Journal of Somaesthetics

Somaesthetics of Noise

Volume 12, Number 1 (2026)

somaesthetics.aau.dk

Editorial Board

Published by
Aalborg University Open (AAU OPEN)

Journal website
somaesthetics.aau.dk
The Journal of Somaesthetics was founded by Richard Shusterman, Else Marie Bukdahl and Ståle Stenslie. The journal is funded by The Joint Committee for Nordic research councils in the Humanities and Social Sciences, NOS-HS and Independent Research Fund Denmark.

ISSN: 2246-8498
Authors retain copyright and grant the journal right of first publication with the work simultaneously licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution License: Attribution - NonCommercial - NoDerivs (by-nc-nd). Further information about Creative Commons.
The journal does not charge the authors for publication.

Front & Back Cover Photo: Debadipta Basak

Contents

Editor's Introduction, Somaesthetics of Noise

Mark D. Tschaepe

Prairie View A&M University, ORCID: 0000-0002-7968-936X

Somaesthetics of noise recognizes noise as a somatic phenomenon that extends beyond the auditory, affecting us in most realms of experience. Noise is heard, and it is also felt through vibration, pressure, irritation, disturbance, interruption, fatigue, excitement, and sometimes pleasure. It can unsettle attention, reorganize bodily orientation, thicken atmosphere, and expose the limits of perception. For the most part, noise has been a largely unexplored source for somaesthetic inquiry. If somaesthetics examines the soma as a medium of sensory appreciation, self-cultivation, communication, and world-disclosure, then noise directs our attention to those moments when embodied experience becomes excessive, difficult, unruly, or resistant to immediate assimilation.

The essays and interviews gathered in this volume approach noise in an expansive somaesthetic sense. Some focus on explicitly sonic practices, including experimental music, noise performance, and sound poetry. Others extend noise beyond the auditory, considering restlessness, bodily interference, atmospheric disruption, and the governance of embodied presence. In all these contributions, noise is what urges renewed attention to the conditions through which meaning, sensation, and social order are formed. Noise can overwhelm and disrupt, but it can also attune and help us refocus. It can produce discomfort, but discomfort often stimulates inquiry. It can be treated as disorder by institutions, but it can also become a resource for resistance, self-stylization, and shared experience.

The contributions to this volume show that noise is one of the ways somaesthetic life becomes palpable. The noisy body helps disclose how perception is shaped through habits, environments, tools, sociocultural norms, and other practices. Somaesthetics of noise adresses how bodies are affected by noise, produce noise, are governed as noise, and how noise may generate new forms of bodily awareness. Noise is acknowledged as a crucial medium through which embodied experience becomes transformed.

Beginning the volume, Derek Hillard and Serena Massimo's "Noise as Atmospheric Interference: Sound Poetry and Romina De Novellis' *Arachne*" examines noise as a form of embodied and affective interference with established codes of meaning, movement, and social order. Through its pairing of Dada sound poetry with De Novellis' site-specific performance, *Arachne*, the essay describes how noise can unsettle habitual relations between body, environment, language, and normativity. In the Dada sound poem, vocal noise disrupts semantic expectation and returns language to its corporeal production. In *Arachne*, noise becomes atmospheric and performative, operating through silence, walking, discomfort, and complicity rather than through sound alone. The essay's relevance to the issue's theme lies in its account of noise as a destabilizing force that reconfigures meaning by producing discomfort. In dialogue with atmospherology and the somaesthetics of discomfort, Hillard and Massimo present noise as

an artistic means of making bodies and environments newly perceptible, especially where hegemonic norms have rendered suffering, alienation, or misfitting invisible.

Reza Shirmarz's "Somathorybics: The Governance of Bodies as Noise" introduces a powerful conceptual vocabulary for analyzing how institutions regulate embodied presence once certain bodies are treated as forms of noise. The essay defines *somathorybics* as the governance of bodies as noise and develops four operators of sensory governance: filtration, compression, amplification, and leakage. Through Shirmarz's concentrated case study of Iran's compulsory modesty regime, the article shows how state power operates by organizing perception itself. State power works to determine which bodies may appear, how they may move, what they may sound like, and under what conditions they become legible as proper or improper. Somathorybics expands the concept of noise beyond the auditory into a cross-sensory and political category. Noise names the excess of embodied life that institutions seek to filter, standardize, and surveil, as well as the irrepressible leakage through which bodies continue to resist hegemonic control. The essay provides a framework for understanding sensory governance as a somaesthetic problem.

Tomokatsu Kono extends the theme of noise into the domain of neurodivergent embodied experience in "Toward a Somaesthetic Participatory Cognitive Science of ADHD: From Feelings of Restlessness to the Somatic Noise Hypothesis". Kono interprets feelings of restlessness in ADHD as a form of *somatic noise*. Rather than a mere behavioral symptom or internal distraction, somatic noise is proposed as a bodily disturbance that can interfere with the aesthetic quality of everyday experience and with interoceptive signals involved in prospective memory. The essay is especially important for this issue because it suggests how somaesthetics can help translate lived bodily experience into both philosophical interpretation and empirically testable hypotheses. Noise, in this account, can arise from the body as background, shaping the field of salience through which tasks, memories, and aesthetic qualities come into focus or fail to do so. Kono's essay provides a promising path for a participatory somaesthetic cognitive science attentive to neurodivergent self-interpretation.

In "Embodied Vibrations: Noise, Mood, and Subtractive Synthesis in High Intensity Acoustic Experiences" Jordan Kokot and Aaron Michael Smith approach noise as a condition through which attention, mood, and shared atmosphere become possible. Drawing on experimental and high-intensity acoustic experiences, the essay develops sympathetic resonance and subtractive synthesis as conceptual models for understanding how persons become attuned to situations. In this essay, noise is presented as the dense field of possible resonances from which embodied attention takes shape. The essay's contribution to this issue lies in its insistence that noise is central to somaesthetic life because it reveals the plurality of ways bodies resonate with atmospheres. In doing so, it also challenges any politics or aesthetics that would seek to homogenize experience by eliminating the very noisiness from which shared yet differentiated presence emerges.

The section on noise concludes with Janne Vanhanen's "'Noise belongs to everyone': Interview with Vilho Koivisto, a Noise Musician." This dialogue provides a practitioner-centered account of noise as a subcultural musical practice. Through Koivisto's reflections on listening, recording, performing, releasing, and distributing noise, the interview offers a rich picture of noise music as a scene built around tactile sound, DIY circulation, cultivated listening, and the search for one's own sonic voice. Noise music shifts aesthetic experience away from conventional musical anticipation and toward the lived immediacy of sound as pressure, texture, density, and somatic encounter. Koivisto's account emphasizes the edge between control and chaos, where sound almost gets out of hand but remains fertile for both performer and listener. The interview frames noise as a democratic and embodied art of attention that ultimately belongs to everyone.

In addition to the section devoted to somaesthetics of noise, we also include two interviews

concerning somatic practices.

"Somaesthetics of Bharatanāṭyam: The Dancer as Yogi" offers an illuminating interview with Smt. Vrinda Ramanan on Bharatanāṭyam as a lifelong discipline of embodied cultivation. The interview foregrounds the dancer's soma as the central medium of communication, showing how gesture, posture, breath, facial expression, rhythm, costume, music, and devotional identification are integrated through sustained practice. Ramanan's reflections present dance as a spiritual and ethical practice through which the body, mind, and breath are brought into consonance. Especially significant is the discussion of *abhyāsa*, or repeated practice, through which the dancer refines the body until movement, emotion, and meaning become internalized rather than externally imposed. The interview also clarifies the pedagogical and moral dimensions of *Bharatanāṭyam*, the *guru-śiṣya* tradition, the cultivation of humility and discipline, the formation of resilience, and the gradual embodiment of *bhāvas* that allow spectators to experience *rasa.* Understood through the framework of somaesthetics, the dancer appears as a yogic practitioner whose art depends on the cultivated body's capacity to transform literature, rhythm, emotion, and devotion into lived expression.

