sup> (p.7). In this way one might think that

"dance is not only an exhibition of the secret synchronization that governs our social behavior, but also a revelation of its modalities, contents, limits and obligations that make

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<sup>4</sup> "Comunicare è innanzitutto danzare assieme".

<sup>5</sup> "A una parola di un interlocutore corrisponde un micromovimento dell'altro, a un accento dinamico di un gesto risponde un gesto speculare o almeno un accenno".

it unique in time. A mirror or microscope that magnifies imperceptible details and makes them visible and spectacular."<sup>6</sup> (Volli, 2001)

Following Volli and Hall's reflections, that is, understanding communication as a hidden act of synchronization between interacting agents, offers an opportunity to reflect further on the possible relationship between synchronization and attunement and how this relation applies to dance. Performing "in sync" and "in tune" can both suggest a feeling of being acting aligned. However, while both expressions may be potentially interchangeable, synchronisation seems to shift our attention to a distinctive aspect of interaction performance. We could say that the term synchronization points at a mode of moving in relation that is specifically based on time alignment. As the *Online Etymology Dictionary* suggests, the adjective synchronous refers to "existing or happening at the same time", from the late Latin *synchronus* "simultaneous" or the Greek *synkhrōnos* "happening at the same time", *syn-* "together" + *khronos* "time" (Harper, n.d.). When one thinks of dance and synchronous movement, the most immediate expression that may come to mind is unison, the practice in which dancers perform movements that appear identical and synchronized in time. Often underlying this performance is a predetermined choreographic structure, the lack of which may make unison performance difficult. In fact, in improvisation settings, it is unlikely to achieve the same formal accuracy that makes unison performance so special, particularly when improvising more dynamically. However, we can consider unison dance a complex exercise of attunement due to the high degree of formal accuracy and timing synchronisation it requires. In this sense, practicing unison can be considered an attunement exercise, insofar a group works collaboratively to find a common breath to act as one performing body. On the other hand, limiting our understanding of synchronous movement to the exercise of unison may prove reductive. This is because synchronization between movements performed by interacting dancers may also emerge through non-identical movements. As already mentioned, in fact, moving in synchrony implies a mode of relating through movement that is more of temporal than formal nature. Such a reflection encourages the exploration of other forms of synchronous movement and, more specifically, raises the question about whether a certain attention to

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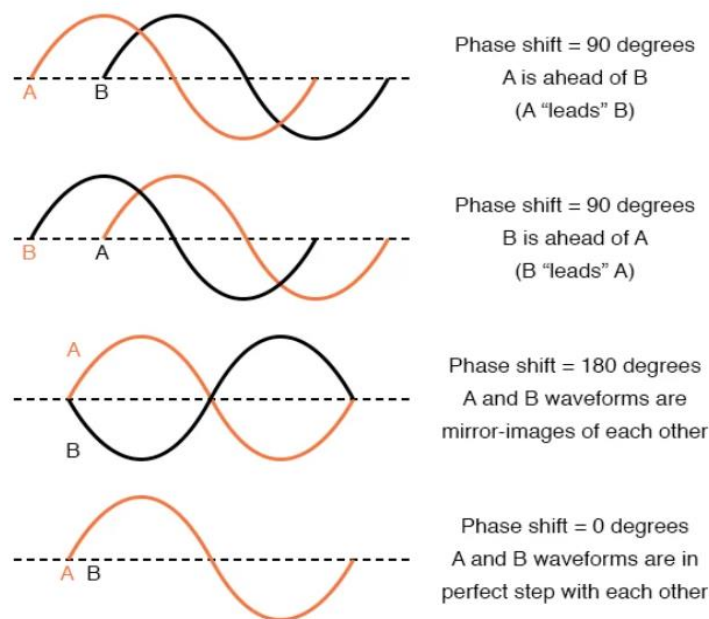
<sup>6</sup> "La danza non è solo la realizzazione esplicita della sincronizzazione segreta che regola il nostro comportamento sociale, è anche la rivelazione delle sue modalità, dei contenuti, dei limiti e degli obblighi che la rendono unica. Uno specchio o un microscopio che ingrandisce i dettagli impercettibile e li rende visibili e spettacolari".

timing relationships in interaction performance can suggest modes of exercising mutual attunement.