"Articulating the Indiscernible" presents an interview between Quim Bigas Bassart and Rasmus Ölme that reflects on dance as a practice of sensing, attunement, and relational inquiry. Emerging from Ölme's research project, *An Indiscernible Zone*, the conversation centers on a score in which the body becomes a felt-sense instrument for mediating one's experience of place through movement. The interview approaches dancing as a way of remaining with complexity. Dance allows impressions from an environment to become bodily expression, loosens habitual definitions of objects and spaces, and attends to the threshold before experience becomes fixed in language. The practice described is deeply responsive to place, since each space alters the dancer's perceptual and physical possibilities. Dance is described as "dancing with" (with a score, an object, a room, another practitioner, or an audience) so that performance becomes a relational and ongoing mediation between soma, context, and action. Bassart and Ölme offer a compelling account of contemporary dance as cultivated somaesthetic acuity. Dance becomes a disciplined yet playful practice of discovering how the soma and its world continually form one another.

Noise as Atmospheric Interference: Sound Poetry and Romina De Novellis' *Arachne*

Derek Hillard and Serena Massimo

Derek Hillard, Professor, Kansas State University, Department of Modern Languages, ORCID: 0009-0002-3661-7099

Serena Massimo, postdoctoral researcher, University of Paris Nanterre, ORCID: 0009-0009-6560-4159

Abstract: *Drawing on atmospherological theory and accounts of embodied affectivity, this paper explores how noise functions by destabilizing habitual responses to environmental affordances, producing performative effects within artistic practices. In the case of Dada poetry, nonsensical vocal sounds are analyzed as a form of acoustic disturbance that disrupts semantic expectations and foregrounds noise as a reconfiguration of meaning. Through the analysis of Romina De Novellis' Arachne, noise is identified as a phenomenon of interference grounded in an atmosphere of discomfort, in dialogue with the somaesthetics of discomfort.*

Keywords: *Noise, Discomfort, Sound Poetry, Site-specific Performance*

Introduction

It does not seem possible to investigate noise without also exploring its synesthetic nature, which reveals its affective, relational, and emergent qualities. Noise is not information mechanically transmitted from one entity to another in space; rather, it is a phenomenon of resonance, in which acoustic perception is inseparable from a sense of discomfort in relation to oneself and the environment. Sound operates as a form of interference – an abrupt shift in situation and affective state that compels a reconfiguration of one's relationship with the environment.

We explore two distinct cultural sites of noise that respond to different theoretical approaches, namely theories of embodiment and emotion with an atmospherological perspective. What unites these approaches is their shared aim to foreground the bodily and affective nature of noise, and to examine how it is mobilized in artistic practices as a means to challenge artistic and social codes and conventions. The case studies analyzed – Dada poetry and Romina De Novellis' site-specific performance *Arachne* (2018) – while belonging to different historical periods and artistic movements, do not merely place the body at the center of their artistic practices. Moreover, they draw on the body's capacity to "make noise" – that is, to generate an emotional impact in which disruptiveness becomes an integral part of the work.

The idea of noise as a phenomenon of atmospheric interference provides a unique lens through which to examine the role of affectivity in art, showing how it depends on a form of disruptiveness inherent in our experience. The suddenness and the pervasiveness that characterize the qualitative dimension of our experience reflect the nature of our engagement

with the world and, at the same time, provide us with the clues for reconfiguring this engagement. A variation in our way of feeling, in fact, brings with itself the tools to initiate a new way of shaping our relationship with the surroundings. Artistic creativity, understood as the actualization of unexpected ways of "experiencing with the world" – instead of experiencing the world (Matteucci, 2019, p. 95) as object – plays a key role in this reconfiguring process. Sound poetry and performance art offer insightful perspectives from which to analyze this practice of artistic creativity, as they leverage the capacity of bodily actions to produce emotional impact as a site of dissent and interference with communicative, artistic, and social conventions.

In Dada poetry, sound appears in many ways metaphorically but also aurally, as meaningless vocal utterances produced by the body; yet it nonetheless refers to the corporeal nature of the voice and, with it, to the origin of the process of semantization through nonsense – the cancellation of meaning. Thus emerges the necessarily reconfigurative nature of re-semantization inherent in the process of signification. This entails a questioning not only of the idea of poetry as a verbal language detached from the body, but also of the notion of communication as mere information transfer. The capacity of the body to obstruct meanings and pre-established categories forms the connecting thread to the site-specific performance *Arachne* (2018). Here, noise is understood to be detached from the purely auditory, emphasizing its connection to the body's ability to "make noise" – that is, to compel a questioning of the alienating dynamics of our contemporary society.

Our discussion is divided into two sections. Part one explores the role of noise in manifestos and poetry of Dada's inceptional phase, in Zurich, with a focus on Hugo Ball's noise poem "Elefantenkarawane" ("Elephant Caravan"). By making use of noise, Dada created embodied poetry of gestures in place of semantics, a poetry that sought to activate embodied performance and listening. The concern of Dada aesthetic was to undermine communicative and intellectual structures of instrumental reason, to reintroduce the body into language. Of its group of performers and audience members alike, the atmosphere created there demanded new affordances to cope with the constant stress, innovation, and provocation that characterized the performative space of Zurich Dada.

Part two is dedicated to the analysis of *Arachne* (2018). The dialogue between the atmospherological approach and Mark Tschaepe's somaesthetics of discomfort will provide the analytical tools needed to examine how this performance challenges mechanisms of alienation. This performance – which, to date, has not yet been the subject of any scholarly study – does so by contrasting the discomfort typically experienced by the alienated with a sense of complicity that provides a destabilizing effect and foster a questioning of the causes of alienation.

Atmospheres

We will now outline the general theoretical framework of atmospherology, to which we will refer differently depending on the case studies, intertwining it with other theoretical considerations. The atmospherological approach has been developed by Tonino Griffero within the framework of a pathic[1] aesthetics. Following Hermann Schmitz' new phenomenology[2] emphasizing of the living, felt-bodily experience, Griffero's pathic aesthetics aims to explore the "pathic dimension that guides the entirety of existence", i.e., the influence of how we feel in a certain space. This involves the felt-bodily dimension of our experience which is, with Hermann Schmitz:

1 See Straus 1930, where Straus introduces the notion of "pathicity" to refer to "how" – and not what – we perceive what surrounds us.

2 Developed with the intention to contrast the increasing tendency to "live and think in terms of abstractions provided by specialists," following "environmental and social systems constructed by technologists," (Schmitz, 2002, p. 491) new phenomenology aims to restore experience as the point of orientation of our lives by focusing on the "felt-bodily" dimension of our experience.

> Whatever someone feels in the vicinity (not always within the boundaries of their material body) as belonging to themselves and without drawing on the senses seeing and touching as well as the perceptual body schema (the habitual conception of one's own body), derived from the experiences made using the senses. (Schmitz, 2019, p. 65)

Following Schmitz, Griffero identifies feelings with atmospheres, "feelings poured out into lived and pericorporeal space" (Griffero, 2020, p. 97) that invite us to feel in a particular way. Atmospheres are "a set of atmospheric affordances […] recognizable and linguistically expressible. By using the power of their affordances, atmospheres tonalize the affective space in which we (literally) enter and segment it through boundaries that are not geometrical but emotional" (Griffero, 2022, p. 87). Griffero borrows the term "affordance" from James J. Gibson (1904-1979), the author of an ecological theory of perception (1979), according to which perception is the result of the encounter between the characteristics of a given environment and those of the perceiver under certain circumstances. Affordances are emergent and relational qualitative characteristics that arise from the interaction between perceiver and environment, configuring themselves as "invitations to act" in a certain way within a given environment. For example, a chair is "sittable" for an adult subject without any permanent or temporary disabilities, whereas for the same subject a water surface is not "walkable," while it is for an insect.

Griffero offers a non-activist interpretation of Gibsonian affordances while retaining their relational and emergent character. Atmospheric affordances are Schmitzian motor suggestions and synaesthetic qualities, i.e., "bridging qualities that can be noticed in one's own felt body but also be perceived in encounters with others, whether at rest or in motion" (Schmitz, 2019, p. 68). Suggestions of movement are "vivid sketches of motion without being fully enacted" – music, for example, is a realm of motor suggestions – while synaesthetic qualities are qualities such as sharpness, brightness, warmth, coldness, smoothness.

The "invitation to feel" in a certain way provided by atmospheric affordances does not imply that atmospheres are merely "produced"; on the contrary, affordances are "atmospheres generators," an expression borrowed from Gernot Böhme,[3] with whom Griffero shares the assumption – distancing himself from Schmitz' position – that atmospheres can be generated. This means that they create favorable conditions for the appearance of particular atmospheres through which we resonate. According to this approach, in fact, our felt-body is a "sounding board" (Griffero, 2020, p. 108) for atmospheric affordances, whose perception elicits the awakening or the formation and/or the dissolution of what Schmitz calls "felt-bodily isles." These are "felt" areas correspondent – but not reducible to – the bodily anatomical parts they concern; among the most stable, there are the oral cavity, the chest, and the soles of our feet, while others emerge according to what affects us (such as pain or even an itch, or the touch of someone or something around us). The relationship with our environment is therefore mediated through these isles, which are also responsible for the communication between the felt body and the physical body.

Dada and Noise

European modernist culture around World War I became enamored with the aesthetic potential of noise. In her study of the uses of noise by British writers between World War I and World War II, Anna Snaith shows that British writers' understanding of the modern experience was

3 Böhme introduces the notion of "generators of atmospheres" in reference to what he calls the "ecstasies of things", i.e. "the way in which a thing steps out of itself and into the surrounding space, where it becomes palpably present." (Böhme, 2017, p. 129) Rather than coinciding with a physical characteristic of things, ecstasy is their "expressive form" that emanates from them and radiates into the surrounding space, creating favorable conditions for the emergence of certain atmospheres. This can be seen in interior design, marketing, and architecture.

considerably impacted by changes in soundscapes:

> The unprecedented noise levels of the wars, together with the newly polyphonous urban and domestic spaces and the auditory training required by new forms of sound technology, caused an attentiveness to sound and hearing which was harnessed metaphorically and structurally in the period's literature." (2025, p. 3)

Sounds, or noises, to be relevant for people, require bodies. To discuss noise without also discussing bodies and embodiment is to omit the way in which bodies must be situated to perceive noise. Snaith helpfully acknowledges this: "However you parse it, noise takes us to questions of embodiment" (2025, p. 6). While Snaith identifies the role played by embodiment in modernist uses of noise, scholarship has generally neglected this link. Yet for the avant-garde Dada movement, historically preceding Snaith's post-war focus, the embodied and affective nature of noise was central to their assault on the status of art during the war.

The notion of embodied approaches to emotion and perception can be explicated with reference to recent work in philosophy. According to Michelle Maiese, the most effective embodied "account should acknowledge our capacity to understand our surroundings is essentially bodily and affective, and capture how the constitution of meaning involved in appraisal depends on the relationship between body and environment" (Maiese, 2010, p. 235). Maiese's discussion develops the analysis of embodiment offered by Shaun Gallagher in his influential study, *How the Body Shapes the Mind* (2006), where he observes that "*bodily* movement is closely tied in various ways to perception and to other forms of cognition and emotion" (p. 8). According to Maiese, evaluating the environment is a bodily process, and emotion is a form of sensitivity to what is important. Objects and situations become intelligible to us because they matter to us (p. 235).

Such understandings receive further support in the work of Giovanna Colombetti (2014). Colombetti draws on research in enactivism, which she traces to several different thinkers and researchers, including the work of Varela, Thompson, and Rosch (1991); and earlier, Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Edmund Husserl. For Colombetti, faculties such as thinking and emoting are forms of the individual's ineluctable activity of sense-making: "both cognition and emotion turn out to be instances of the relentless *sense-making* activity of the precarious living organism as it maintains itself via continuous processes of self-regulation and exchange with the environment" (p. xvii). Colombetti emphasizes how bodies rely on emotion for the activity of sense making. Dada artistic practices amounted to forms of sense making through the use of noise and body-centered affective aesthetic strategies.

Dada began in Zurich in 1916 (Dickerman, 2005, p. 19-23). It was largely the invention of the German poet Hugo Ball (1886-1927), Ball's wife, the German actress and cabaret entertainer, Emmy Hennings (1885-1948), and Ball's friend, the German writer Richard Huelsenbeck (1892-1974). Protesting and fleeing the violence of World War I, they relocated from Berlin to Zurich and decided to found a radically new sort of cabaret.

Christened the Cabaret Voltaire, it opened in a Zurich café in February 1916. Having placed an advertisement in a newspaper targeted to appeal to innovative young artists and writers, several of these appeared to perform on the opening night, February 5, 1916 (Ball, 1974, p. 50). These included the visual artist, Marcel Janco, and the poet and performer, Tristan Tzara, both Romanian Jews, and an established Alsatian-German painter, Hans Arp. This group formed the early membership of the nascent Dada movement. A movement self-consciously conceived as international, Dada, along with its practitioners soon dispersed abroad, for instance to Paris, New York, Berlin, and beyond. While the movement's growing reputation resulted in greater

influence, it soon led to clashes of personalities and the end of Dada in Zurich (Dickerman, 2005, p. 41). While a study of successive waves of Dada in terms of noise, embodiment, discomfort, and atmospheres would be compelling, we limit our discussion to the moment of Dada's inception and in particular the role played by Hugo Ball.

A key motivation for the turn to noise by the Dadaists as an aesthetic strategy was its power to serve both as a source of art, provided by sonic landscapes of everyday life –which also included the war's violent cacophonous sound – and a dissonant weapon against the instrumental reason that they held responsible for the war. Dada artists saw in the aural sensations and sonic properties of noise a method to alter recipients' perception and the practices of aesthetic reception.

Noise offered Dadaists symbolic material with which to criticize the instrumental reason and militarism that they held responsible for the war and its continuing destruction. By emphasizing simultaneity, unpredictability, and chaos, they drew attention to the violence and suffering of human bodies. The raucous and messy performative strategies of Dada amounted to incorporating bodily affordances into models of thinking and reasoning and presiding over the creation of innovative atmospheres of chaos. These artistic strategies thematically and formally criticized both idealism and disembodied representational logic.

Noise for the Dada artists became a symbolic and performative tool with which to short circuit or divert powerful currents of logic. As Ball asked, "What does it mean, to value the side for something just as much as the side against it? Or, what did it mean and what does it mean to be for and against something…?" (Huelsenbeck, 1964, p. 11). While this may appear as self-gratuitous antics of self-contradiction, it supplied for these artists innovative practices of performing, making, and thinking with which to challenge dominant models of communication in politics, aesthetics, philosophy and society. Huelsenbeck echoed this motif in his remarks: "Logic imprisoned by the senses is an organic disease […] We observe, we regard from one or more points of view, we choose them among the millions that exist. Experience is also a product of chance and individual faculties" (Motherwell, 1989, p. 79). With this they dismiss the law of non-contradiction to embrace the perspectival nature of truth.