## 6. Entrainment perspective

Particularly relevant to broadening our understanding of synchronous movement in dance are the studies conducted within a rich field of theoretical analysis called entrainment theory. Entrainment theory studies processes "by which independent rhythmical systems interact with each other" (Clayton, 2012) and achieve synchronisation in an ideal sense or, in more complex cases, phase-related rhythmic coordination (Waterhouse, 2014). The origin of the term entrainment can be traced back to an experiment conducted in the 17th century by the Dutch physicist Christiaan Huygens. While lying ill during a long journey at sea, Huygens observed how two pendulums ticking out of sync and suspended on a common support achieved perfect synchronisation through time, even after their oscillatory motion had been disturbed (see Strogatz and Stewart, 1993). The explanation for this phenomenon lies in the fact that the oscillatory motion of each pendulum produces a mechanical force that, transposed through the support, causes influence. Interesting to notice is that, if the two pendulum clocks had been separated, no change in their oscillatory behaviours would have occurred. We could argue therefore that the support on which the clocks were hanging served as an enabling constraint in the same way such notion is applicable in interaction performance. Without setting the clocks on a common support, communication and response would not have taken place. The two pendulum clocks would have kept ticking out of sync. Through the support however, the two objects are put in the condition to relate to one another and therefore cause response. And response is an important parameter for our discussion on exercising attunement because it is feedback of an ongoing communication. Proof of entrainment is given in Huygens experiment by the fact that two rhythmic behaviours achieved perfect sync. Nevertheless, entrainment theory shows how stabilization between two coupled rhythmic systems may manifest in diversified forms. Let us start by looking at Clayton's proposed definition of rhythmic systems (2012). For Clayton rhythmic systems can be considered as oscillatory activities that, usually continuous in nature, may exhibit a periodic or quasi-periodic character (p. 49), i.e. a greater or lesser regularity and predictability in terms of occurrences. Clayton continues by explaining how, to assess entrainment between coupled rhythmic systems, one must first establish a reference point through which a relative phase shift can be observed. Studying entrainment entails therefore the assessment of different

types of relations, not only "in the more common sense of phase and period alignment" (p. 49), i.e. synchronisation in the ideal sense (unison dance or Huygen's clocks), but in other instances as well. In musical performance, for instance, Clayton suggests taking the action of hitting the drumhead as a focal point from which phase shifts of a particular coupling can be studied (e.g. with another musical gesture performed by another performer). From here, various phase shifts can be assessed (see Fig.1): if the two reference points taken into exam overlap perfectly in time, they will be said to be *in phase* (phase shift 0 degrees), if they occur exactly halfway from each other, *anti-phase* (phase shift 180 degrees), or, in other cases, their phase relationship may stabilize somewhere in between (i.e. phase shift 90 degrees). In musical performance Clayton explains in fact how "different rhythms can be in sync not only in unison, but also in hierarchical or polyrhythmic relationships" (p. 51), highlighting how musical entrainment asks for the consideration of a wider range of phase shifts, broadening in this way the understanding of entrainment as performance of ideal synchronization.



Examples of phase shifts.

Figure 1

Retrieved from <https://www.allaboutcircuits.com/textbook/alternating-current/chpt-1/ac-phase/>

Following Clayton's reflections, we may not only glimpse how conditions underlying entrainment phenomena may well align to attunement behaviour in dance interactions (setting up a relationship, generating response through communication), but also encourages to ask further how entrainment may translate more specifically in dance, as interplay of rhythmic behaviours.

If we would like to transpose characteristics of entrainment into dance practice, it may be useful to consider another definition of entrainment, as proposed by Jessica Phillips-Silver et al. (2010, September). The authors find the essence of entrainment in "spatiotemporal coordination in response to external rhythmic stimuli" (2010, p. 3), explaining how this phenomenon is essentially based on our ability as organisms to 1) detect, 2) produce and 3) live integrate rhythmic information through our sensorimotor systems. These three building blocks constitute what the authors call the *entrainable system*, a model that seems to lead us back to the communicative behaviour underlying attuned interactions as discussed so far. Moreover Phillips-Silver et al.'s definition sheds light on the spatiotemporal and motor dimension of entrainment, an aspect that may suggest entrainment processes as interactions between movement behaviours. The further opportunity that entrainment descriptions give is to emphasize information exchange that is of rhythmic nature, thus leading us to ask how such process may apply to dance practice. In this direction, it is important to note how both Clayton (2012) and Phillips-Silver et al. (2010) mention the possibility of considering different sources of rhythmic information. This is particularly relevant because a more intuitive link between entrainment and dancing might end up confining us to the example of dancing to music beat. This translation of entrainment, however, may not accommodate the wide range of rhythmic interactions that dance practice enacts. As mentioned at the beginning of this text, not all dance performances are accompanied by music. Certainly, the ability to coordinate movement to a perceived musical beat remains evidence of entrainment (also called *beat entrainment*). Two dancers coordinating movement to the beat will eventually move in sync and probably attuned. In this case, however, they would be attuning to each other through the musical element. They may enter conversation more with the music than with the other. Thus, to best grasp the potentials of applying entrainment to dance practice, it might be beneficial to think of rhythmic interactions in dance as exchange of rhythmic stimuli of varied nature. In this direction, Phillips-Silver et al. (2010) offer an example of visual rhythmic information by drawing from animal behaviour: a predatory bird species with a

highly developed visual system for detecting prey might be more attuned to visual rhythmic inputs (p. 6-7). In this way, the authors emphasize once more how rhythmic information can be transposed differently than acoustically. Such a reflection sets an important starting point for continuing to explore how entrainment behaviour emerges in dance in more complex cases, not only as dancer-to-beat interaction but more specifically as a form of interpersonal communication.