The first Dada practitioners were as fascinated with noise as they were with an aesthetics of the body. In his text of 1920, "En Avant Dada: A History of Dadaism," Huelsenbeck, acknowledged Dada's indebtedness to Marinetti and the Italian Futurists as the creators of the *bruitism*, noise in artistic practice. Yet he took pains to distinguish the ironic and contradictory Dada use of noise from its imitative and instrumentalist strategies employed by the futurists. As puzzling and unique forms of friction, he compared noise to life: "Every movement naturally produces noise […] but bruitism is life itself, cannot be judged like a book, but rather it is a part of our personality, which attacks us, pursues us and tears us to pieces" (Motherwell, 1989, p. 26). As Huelsenbeck understood it, all sorts of action including collective action produces noise. The Dada practice of making noise is self-reflexive, contradictory, and creatively destructive for its own purposes.

In his "Collective Dada Manifesto" (1918), Huelsenbeck was more expressive of the connection between noise, human bodies, and life:

> The word Dada symbolizes the most primitive relation to the reality of the environment; with Dadaism a new reality comes into its own. Life appears as a simultaneous muddle of noises, colors, and spiritual rhythms, which is taken unmodified into Dadaist art, with all the sensational screams and fevers of its reckless everyday psyche and with all its brutal reality. […] By tearing to pieces all the platitudes of ethics, culture, and inwardness, which are merely cloaks for weak muscles, Dadaism has for the first time ceased to take an aesthetic

position toward life. (Motherwell, 1989, p. 244)

Here we can see how the Dada fascination with noise is imagined as embodied in the screams, fevers, the "tearing to pieces" of the outer layers of societal niceties, as if shredding the skin to get at the muscular Dada body.

Dada understood noise as a provocation, shattering, and reorganization of the body. Often, as in Huelsenbeck's "Collective Dada Manifesto" of 1920, the Dada body is imagined as fragmented, disassembled, shattered:

> The highest art will be that which in its conscious content presents the thousandfold problems of the day, the art which has been visibly shattered by the explosions of last week, which is forever trying to collect its limbs after yesterday's crash. The best and most extraordinary artists will be those who every hour snatch the tatters of their bodies out of the frenzied cataract of life, who, with bleeding hands and hearts, hold fast to the intelligence of their time. (Motherwell, 1989, p. 242-243)

In these comments, a new mode of "intelligence" is envisioned, which emerges from and assumes the form of a fragmentation in terms corporeal, social and political, marked by traumatic memory of World War I.

The reference to "holding fast to the intelligence of their time" is a nod to the efforts of Dada artists and performers to rely on the affective body to make sense of its changing environments. Their attempts at making sense dovetail with accounts of embodied emotional perception now familiar from Maiese and Colombetti. Dada provides us with history's first artistic, or, anti-artistic, movement to understand its activities as a relentless and aggressive process of sense-making while explicitly refusing to make sense. As Tzara put it, "Dada is working with all its might to introduce the idiot everywhere" (Motherwell, 1989, p. 94). Dada relied on its literary, visual, and performative strategies of embodied affectivity to assess its environment, that is, to seek out what could be sought and where. Tzara formulated it this way: "And so Dada was born of a need for independence, of a distrust toward unity. Those who are with us preserve their freedom" (Motherwell, 1989, p. 77). In other words, it explored and sought to foster all manner of environments conducive to what it understood to be its values of disunity, freedom, individuality, contradiction, senselessness, and chaos.

The early Dadaists of Zurich attempted, without perhaps understanding it in these terms, to foster an atmosphere of noise. As Griffero notes, "perceiving atmospheres mostly means being touched by them in the felt-body" (2014, p. 16). Crucial to this atmosphere were improvisation, disorder, a tireless, ludic pressure placed on participants and viewers to the point of exhaustion, as well as in the words of T.J. Demos, the assertion of "*difference* as the formative principle of its social collectivization" (2005, p. 16). Dada located in noise the figure with which to grasp the atmosphere of its age, whose defining historical feature was the technologically imposed destruction wrought by World War I. Opposed to the machinery of destruction, Dada created a counter-atmosphere. It created an environment that sought to challenge spectators and performers alike with its atmospheric affordances that demanded shock and caused discomfort. As Hans Richter wrote of Emmy Hemmings, 'the only woman in this cabaret [...] her performances were not artistic in the traditional sense, either vocally or as interpretations. Their accustomed shrillness was an affront to the audience, and perturbed it quite as much as did the provocations of her male colleagues" (1964, p. 26-27). As an aesthetic, Zurich Dada, and as a place, the Cabaret Voltaire, placed significant demands as atmospheric affordances on its audience. Ball's diary repeatedly mentions the aleatory, tense, exhausting performative ethos of

the cabaret: "everyone has been seized by an indefinable intoxication. The little cabaret is about to come apart at the seams and is getting to be a playground for crazy emotions" (1974, p. 51-52). The performative ethos developed along a trajectory of noisome escalation.

Dada performance, and, as we will see, Dada poetry, was driven as much by a loathing of meaning as by a fascination with the body. Janco called Dada a "bodily art, a force coming from physical instincts" (quoted in Richter, 1988, p. 49). The power to alter embodied emotions and cognition can also be seen in the importance that Dada artists placed on masks and costumes and the atmospheric affordances they engendered. One occurrence of the use of masks is particularly instructive, an episode that Ball noted in his diary in May 1916:

> Janco arrived with his masks, and everyone immediately put one on [...] Not only did the mask immediately call for a costume; it also demanded a quite definite, passionate gesture [...] we were walking around with the most bizarre movements[...]. The masks simply demanded that their wearers start to move in a tragic-absurd dance. (Ball, 1974 , p. 64)

While the mask in general is a medium of concealment, in the hands of the Dada artists, it modified their emotions and sensations. Through their bodily affectivity, Janco, Ball, and their collaborators imagined and sought out new objects and environments and developed unpredictable gestures. "What altogether fascinates us about these," Ball wrote, "is that they personify beings and embody passions larger than life. The dread of our times, the paralyzing background of things is made visible" (1974, p. 64).

While the Dadaist innovation in dance, the confrontational stage antics, and garish costumes designed to create new forms of physical expression caught the attention of numerous visitors within and without artistic circles, the combination of bodily gestures with linguistic performance proved to be the most provocative and discomfiting for the audiences at the Cabaret Voltaire. Huelsenbeck perhaps set the tone for the Dadaists most innovative literature production. As Ball noted in his diary: "Huelsenbeck has arrived […] He would prefer to drum literature into the ground" (1974, p. 51).

Though Huelsenbeck's more traditional poetry produced noise through theme and performance, two new literary genres increased the volume: the simultaneous poem and the sound poem. "Huelsenbeck, Tzara, and Janco took the floor with a 'poème simultan' [simultaneous poem]," wrote Ball (1974, p. 57) which involved three performers reading and making sounds at the same time. Though such antics might appear to be little more than provocation, Ball viewed this kind of poetry as the site of conflict between the embodied human voice and the violent incoherence of a mechanist age: "The noises represent the background—the inarticulate, the disastrous, the decisive. The poem tried to elucidate the fact that man is swallowed up in the mechanistic process. In a typically compressed way it shows the conflict of the *vox humana* [human voice] with a world that threatens, ensnares, and destroys it, a world whose rhythm and noise are ineluctable" (57).

Though simultaneous poetry made its appearance first, it was Ball's innovation of the sound poem that has proved to be the most influential. Ball's sound poetry offered innovative noises within sound and new combinations of vowels and consonants that sought to mime physical movements and saturate poetry with articulations of the body. These new genres of literature aimed to transform poetry into something like dance. Indeed, Dada noise poetry was as much an assault on traditional poetry as it was an attempt to transform words into gestures and emotions, to convert speech into the gesturing body.