## 7. William Forsythe: *Duo* and *N.N.N.N.*

### 7.1. *Duo* (1996 – 2016) – entrainment as a rehearsed practice

A highly significant example of how entrainment can be studied in the context of dance is offered by Elizabeth Waterhouse in *Doing Duo - a case study of entrainment in William Forsythe's choreography "Duo"* (2014). Waterhouse describes how the term entrainment is not "native to ballet and contemporary dance contexts" (p. 5), proposing instead *connection* as a more recurrent term in rehearsal contexts of Forsythe's company. Waterhouse therefore offers us a link between the terms attunement, connection and entrainment, intuiting how these may commonly refer to that sense of felt-relationship as discussed so far. In her article, Waterhouse asks not only how entrainment theory can be applicable to a phenomenon as complex as dance, but more importantly she exposes, through the analysis of *Duo*, how entrainment can be considered as a rehearsed practice. *Duo* is a roughly 10-minute choreography created by William Forsythe in 1996 for a cast of two dancers. The work was revisited until 2016 and performed in various versions by casts that included both male and female performers. The cases Waterhouse refers to are versions of *Duo* rehearsed and presented between 2012 and 2014, featuring performers Brigel Gjoka and Riley Watts. What makes *Duo* a particularly interesting case studies of entrainment is that it is performed in almost absolute silence and do not involve any physical contact. How can the two dancers perform entrained - or attuned - in these conditions? If not interacting via contact or through the support of a music pulse, how would the dancers be able to act in relation? By studying entrainment in *Duo* - a performance in almost absolute silence - Waterhouse explains that it is necessary to refine "[...] the perspective of dance as a response to an external musical signal [as it is] suspected that multimodal cues and feedback factor strongly in dance entrainment [...]" (p. 5). In fact, the interactions performed in *Duo* involve various forms of cueing, mainly visual and acoustic. At several moments of the choreography, we can hear different sounds, actively produced by the dancers either through breathing or through movement

such as body percussion, stepping, slapping etc. Some of these elements are choreographically set and, in some moments, they serve the dancers to communicate change, initiation rather than stopping moments. Interaction between the performers over the course of the choreographic structure develops in four different modes, which Waterhouse understands as "varieties of entrainment framed by choreography" (p. 7): 1) unison (identical movement performed at the same time); 2) complementary / counterpoint (different movement performed at the same time); 3) turn-taking (one performer pauses while the other moves); 4) breaks (both performers collectively pause). In this way *Duo* shows how entrainment can manifest in dance not only as ideal synchronization of movement but also through interacting modes that do not involve neither perfectly synchronous nor identical movement. Waterhouse emphasizes, though, how the element of timing relations remains central, as it is in entrainment processes after all. The way timing is negotiated within very different moments of choreography is central for the dancers to keep in connection. Although, because *Duo* is a set choreography, one might think that the dancers can stop together because the choreography sets to do so; that they are able to coordinate shifts between moments of unison and counterpoint because the material dictates it. Thinking in this way, however, would also mean saying that performing unison would automatically result in performing attuned; that executing predetermined material would be enough for the performers to work attuned. Perfectly executing a set material does not necessarily imply attuning to what the others do though. Set material is certainly serving dancers as an enabling constraint. It puts the group in a position to move onto common ground. However, how dancers act within it remains a matter of negotiation skills as their performance may vary each time. It only takes one day to feel more tired for the entire performance to be affected and for each performer to have to reorganize accordingly. In fact, although choreographically set, *Duo* exemplifies very well how the elements of timing must be continually negotiated, Waterhouse defining *Duo* as a sublime performance of "elastic temporal integrity" (p. 8). The author continues by saying that, to ensure the quality of the performance, more important than achieving perfect synchronization is how the dancers "[...] choose to play or engage time, using dynamic musical strategies based on their collaborative duet relationship" (p. 8). Particularly interesting is the setting into play of what Waterhouse calls "breath song". The way dancers breathe in movement seems to be useful to construct an internal timekeeper, on which timing variations can then occur according to what is happening in the very moment. Breath sounds, moreover, are considered by Riley Watts as "[...] a

communicative extension of somatic motion, ideally perceived as relating directly from actions seen to actions heard" (p. 10). It seems that what Watts is referring to is the possibility of perceiving an acoustic rendering of movements through hearing the breath sounds associated to them. Inversely, one could also say that breathing, and thus the sounds produced from breathing, may be affected by how force is exerted in movement. In this sense, it is interesting to note how Waterhouse proposes an understanding of rhythm in *Duo* as a succession of "[...] energetic turning points in the dancers' motion" (p. 6). Following this description, we might intuit how acting rhythmically may be tied consequently to the dancers' ability to modulate energy or force in movement, whose breathing sounds are feedback. If we take this for valid, dwelling on the relationship between breath and modulation of force in movement could provide a starting point for understanding how rhythm can be sensed as corporeal. In defining rhythm, Waterhouse in fact also refers to Laban's description of it, intended as "alternation of opposite happenings" or "organized tension and relaxation, each with its own effort" (Hodgson, 2001 as in Waterhouse, 2014, p. 5). As a silent performance, *Duo* constitutes an interesting case of rhythmic interaction skilfully performed through dancing. It exemplifies how dance rhythms can emerge from the body, further emphasizing its role in the communicative acts in between the two performers. In fact, one can argue that it is precisely the dancers' ability to create and perceive rhythmic alternations (between accelerations, suspensions, arrests etc.) that makes their communication so attuned. *Duo* offers us the opportunity to discuss attuned interactions as a musical game, that is made possible by dancers' mastery to engage corporeally with, adapting to and pushing each other's timing.

## 7.2. *N.N.N.N.*<sup>7</sup> (2002) - *Hear dance and see music*<sup>8</sup>

A further fascinating case of musical interaction is another work by Forsythe: *N.N.N.N.* This is a performance lasting about 17 minutes, originally created for a cast of four male dancers from the Frankfurt Ballet. It was first presented in 2002 at the Frankfurt Opera House and reprised in slightly different versions by other international dance companies such as the Sydney Dance Company, Ballet de l' Opéra de Lyon and NDT 1,

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<sup>7</sup> Full-length video recording of *N.N.N.N.* at *Ramallah Dance Festival* (West Bank), Palestine: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=45RQLJd8hY&t=351s>. Cast: Cyril Baldy, Amancio González, Tilman O'Donnell and Ander Zabala.

<sup>8</sup> *Hear dance and see music: Unlocking the nuances of William Forsythe's 'N.N.N.N.'*, is the title of an interview with Cyril Baldy held in 2020 by Elizabeth Ashley, published on *Dance Informa Australian Edition*. <https://dancemagazine.com.au/2020/03/hear-dance-and-see-music-unlocking-the-nuances-of-william-forsythes-%E2%80%8Bn-n-n-n/>

among others. The piece was originally part of a triple bill entitled *William Forsythe's Chamber Works* containing two other works, *The The* and *The Vile Parody of Address*. As *Duo*, *N.N.N.N.* presents a similar challenge: it is considered "absolutely musical" (Ashley, 2020) despite being performed in almost total silence. Cyril Baldy (one of the original cast members) recounts that the process of creating the work began from two very simple principles: "the swing of an arm and the drop of a limb" (Ashley, 2020). From these two motor principles, swing and drop, the entire choreography was extrapolated. Moreover, the four dancers navigate the choreographic material - predetermined - interacting throughout the performance without any musical support other than the barely perceptible sound fills-in composed by Thom Wilhelm. Nonetheless, Baldy considers *N.N.N.N.* as "absolutely musical", stating that Forsythe himself "[...] speaks of the four dancers behaving like a string quartet" (Ashley, 2020). *Hear dance and see music* is not only the title Elisabeth Ashley chose for the publication of her interview with Baldy, but also an expression that captures very well *N.N.N.N.*'s experience as a spectator. The sounds produced by the artists through slapping, body percussion, breathing and voice generate audible rhythmic patterns that can invite the viewer to experience the performance as a musical composition. As Ashley's title suggests, however, we do not just hear dance and thus the concrete sounds that result from movement. We are tempted to perceive the movement as music itself. Baldy, in fact, defines *N.N.N.N.* as "absolutely musical in a physical manner" (Ashley, 2020). For him, their attempt was to "compose music, moreso than choreography" (Ashley, 2020). The choreographic structure of *N.N.N.N.* involves several physical situations very similar to *Duo*: very brief moments of unison, physical contact, and moments of counterpoint in which the dancers act independently of each other, creating a varied rhythmic landscape. The quartet sometimes becomes solo, trio or duo. Landmark of this work is its dynamism and the way the dancers collectively achieve "photographic stills" of impeccable precision. A rather recurring compositional element is that of chaining. An action by one performer causes the action of the other, thus creating a chain effect that, when performed dynamically, dares the audience's attention. The eye is taken by surprise by such dynamism. Chaining is clearly visible in the opening sequence that returns like a refrain throughout the choreographic structure, where the four dancers perform a complex sequence in contact of arm movements through swinging and dropping. Such a concatenation of motor events appears highly ordered as it is executed with extreme precision. It makes us think of orchestration. This effect could not be achieved other than through their refined ability to know when an action begins and when it ends. The

succession of events in this way is easily discernible, as if it were a clearly punctuated and phrased speech, well balanced in between silencing and acting. It could be said that it is precisely the choreographic silences that make the work particularly intriguing. As *Duo*, *N.N.N.N.* is inherently collaborative when it comes to timing. Its performance requires the dancers to collectively arrest in a highly precise manner as well as to seize the momentum for a lift or to begin movement together. *N.N.N.N.* seems emphasizing once more how rhythmic skills are critical to ensure attuned communication between performers as well as to keep the audience alert. Moreover, the founding principles of the choreography, drop and swing, seem to point us back to Waterhouse's understanding of rhythm, as sequence of energetic turning points. Both qualities, as performed in the choreographic work, are examples of how releasing weight to gravitational force causes an energetic shift, from holding to release, causing accelerations that are functional for the group to initiate movement together. This aspect of the work adds therefore additional movement parameters to understand musicality in dance. As highly musical works, both *Duo* and *N.N.N.N.* invite thinking about rhythmic and phrasing skills as central to producing ordered communication of events. And implied in the performers' musical skill is their ability to modulate force in movement, to navigate between silence and action, a practice that I am particularly interested in exploring further within an improvisational framework.