The appearance of Ball's "noise poems" is recorded in his diary, which acts as an

intentional gloss of the performance:

> I have invented a new genre of poems, "Verse ohne Worte" [poems without words] or Lautgedichte [sound poems], in which the balance of the vowels is weighed and distributed solely according to the values of the beginning sequence. I gave a reading of the first one of these poems this evening. I had made myself a special costume for it. My legs were in a cylinder of shiny blue cardboard, which came up to my hips so that I looked like an obelisk. (Ball, 1974, p. 64)

As Tobias Wilke has shown, the unconventional word "Ansatzreihe," rendered in the English as "beginning sequence," echoes uses in specialized contexts, where the most relevant allusions are to those of tone's inception in vocal music and perhaps also to the anatomical space in the human voice box where phonological distinctions can emerge (2022, p. 120). Ball's comments show that he measured the auditory and articulatory values of speech, particularly of vowels, which highlight the anatomical production of sound, rooting it in the body. Indeed, through his costume, whose inflexible design imposed constraints on his movements and stance, through the transformation of poetry into Ball's intoning sonic gestures, the performance space managed to require a charged "atmospheric perception" (Giffero, 2014, p. 18) that permeated the space, the objects, the noise, the surrounding sounds.

One sound poem that Ball read he referred to as "Elefantenkarawane" (Elephant Caravan):

> jolifanto bambla ô falli bambla
> grossiga m'pfa habla horem
> égiga goramen
> higo bloiko russula huju
> hollaka hollala
> anlogo bung
> blago bung
> blago bung
> bosso fataka
> ü üü ü
> schampa wulla wussa ólobo
> hej tatta gôrem
> eschige zunbada
> wulubu ssubudu ulu wassubada
> tumba ba–umf
> kusa gauma
> ba–umf (Ball, 1984, p. 408).

While the poem was spoken in a nonexistent language, its sounds can nevertheless not refrain from suggesting meaning. "Jolifanto" evokes elephant, an association strengthened by one of the traditionally ascribed titles of the poem (Caravan). The word "habla" is Spanish for speech. Word pairs with minimal differences are created, *hollaka/hollala*, differences that could be meaningful in a linguistic context in the same way that the difference between sad/mad creates meaning. Though renouncing meaning, the text both manages to create linguistic conditions for the possibility of meaning and to become a poem.

There is no poetry without the kinesthetic body. Traditionally, lyric poetry is the genre of the solo voice that sings of itself. By necessity it assumed a reliance on biological systems and

physical actions. The air pressure system, the vibratory system, and the resonating system are all activated to produce sound. The diaphragm, muscles, voice box, the throat, oral cavity, and so on, are all brought into motion to speak poetry and to sing. Indeed, Ball's word *gauma* could echo German *Gaumen*, the palate, anatomy symbolically significant for taste, also aesthetic taste, and for speech. From the perspective of the body, the Dada poem has no choice but to be traditional and paradigmatic and conform to the generic contours of lyric poetry.

Yet by severing itself from meaning, it attempts to reclaim these affective embodied elements, described by Maiese and Colombetti, that modern technology such as the printing press or the typewriter have managed to exclude from the word. Just as print results in a medium that attempts to be words without bodies, the Dada poem attempts to become bodies without meaningful words. Furthermore, the Dada poem displays more than a passing fascination with the primitive. It endeavors to reenact a scene of primitive noise according to the romantic notion that the first human being has been said to be a poet. Ball's poem is an attempt to access the primitive creative power of the word in its independence from reason. By replacing meaning with noise, the poem creates a gestural language akin to dance, one that, while perhaps not expressing wonder or awe at the world, nevertheless expresses bafflement, while simultaneously provoking action from its listeners. The noise is provocative.

Ball's commentary on the event is replete with passages emphasizing the physical dimensions of the performance. There is the "special" costume made for this occasion, which placed demands on Ball and the audience: "My legs were in a cylinder of shiny blue cardboard, which came up to my hips so that I looked like an obelisk. Over it I wore a huge coat collar cut out of cardboard […] It was fastened at the neck in such a way that I could give the impression of winglike movement by raising and lowering my elbows" (1974, p. 70). Ball's costume is relevant for an understanding of what we might call a Dada posture. As he remarks about the constrictive costume, "I could not walk inside the cylinder so I was carried onto the stage" (70). In this performance, the body is elongated, shaped like a column, and constrained, with only the cardboard collar permitting him a pivoting movement during his reading, as he writes, "flapping my wings energetically" (p. 71). These energetic movements create a tension with what he noted were the "heavy vowel sequences and the heavy rhythm of the elephants" (71). The costume and its restrictive movements combined mechanistic with statuesque and shamanic features.

Ball later printed a manifesto that was likely excerpted and read by him at the performance where he debuted his sound poems, for his diary notes that he prefaced the reading by "a few program notes" (1974, p. 71). In these comments, Ball explains: "I want my own stuff, my own rhythm, and vowels and consonants too […] If this pulsation [*Schwingung*] is seven yards long, I want words for it that are seven yards long" (221). Here he indicates that his words are chosen according to how adequate they are to the body's "Schwingung," which can be rendered in English as "vibration" or "oscillation," and might convey a stirring emotion or the physical feeling provoked when the body makes circular movements. He went on to equate the words of his noise poetry with the body in motion: "It will serve to show how articulated language comes into being […] Words emerge, shoulders of words, legs, arms, hands of words. Ay, oi, u" (p. 221). With these noisy articulations, "Ay, oi, u," Dada would close the gap between words that seek sense and the affective body that attempts to make sense of things.

Atmospherology and somaesthetics of discomfort in dialogue

The analysis of Romina De Novellis' site-specific performance *Arachne* requires some theoretical premises that further develop the framework outlined in the beginning of our paper. One

of the key aspects of our analysis will be Griffero's categorization of atmospheres. According to him, there are three types of atmospheres. First, there are the "prototypical atmospheres": non-intentional, objective, and external atmospheres, they are the first atmospheres that affect us as soon as we enter a room (think of the sense of austerity that comes over us when we enter a government building). Then there are "derivative-relational" atmospheres, which are objective and external, but they are intentionally produced. They are, in fact, the atmospheres that arise from interaction between subjects or between subject and object. Consider the joyful atmosphere that arises when two people who care about each other meet again. Finally, there are "spurious" atmospheres, i.e., subjective and projective atmospheres generated by the subject drawing on their "atmospheric competence" to exercise a "resistance (mood protest)" (Griffero, 2024, p. 95) to the prototypical atmosphere in question (e.g., when the joyful atmosphere of a party makes us feel sad instead of happy). Atmospheres can change over time: the prototypical ones can become derivative-relational and vice versa, for example.

Such a change manifests in the felt body as a variation in the type of felt-bodily isles that may or may not be activated. Our way of resonating with atmospheres can take two forms: syntonic and dissonant. The former manifests as a generalized state of "well-being that momentarily prevents some particular isles from emerging and promotes an uncritical fusion with the external reality" (Griffero, 2020, p. 110). Such resonance occurs when one is at rest, or when observing a fluid movement, such as the regular motion of waves in a calm sea. Discrepant resonance, by contrast, occurs whenever one encounters something that inhibits one's fluid bodily behavior. It produces a "contraction giving birth to individual felt-bodily isles of which the subject was previously unaware" (Griffero, 2020, p. 110). Think of when one is in a state of distress, or experiences a sensation that contrasts with the protopathic state one is in.

The notion of "discrepant resonance" characterizes the phenomenon of interference produced by the noisy artistic practices discussed here. In the analysis of *Arachne*, we argue that the core of this phenomenon of interference lies in a sense of discomfort, which manifests itself in the form of discrepant resonance. *Arachne* seems to show that interference with the status quo can be generated precisely by mobilizing discrepant resonance. This, in turn, produces a destabilizing effect that unsettles – or at least reveals the questionability of – the underlying mechanisms of alienation. All of this will be developed through a comparison of atmospherology with the somaesthetics of discomfort.