## 8. Embodying musicality – a first person perspective

*N.N.N.N.* and *Duo* offer an opportunity to talk about movement interactions as musical experiences. Because they are performed in a very quiet acoustic environment, both of Forsythe's works seem to foreground the musicality of movement while at the same time emphasizing how the musical accompaniment can be a disruptive element to its own experience. This may be due to the fact that the musical accompaniment often tends to impose itself, eventually influencing the way of acting. Through its qualities, whether it is the mood or its rhythms, music can impose itself as a constraint on performance. Thus, it can be said that movement on music is not completely free to find its own musical nature. This is not to judge performances accompanied by music in any way or to say that the musicality of movement cannot be investigated during performance on music. This is particularly well exemplified, for example, by the way hip-hop dancers improvise over the musical beat. Hip-hop dancers talk about training musicality in terms of choosing how to show the music in movement, how to reconstruct it through their dance. In this case, however, we would be looking for a notion of musicality that depends on the music-dancer

connection. We might end up evaluating musicality based on how the dancer is attuned to the musical elements and possibly how the music can be transposed visually through movement. Dancing to music can certainly be an exercise of attunement in that the musical score establishes a constraint that allows dancers to decide how to act in attunement with it. However, if we are examining the potential of the body's musicality and how it can affect interactions between dancers, it may be useful to act in its absence.

By placing dancers to interact through the choreographic score in silence, Forsythe in fact seems to offer potentials of understanding attunement practice in dance as relying on musical skills to be intended "in a physical manner" (as Baldy suggests). Forsythe seems to offer a starting point for thinking of non-touch-based interaction as a collaborative act of creating music together, in which each performer acts as moving spatiotemporal rhythmic scores to the other. It is therefore no accident that Forsythe chose almost silence for staging these works. Silence is a condition that Salomé Voegelin considers as the "beginning of listening" (2010, p. 83 as in Ferris, 2020). Performing in silence is a qualitatively different experience than dancing to music. At times performing in silence can be almost disorienting. Thoughts crowd in and one can feel particularly exposed. On the other hand, as Salomé Voegelin keeps suggesting, when there is nothing to hear "so much starts to sound" as also John Cage has taught us in *4'33'*. It is therefore based on silence and its "listening" that I intend to investigate musicality as an improvisation practice and how it applies to non-touch-based improvised interaction. I start from Laban's understanding of embodied rhythm, as "alternation of opposite happenings" (Waterhouse, 2014), to observe the vocabulary that may unfold.

### 8.1. Exploring dynamics

Although the term dynamics is quite recurrent and used in dance contexts, understanding its meaning is not so immediate. The etymology of the term dynamics suggests its derivation from the Greek word *dynamis*, referring to "force" or "power." Similarly, in physics, *Encyclopedia Britannica* defines dynamics as that field of study that deals with "the movement of material objects in relation to the physical factors that influence them including force, mass, momentum and energy" (2022, September 20). Ben Thomas and McMains (2013) suggest how the term dynamics in the field of music refers "almost exclusively to changes in volume" (p.203) in acoustic terms. A certain force applied to playing in fact, may determine a higher or lower volume of sound produced. In

dance, Laban may represent main reference to grasp potentials of how this term can be defined. In Vera Maletic's *Body-Space-Expression* (1987), the author traces the origins of the concepts of dynamics, effort and *Eukinetics* by looking at the chronology of some of Laban's work and noting how these concepts have converged or changed over time. While the term dynamics does not seem to be able to be uniquely and continually defined, related notions to it are rhythm and phrasing. As underlying both the elements of rhythm and phrasing is the concept of change and alternation, one might begin to understand, how the notion of tension and relaxation may be central to understand the unfolding of dynamic qualities. For Laban, in fact, it is precisely such principles that regulate the emergence of rhythm, understood not simply as a division of emphasis through time but rather as nuances of forces generated through alternation between two polarities, tension and relaxation (Laban, 1920 as in Maletic, 1987, p. 160)

Laban's reflections would require a more in-depth study. On the other hand, Maletic's work already suggests to me some important parameters to begin investigating physically the notion of dynamics and its possible relation to musicality. Particularly significant is also Damsholt (1999) reflections about the interrelation between music and movement, explaining how the "the link between sound and force is a very basic physical experience" (p. 109) and that music "reminds us of the physical gestures of our bodies" (p. 108). As all mentioned descriptions seem revolving around the notion of force, I propose to explore dynamics as exertion of force to movement.

### *Dynamic qualities*

Taking the two principles of tension and relaxation focus, I find myself working with the sensation of body weight in relation to gravity. Total body relaxation is a condition that would not allow me to move. Gravity would bound me to the floor. Standing itself requires a certain amount of muscle tension to maintain that position. The two concepts of tension and relaxation therefore cannot be taken into practice as extreme concepts. More interesting might be in fact to experiment with the nuances in between resistance and surrendering. One might then more correctly speak of working on different gradations of tensions – or resisting gravity. I believe that such sensation is already present in one of our most basic biological functions, namely, the respiratory movement. The alternation of inflating and deflating may be seen as a modulation of degrees of tensions.

While exploring dynamics I intend to pay attention to whether and how my breath is affected and feedback movement.

### Swing

While working on the quality of the swing for example, I notice a certain behaviour at the respiratory level. Swing is a typically oscillatory movement. The principles inherent in the swing are fall and suspension. While generating suspension, I notice how I intuitively breathe in, as if inflating would function better in preparation to a fall – to the exhalation. A similar movement may be the typical preparatory movement of a conductor starting the orchestra. Once suspension is generated, I am ready to let myself fall, surrendering to the force of gravity, relaxing tension and causing acceleration. To repeat a swing movement, however, I observe how reactivation is required for a new suspension to be generated – for the curving motion to complete. In the absence of such reactivation, relaxation would result in a drop. Thus, if we were to trace the beginning and end of a swing movement, we could define the two suspensions activities as reference points. I observe how repetition of swing motions can be a particularly helpful exercise to practice suspension.

### *Rebound*

I experience rebound as characterized by a sudden acceleration after a hit. Hitting does not mean hitting a concrete surface. The quality of rebound may in fact require the setting of an imaginary surfaces. I observe how rebound can come from a fall, but not necessarily. Rebound as well as swing can be practiced in other spatial configurations, tracing horizontal or diagonal trajectories for instance. Important to create rebound remains for me the establishment of a reference point on which the movement can "bounce back". When executed vertically, I observe how rebound can be well combined with a swing movement. The ending suspension of a swing can be followed by a vertical fall and therefore rebound. This is producing a rhythmic succession. That's because swing and rebound differ from each other in terms of force modulation. I observe rebound as producing sudden acceleration after hitting, both in terms of direction and of energy conversion. Swing instead, does not include a sudden acceleration but rather a more gradual one. In rebounding with a certain force, I notice how the sudden acceleration following the vertical fall affects my breathing. When I hit, I exhale abruptly. I sense this

exhalation as functional to produce speed after bouncing – to reproduce the effect of bouncing on imaginary surfaces. I sense that such a sudden exhalation is feedbacking a certain mode of energy conversion that is specific to the quality of rebound.

### Impact

I experience impact as a dynamic quality that is helpful to exercise sudden arrest. A typical example of impact quality is visible in N.N.N.N. whenever the dancers reach impeccable stills. While practicing impact, movement must freeze suddenly, as so it seems to do my breathing. I feel that main skill inherent in impact dynamic quality is sharpness. In arresting movement suddenly, some sort of echo or movement reverb seems to occur frequently. To produce impact, I think of charging energy to release it at the moment of impact. When I impact, I exhale abruptly. Such abruptness reminds me of the hitting of rebound quality. Regardless the degree of force applied to create impact, I sense that all my focus goes to how I manage to stop movement with precision, with no reverb. Differently than rebound and swinging qualities, impact can be considered in fact, as the quality of reaching abrupt silence.

### *Continuous*

As the term itself suggests, I take continuous as an exercise of no energy conversion. While I practice continuous, I am trying to produce no change in terms of acceleration or deceleration. This is almost impossible. All my weight shifts produce accentuations. During continuous movement I sense my breathing becoming shallow and this might depend on the high level of concentration it takes as well as a too high degree of tension in my full body. I try therefore to release tension where I feel is not needed. While doing that I feel like I am draining tension down to the floor. Moving continuously is a skilful task, somewhat unnatural. It requires high body control for no accentuation to occur. I observe how I often starts to practice continuous in a rather slow pace, but it does not have to be like that. Practicing continuous slowly may turn out being a meditative exercise. Increasing the pace though makes this exercise somehow easier and lighter. At more sustained pace the sensation of floating tends to emerge.