Characterized by Tschaepe as "an overarching framework or collection of concepts that may be used to address issues concerning identity, normativity, and alienation" (Tschaepe, 2025, p. 25), somaesthetics of discomfort draws on Richard Shusterman's somaesthetics, and on feminist and queer theories. Somaesthetics is "a critical study and melioristic cultivation of how we experience and use the living body (or soma) as a site of sensory appreciation (aesthesis) and creative self-fashioning" (Shusterman, 2008, p. 1). At its center is the soma, understood as "the living, feeling, perceptive, purposive, culturally informed body, an entity with integrated physical and mental attributes that could be described as a unified 'body-mind'" (Shusterman 2020, p. 24). The importance of the living and felt dimension makes the soma closely comparable to the Schmitzian felt body. However, unlike the soma, the *Leib* refers to a bodily dimension distinct from the physical body, and bears no relation to the mind, which is considered in terms of "artificial (post-Platonic) constructs, whose only purpose is a better scientific-pedagogic-prognostic (rationalistic) control of involuntary bodily-affective life." (Griffero, 2021, p. 18)

The main point of divergence between the two approaches concerns the role of the physical body, which is essential for the melioristic aims of somaesthetics, whereas New Phenomenology

focuses on providing the "alphabet of felt-bodiliness."[4] The latter includes notions such as the felt body, felt-bodily communication, motor suggestions, and synaesthetic qualities, which are taken up and reworked within the atmospheric approach. A somaesthetics of discomfort contributes to this dialogue by foregrounding the felt-bodily dimension of discomfort. Discomfort is an experience of "being at odds with the world" with the environment (2024, p. 28), an experience that Tschaepe associates with what Fredrik Svenaeus defines as illness: "an unhomelike being-in-the-world in which the embodied ways of being-in of the person have been thwarted" (quoted in Tschaepe, 2021).

It is precisely this felt-bodily nature of discomfort that underpins the link between discomfort and inquiry, i.e., the questioning of the mechanisms at the basis of alienation. This link is made tangible by the "feeling of perplexity or puzzlement" (2025, p. 28) in the aporia that marks the Socratic method of inquiry. Following the early American pragmatists (C.S. Peirce, William James, and especially John Dewey), Tschaepe shows that discomfort emerges as the unifying and pervasive tone of a situation that is recognized as problematic because it is felt as difficult, i.e., it is marked by the experience of failure of habits of thought. This elicits doubt and the need to inquiry.

Of this nature is the inquiry that somaesthetics seeks to elicit regarding hegemonic normativity, leveraging the kind of discomfort it generates, thereby giving rise to alienation. The latter is the result of what Tschaepe calls "menhir": "the discomforted normative agent" whose position of privilege "relies on persistent definitions of reality that uphold hegemonic dynamics" (2025, p. 113). When people who identify with the menhir undergo experiences that contradict and disrupt the values they adhere to, they feel an "hegemonic" or "privileged" discomfort. The latter, rather than functioning as an affordance of inquiry and questioning of the menhir, functions as an affordance for the imposition of the normativity implied in the menhir, thereby giving rise to the process of alienation toward those who do not fit within it, who then fall prey to misfit discomfort.

Such a reaction can be explained by the fact that people who misfit the identity categories of the menhir expose the illusory nature of those categories, according to which identity is something fixed and unitary. This unsettles what, for supporters of the norm, is something they feel the need to cling to for a variety of reasons. Accepting the illusory nature of such a notion of identity entails consenting to engage in self-questioning. This means adopting a receptive attitude – Deweyan self-reflection – in which one becomes open to one's own transformation, specifically to "un-suture one's somatic habits to create a critical space for questioning, hypothesizing, and attempts at remedy" (2025, p. 147). To foster this process, a shift must occur in the type of affordances arising from hegemonic discomfort: rather than leading to the imposition of the menhir, it must be transformed into an affordance to inquiry. This only occurs through the medium of something that affords exposure that makes one become vulnerable enough to create counterhegemonic habits: open mindedness, whole heartedness, responsibility, and readiness.

From an atmospherological perspective, these attitudes appear as spurious, counter-atmospheres to that of hegemonic discomfort. The latter, together with misfit discomfort, can be understood as a derivative-relational atmosphere arising from interactions with human and non-human entities (including buildings, means of transportation, and everything through which the menhir is concretely realized). In our analysis of *Arachne*, we will show that the un-suturing of somatic habits associated with the menhir can be fostered through the generation

4 For a more detailed discussion of the comparisons between somaesthetics and both new phenomenology and at-mospheric studies, see Griffero (2021) and (2022), respectively. For a deeper discussion of somaesthetics' position on the mind-body relationship, see Shusterman (2010).

of an atmosphere of complicity that deprives alienation of the footholds it needs to take hold.

Atmospheric interference through discomfort: *Arachne* (2018)

Romina De Novellis is an Italian dancer, anthropologist, and performer based in Paris. Her biographical and artistic trajectory was profoundly shaped by an accident that led to a year of hospitalization, during which she relearned how to walk and was compelled to abandon her career as a dancer. She subsequently turns to performance art, engaging with disability and "out-of-code" bodies, and develops an "intersectional critique of the relationships between patriarchy, capitalism, and the exploitation of female, racialized, nonconforming, trans, and queer++ bodies, within the broader framework of systemic relations between the human, the nonhuman, and the environment" (D'Amico & De Novellis, 2021).

Arachne took place in Apulia, in the Salento, on June 10, 2018, and consists of a 42.9 miles walk carried out over fourteen hours, "from the Chapel of San Paolo in Galatina at dawn, passing through the fields of olive trees under the burning sun, amid the architectures of the extinguished lights, to the very end of Italy, Punta Ristola, where we stayed until sundown, motionless, gazing at the sea" (De Novellis, 2019, pp. 45-46).

The protagonists evoked by this performance are the *tarantate*, the women who, every year during the harvest season, in the Salento, a rural area of Apulia, were traditionally believed to be victims of the bite of the tarantula.[5] This – symbolical – bite leads to convulsive crises; driven by an uncontrollable urge to move, the *tarantate* respond only to the command of the tarantula by which they have been bitten – one they often call by name – which renders them receptive to specific sounds and colors, as well as to certain foods and people, in response to which they launch into the *tarantella*. Literally, the "dance of the little spider," the *tarantella* is made up of small jumps, turns, and broader chiasmatic legs and arms gestures with which the "bitten" person forcefully stomps the ground, as if to simulate the crushing of the spider.

A key role is played by the relationship with the earth: during these crises, women are not only unable to maintain an upright posture while dancing – thus metaphorically defying imposed expectations of composure and decorum – but the earth also represents the tobacco fields, where they were exploited for their labor. These crises, therefore, can be understood as a form of rebellion against that condition. The *tarantella* is a dance of suffering and disobedience. During this dance, women, under the pretext of responding to the commands of the tarantula, withdrew from their roles as wives, mothers, and laborers to assert themselves in their freedom of bodily movement. However, as suggested by De Novellis – and already underlined by Ernesto De Martino (1961)[6] – it was also a strategy through which the system reaffirmed its power.