## 8.2. Exploring composition

### *Isolation: silence and motion*

I consider the practice of isolation as an exercise aimed at sharpening awareness of what I move and what I do not move. Attempts to propose techniques of isolation in the past can be traced back to Eurythmics method, a teaching system conceived by Émile Jaques-Dalcroze (1865-1950) that aimed to educate students' sensitivity to rhythm and music through bodily exercises. Among the many exercises proposed is that of transposing the different rhythms perceived in music into coordinated movements of different body parts. Such practice represents a complex exercise in terms of coordination. Although performed to musical accompaniment, it could be argued that such an exercise can be functional in producing clarity in movement: what moves and how. I therefore propose isolation as an exercise aimed at producing clarity, aimed at perceiving the amount of information I offer during movement. I begin to practice isolation gradually, thinking of producing motor events that can be perceived as single units. During practice, I realize how isolation sometimes involves some counter movement because isolation happens. This is because, due to the mechanical and anatomical limitations of my body, isolation of some body parts is not completely possible without involving others. However, this does not prevent me from continuing to perceive such motor events as single units. As I continue to practice isolated movements, I realize the possibility of isolation at both the micro and macro levels. I perceive full upper body rotation as isolation in the same way that I perceive it during finger movement. In practicing isolation of different parts of the body, I become aware of the pauses I take between isolations. This element suggests to me additional ways of composing through isolated movement.

### *Chaining: practicing shifting attention*

If isolation is understanding movement in terms of units, I should be able to place such units in a compositional chain. Thus, chaining is a compositional practice that refers to how I can sequence isolated movements. For the practice of chaining, it is important to decide when a movement begins and ends. I observe how chaining can be accomplished through pause or crossfading. In the second case, the end of the previous movement overlaps with the beginning of the next. Chaining through crossfading isolated movements results in an almost continuous flow of movement by still being able to keep focused on the clarity that isolation task sets. I perceive how my internal focus continuously shifts

within the architecture of the body. For example, I try to chain a movement of the head with one of the lower limbs. Because of the distance between the two body parts, it seems to me that I produce a shifting effect. As if my internal gaze is moving between one body part and the other. I begin to concatenate the units by implementing dynamic qualities previously explored. I observe how much actions overlap, how much information I set into motion. I realize, for example, that every time I produce an impact, a pause is generated. Silence is produced. I then begin to experiment with ways to create continuity and arrest within concatenation. As I compose, I realize how breathing feedback possibilities of phrasing. I ask myself whether breathing is affected by movement or movement by breathing.

*The other is my score*

After practicing the above exercises together with a colleague, we began to ask how musicality, intended as orderly gradation of forces in movement, may factor in exercising mutual attunement in a non-touch-based improvised interaction. To begin with, we established the roles of leader and follower to provide clarity to the interaction exercise, although it has been noted that these roles become increasingly blurred during practice. Our interaction would take place through improvisation based on principles drawn from the previously explored exercises. As a constraint, we established that the follower would attempt to synchronize movements with those of the leader, leaving open how to do it. During practice, synchronization appeared as temporal matching of varied forms: 1) pausing together; 2) coordinating accelerations after suspensions; 4) slowing down; 3) resuming movement after pausing. In between such moments, complementary movement became necessary to keep generating new potentials of getting in sync again. Since the exercise did not involve any formally predetermined choreographic material, some tendency to mirror each other's movements was observed. However, in the cases of sudden accelerations, mirroring was most likely not to occur. A predominant term that came out while focusing on synchronization was "readability". By readability we seemed to agree on a certain ability to make ourselves predictable in motion. Predicting accelerations for instance played a crucial role in coordinating action together. Particularly useful in this direction was the element of suspension. Creating suspension seemed to be functional in generating a certain predictability of what happens next. As seen while discussing suspension in swing motions, a similarly predictable movement is that of the conductor

initiating the orchestra. To signal a start, the conductors create a suspension with both arms preparing the musicians to begin playing coordinated. In this case suspension is the up before the down. It is the inhaling before the exhaling. Suspension can be seen as the moment of inhalation before exhalation. It feels somewhat counterintuitive to exhale while suspending. Practicing suspension may mean basically practicing preparation to movement. It is the breath that prepares another movement. It is the “and..” before the next phrase. Certainly, I could decide at any time to interrupt suspension abruptly. In this way I would be deciding to take my colleague by surprise. I would be trying to make myself less predictable. This is of course possible. It generates adrenaline and expectation. It awakens alertness in the partners. I would be trying to challenge my colleague in the same way Forsythe’s dancers in *Duo* talk about challenging each other by pushing timing. In addition to accelerations and pauses, another aspect that seemed to be central to generate feedback of mutual attunement was a certain ability to coordinate response at a directional level. In coordinating an acceleration, for instance, we realized how we often took the same direction as the other in space. Only few times, we happened to take separate directions. Such a pattern occurred both in whole-body displacements and not. During interaction on spot, there happened to be an imitation of trajectories traced by movements. For example, between my head and my partner’s arm: the trajectory accomplished by one movement was imitated in the instant by the other motion. This possibility of relating was possible whenever trajectories appeared clear to us. In this way, we could say that practicing isolation may played a part. Practicing isolation in fact, points our attention at the amount of information set into motion. In this case the motto “less is more” may prove useful in generating a clear communicative act. It is as if while practicing isolated movement we are practicing articulating a speech. At the macro level, we practice pronunciation of entire words, at micro, syllables or even phonemes. And such communicative acts are expressed in space, time and with force as they are essentially motor events. The exercise of interaction here described may therefore result in the acknowledgement of musical skills as abilities to articulate ordered events of spatiotemporal nature. Practicing degrees of tensions applied to movement helped us to generate diversified nuances of phrasing, combining suspensions, accelerations, and arrest. An increased sense of mutual attunement moreover, resulted from the ability to make oneself readable, meaning to to act predictably so that movement can be more easily anticipated by the other. On the other hand, abrupt changes at times were functional to generate alertness and to awaken response. Moreover, the musical strategies here implemented, shed lights on how attuned work may rely in the