This is made evident by the role played by religion. The crises of the *tarantate*, in fact, were officially over – albeit only until the following year – through exorcisms performed in the Chapel of St. Paul. The latter is the saint to whom the *tarantate* were forced to ask for grace after a walk between June 28 and 29 (the feast days of Saints Peter and Paul), hidden by the darkness of the night. The walk undertaken by the De Novellis and some of the representants of the "marginalized" women of today, moving in the opposite direction to the ostracizing path imposed on the *tarantate*, in full daylight, brings the alienation into the open and symbolically restores to the *tarantate* their power over themselves.[7]

5 Men were affected by the bite of the tarantula too. However, most of the victims were women.

6 De Martino is the author of an anthropological study of tarantism. (De Martino, 1961) Although this study, as pointed out by De Novellis, undermines the connection between *tarantate*'s rebellion and tarantism, he clearly states that it was a way to maintain the *status quo.*

7 De Novellis characterizes the walk as a "self-care" practice, in response to the "suffering that has been inflicted on us, on our stories, and also on this environment that has borne this drama." (De Novellis, 2021)

This is the aspect that makes *Arachne* apt for an analysis that draws on the somaesthetics of discomfort. Its protagonists, in fact, are not only victims of the alienating system that characterizes the "menhir," and thus subject to misfitting discomfort, but they are also responsible for an operation of disruption directed at the refusal of inquiry that characterizes hegemonic discomfort. This performance, in fact, seems to enhance the restoration of the intimate link between discomfort and inquiry, because it provides a series of affordances that destabilizes the refusal to inquiry since they create a "critical space for questioning" alienation. Our claim is that these affordances are atmospherical – hence the efficaciousness of the intertwining between somaesthetics of discomfort and the atmospherological account – since they are part of the derivative-relational atmospheres that contribute to the formation of a counter-atmosphere of complicity that undermines hegemonic discomfort's basis.

At stake is an operation of exposing and inhibiting the mechanisms of alienation, an operation that is carried out through the counter-affordances conveyed by these factors: the replacement of *tarantella* with walking, the absence of music, and the conditions of its unfolding. The walk takes place in broad daylight rather than at night, its long duration, the physical strain produced by the extended unprotected exposure to sunlight and, in general, the length of the walk, and the state of distress affecting the territory crossed by its participants. These factors provide affordances that foster the generation of an atmosphere of complicity. This is the spurious atmosphere that arises against hegemonic discomfort and those atmospheres of oppression and misfitting experienced by the victims of the alienating system underlying the exorcism of the crises experienced by the *tarantate*.

We will now examine each of these factors and the way in which they give rise to this spurious atmosphere, which provides affordances for inquiry. The replacement of the dance with walking works as affordance for inquiry because it retains the rebellious aspect of the *tarantate*'s convulsive crises while eliminating the idea that they are a symptom of (feminine) hysteria – an impromptu and illusory rebellion – which serves to reaffirm the *status quo.*

The affordances of rebellion inherent in the *tarantella* are here evoked and reactivated, first and foremost, in the inversion of the direction of the walk that shapes *Arachne* in relation to the route that the *tarantate* were compelled to follow on the night between June 28 and 29, as well as in its taking place during the day rather than at night. Secondly, these affordances of rebellion towards the intention of ostracism and elimination inherent in the *tarantate*'s walk manifest, at an atmospheric level, as invitations for passersby to become curious and thus to question the nature of this mode of traversing those territories – one that jars both with the modes of movement tied to everyday activities and with those associated with extraordinary events: from protest demonstrations to religious processions, but also popular or more traditional artistic performances.

What sets this journey apart from a more traditional kind of performance art – one that the "casual" audience of *Arachne* is presumably more accustomed to – is also the absence of music. The invitation to curiosity and to an interrogative attitude is heightened by the fact that the participants in *Arachne* do not interact with passersby. Their silence, in response to the questioning gazes of those they encounter, becomes central to the emergence of a derivative-relational atmosphere of mystery – one also permeated by a sense of determination, perseverance, and, in a certain sense, resistance. This is expressed in their refusal to provide any verbal or physical response, even stopping their walk while questions remain suspended in the air.

This is an affordance to inquiry too because it is an affordance to focus on *Arachne*'s participants' "rebellion" walk. De Novellis explains that the absence of music is integral to demonstrating that the "cure" for tarantism does not involve imposing something external upon

the sufferers, but rather is autonomous and linked to "the capacity and will of these women to express themselves and assert themselves through their bodies in order to exorcise their pain." (De Novellis, Arachne, Inv. 2021-2504)[8] should also be considered in relation to what De Novellis says about music in her performances:

> Music – or, to put it better, noise as an archetypal background – has always been part of my performance art […] the spectator starts from subjective and personal dimensions. The choice of selections in all my works must lead to the viewer's estrangement, starting from real elements in the present-day world. (De Novellis, 2019, p. 9-10)

In *Arachne*, it is the viewer of the video of the performance who experiences this atmospheric affordance of estrangement, and its role as an affordance for inquiry. Emblematic of this is the role of the audio in the 24:52 video available at MAC VAL. While the walk itself unfolds in silence, the video features a soundtrack consisting of a single low tone – something like the sound of radio interference – whose disturbing effect is heightened not only by its gradual increase approximately every twenty seconds, but also by its alternation, after about one to one and a half minutes, with roughly a minute of silence. The sound-noise is unsettling, and its intensification just before it cuts off creates a near sense of anxiety and inevitability, as if emphasizing the unstoppable nature of the walk – its repetitive, almost trance-like quality. The experience of these moments is shaped by the intertwining of two possible perceptions: on the one hand, a feeling of being part of this march, as if one were carried along by its steady pace, underscored by the sound. On the other hand, a sense of intrusion, as if by an inexorable forward movement that advances "against" the camera, the viewer, anyone who might symbolically attempt to deny its existence and its mobile, unstoppable presence.

When the sound cuts off after a crescendo, the discrepant nature of the atmospheric resonance at stake intensifies: one suddenly feels deprived of a tool, almost stripped bare, vulnerable to the lingering effect the noise continues to exert within the viewer, now the only sounding board for images that have become silent. The silence is suddenly *felt*, and the walk takes on an estranging quality, as if it were speaking a language the viewer must learn. These become intense moments of inquiry: the gaze shifts from focused to peripheral, picking up details that enter into a discrepant resonance with both the silence and the images: environmental elements, gestures, subtle variations in light and in the rhythm of the walk that had previously gone unnoticed. The discrepant atmospheric resonance felt by the viewer manifests itself in the activation of a wide range of felt-bodily isles – from the legs to the chest, to everything connected with what these frames evoke emotionally in them. This prompts questions, comparisons, and reflections on the *tarantate* of the past and of today, emphasizing the impact this "white procession" is having on the viewer.

White clearly dominates the performance: the participants in *Arachne* all wear white garments, and their prolonged presence throughout the video heightens the viewer's sensitivity to the color – from flowers, to the paths in inland areas, to clouds, to the foam of the sea, which in the final frame, when the group stops before it, appears as a continuation of their walk. The atmospheric affordances associated with the color white reflect the interplay between the two principal atmospheres of *Arachne*: combativeness and complicity, producing a dual resonance in the viewer that is both attuned and dissonant. The determination and resilience conveyed by the group's steady movement are tempered by the atmospheric affordances linked to the sense of purity and innocence traditionally associated with white – especially in the deeply religious

8 All quotations from this unpublished text by De Novellis are translated from Italian.

context of southern Italy. De Novellis says:

> This walk was neither a protest nor a demand; rather, it was an attempt to begin from conditions of extremity and exclusion in order to leave a trace of the present: the question of gender, women, migrants – all of these are part of ongoing discussions and forms of exclusion in Mediterranean societies. (De Novellis, Arachne, Inv. 2021-2504)

White does not seek to erase the alienation, but to make it visible showing the innocence of the alienated. This is achieved precisely through a dialectical engagement with the religious dimension, at the center of which lies the "white" light of the South. Its function as a counter-affordance emerges in contrast to the atmospheric affordances of concealement, erasure, and even shame embedded in the darkness in which the ostracizing walk of the *tarantate* once took place, as shown in the opening frames of the video. The video begins, in fact, in the dim light of the Chapel of St. Paul: De Novellis stands facing away from the apse, her hair loose, her head and shoulders bare, openly defying the dress code expected in church. These details contribute to the ambiguous atmosphere she sets against the oppressive mood conveyed by the chapel's half-light. The proprioceptive "isles" that carry a dissonant resonance with the performance correspond to the shoulders, the back, the head, and also the feet. De Novellis's walk seems to begin as a gesture of resistance to the sense of oppression emanating from the chapel. When the atmosphere of oppression becomes unbearable to De Novellis, she exits, without turning back, without making the sign of the cross – another transgressed code – into the deserted streets of Galatina, where the purplish-gray light of dawn is reflected and intensified by the color of the stone streets and buildings.