ability to keep listening to moments of change, to balance action and rest, to modulate tension and relaxation. As a famous quote by Miles David says about music: “it’s not the notes you play; it’s the notes you don’t play” (2019)<sup>9</sup>.

## 9. Conclusion

In this text, I was interested in exploring what lies behind that sense of mutual attunement that is sometimes generated when we perform together. Is feeling in tune purely spontaneous emergence of a sensation or can attuning be something practiced in dance? We have seen how conditions of interaction performance are subject to constant change, dependent on both subjective and objective factors. This continuous variability brings into play what Ziemer calls “situational skills”, tactical abilities to capture potentials according to a given condition. Interaction performance requires deployment of intercommunicative strategies that dancers transpose into bodily acts, into movement practice, to navigate the most diverse of physical conditions. Each physical conditions require specific skills, as we have seen by outlining differences between touch- and non-touch-based interactions. Perceptions related to touch, the use of space as well as abilities in elaborating rhythmic behaviour can be considered as some of the qualities enabling attuned communication while performing with others. We could argue therefore that interactive working settings may provide a beneficial framework on which to build listening skills, enabling the dancers to act according to possibilities and impossibilities that each relation affords. I propose to call this working mode “performing listening” referring to that set of attentional qualities that each interactive situation brings out. In this sense, it may be not too far off to consider attunement practices as valuable resources for reflecting on dynamics that exceed the experience of dancing. In this regard, the metaphor used by American philosopher John Dewey is quite illuminating. Reflecting on artistic forms and on their primary value as human experiences, the author states: “[m]ountain peaks do not float unsupported, they do not even just rest on the earth. They are the earth in one of its manifest operations” (1934/2005, p. 2). In this passage, Dewey emphasizes, with critical tone, the need to re-establish a connection between that ensemble of refined experiences that are usually called artistic and those of everyday life, a relation that has become weaker and weaker for him due to market-related dynamics and the segregation of

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<sup>9</sup> See NY Times article *How the Silence Makes the Music A brief, incomplete, very quiet guide to the history of music’s negative spaces*: <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/10/02/arts/music/silence-classical-music.html>

artworks in elitist spaces. Practices such as Contact Improvisation, Passing Through, as well as Forsythe's works, however, seem to propose a type of work in line with Dewey's mission. As attunement practices, we may say that they propose artistic work as a horizontal practice. They could be said to facilitate "areas of experience" (Parkinson, 2009) in which communication can be rehearsed and enacted in the form of dance. In reference to the social value that is embedded in such artistic practices and for the opportunity they provide to set people in relation, I would like to conclude my reflection by quoting a rather poetic passage by William Forsythe, as captured during one of the interviews concerning one of his most recent works, *A Quiet Evening of Dance*: "[...] time is expressed through sharing a kind of lived rhythm. I think that this is what people crave: sharing time together" (The Shed, 2019, October 21, 2:05) <sup>10</sup>.

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<sup>10</sup>See Forsythe's video interview about *A Quiet Evening of Dance*, first performed at Sadler's Wells, London, 4th October 2018. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZGw0HXx\\_dAY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZGw0HXx_dAY)

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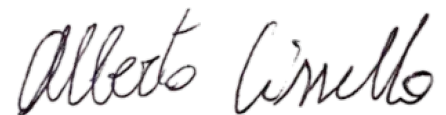
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### **Eidesstattliche Erklärung**

„Hiermit erkläre ich eidesstattlich, dass ich die vorliegende Arbeit selbstständig und ohne fremde Hilfe verfasst habe. Alle Stellen oder Passagen der vorliegenden Arbeit, die anderen Quellen im Wortlaut oder dem Sinn nach entnommen wurden, sind durch Angaben der Herkunft kenntlich gemacht. Dies gilt auch für die Reproduktion von Noten, grafischen Darstellungen und anderen analogen oder digitalen Materialien. Ich räume der Anton Bruckner Privatuniversität das Recht ein, ein von mir verfasstes Abstract meiner Arbeit sowie den Volltext auf der Homepage der ABPU zur Einsichtnahme zur Verfügung zu stellen.“

Vienna, 13/12/2022

Alberto Cissello

Handwritten signature of Alberto Cissello in black ink.