As soon as the first woman joins De Novellis' walk, the nature of the interference shifts: from something that simply appears "out of place" within the context, it becomes something that compels passersby – exclusively men, except along the final stretch by the waterfront – to stop in their tracks. They pause to watch, intrigued. The operation thus takes on a symbolic dimension grounded in a reversal of roles: it is the context itself that becomes the misfit in relation to this silent march, through which the presence of alterity asserts itself without the need for external validation. In doing so, it forces a halt and invites reflection, thereby creating the conditions for the emergence of a receptive attitude and of a potential inquiry.

It is possible because of a change in the alienated individuals' experiences: sharing the walk diminishes the feeling of misfitting that *Arachne*'s participants might otherwise have experienced. This is the result of a relational, derivative-relational atmosphere of complicity that develops among the performers and between the performers and the places they move through.

The atmosphere of complicity that forms among the performers arises from the discrepant atmospheric resonance arisen from the conditions in which the side-by-side walking takes place – sharing the strain of each step imposed by the roughness of the terrain when crossing inland areas, but above all from the effect of the scorching sun over the many long hours of the walk. The performers' faces reveal not only physical fatigue but also a contemplative, meditative state – a reflection on their own pain. The felt-bodily isles affected by the emergence of the derivative-relational atmospheres of complicity are those correspondents to the feet, the legs, the arms, but also the torso. The torso held upright expresses pride and a sense of opposition and self-assertion against the system to which the *tarantate* refused to "bend." The affordances conveyed by this posture evoke respect, attention, and curiosity. All participants are therefore united by this shared, discordant resonance resulting from the long walk in the heat of a Southern Italian summer day without protection from the sun.

Throughout the video, the interaction among the participants is reciprocal. One senses a discrepant atmosphere – in their uncertain gait, in their posture, in their pensive gazes – a dissonant resonance that characterizes this condition. A sense of complicity emerges through the shared experience of walking together and enduring common physical as well as psychological strain – to which their meditative attitude and the intentions underlying the performance refer. This, in turn, extends that complicity to the *tarantate*, thus conveying a cross-temporal connection between those of today and those of the past.

What makes the atmosphere of complicity a disruptive tool against hegemonic forms of discomfort is precisely this sense of communion and unification—one that exceeds the specific conditions through which the discordant resonance of psychophysical fatigue and distress is experienced. It is precisely this resonance that the exorcism of the *tarantate's* crises, along with its alienating dynamics, tends to erase. The disruptive power of this atmosphere of complicity is further reinforced by the fact that the shared experience of discomfort grounds the participants' sense of complicity with the territory:

> I chose – says De Novellis – a *finis terrae*, a territory at the margins of our continent, to project myself into the void and to understand the discomfort of bodies that become silhouettes between the frontier and the horizon […] I wish here to think of the land as both a geographical and a corporeal space, and of remorse as an overwhelming feeling in the face of marginalized people […] Between the bodies of the performers and the body of the surrounding space, I move across a land that bites itself and expresses its discomfort through remorse. (De Novellis, Arachne, Inv. 2021-2504)

This walk represents a response to the "bite" produced by alienation towards those who misfit hegemonic categories. The walking that defines *Arachne* highlights the bond between body and territory, which here appears as a body itself, existing in a condition of discomfort. As De Novellis emphasizes in one of her writings, for years Salento has suffered from desertification, exacerbated by the mismanagement of the disease affecting olive trees – struck by the *Xylella* bacterium – which causes them to wither.

Walking along these sun-scorched roads, among the trunks of dying olive trees, becomes a way of bringing this condition of suffering into public view – denouncing it in complicity with the territory, with which a shared condition of neglect, alienation, and invisibility is established. In this way, *Arachne* makes tangible the idea that the system that produces alienation is itself its first victim. And when the path comes to a halt, it continues to act in the movements of the sea foam, lapping against a land that, through the moving, traversing bodies of the performers, now can reclaim its capacity to "make noise," to become a ground of dissent.

Conclusion

The analysis of noise in works of Dada and in *Arachne* leads to a fruitful dialog among theoretical approaches of embodiment, atmospherics, and discomfort. This perspective has allowed us to connect the synesthetic and affective-bodily nature of noise to its relational character. This enables us to further develop its understanding as a phenomenon of interference – that is, as a destabilization of pre-existing relations within the encounter with artistic and social norms.

The meeting point between Dada poetry and *Arachne* lies precisely in their focus on the transformative power of the body in relation to the conventions, codes, and power structures within which one is situated. This rests upon an underlying disruptiveness, a noisy, discomfort-inducing interference toward such structures. "Elefantenkarawane" does not codify a new

language, just as Arachne does not inaugurate a matriarchy. Rather, in the fragments of meaningless vocal emissions in " Elefantenkarawane" and in the repeated, adaptive, and laborious steps of the performers in *Arachne*, the iterative and inchoative nature of the process of "making sense" of the world through its destabilization emerges. In this way, a space of interference unfolds: a mobile, variable in-betweenness whose boundaries are continually renegotiated, yet which presents itself as a terrain for reconfiguration and the ever-present impulse to regenerate meaning. It is within this in-betweenness that our disciplines intersected, giving rise to a hybrid language through which the phenomenon of noise can be explored.

References

Ball, H. (1974). *Flight Out of Time: A Dada Diary*. Viking Press.

Ball, H. (1984). *Der Künstler und die Zeitkrankheit: Ausgewählte Schriften*. Suhrkamp.

Böhme, G. (2017). *Atmospheric architectures: The aesthetics of felt spaces*. Bloomsbury.

Colombetti, G. (2014). *The Feeling Body: Affective Science Meets the Enactive Mind*. MIT Press.

D'Amico, F. D., & De Novellis, R. (2021, April 30). Attraversare il tempo della luce. Conversazione con Romina De Novellis. *Webzine SCIAMI*. Retrieved March 30, 2026 from https://webzine.sciami.com/attraversare-il-tempo-della-luce-conversazione-con-romina- de-novellis/#fn4740-2.

De Martino, E. (1961). *La terra del rimorso. Contributo a una storia religiosa del Sud*. Il Saggiatore.

Demos, T.J. *The Aesthetics of Exile*. (2005). In Dickerman, L., & Witkovsky, M. S. (Eds.), *The Dada Seminars* (pp. 7-29). National Gallery of Art.

De Novellis, R. *Arachne* (Inv. 2021-2504) [archival document]. Consultation center, MAC VAL, Vitry-sur-Seine, France.

Dickerman, L., Doherty, B. (2005). *Dada: Zurich, Berlin, Hannover, Cologne, New York, Paris*. National Gallery of Art.

Gallagher, S. (2006). *How the Body Shapes the Mind*. Clarendon Press.

Griffero, T. (2014). *Atmospheres: Aesthetics of Emotional Spaces* (Sarah De Sanctis, Trans.), Ashgate.

Griffero, T. (2020a). Better to be in tune: Between resonance and responsibility. *Studi di Estetica*, (2), 9–118.

Griffero, T. (2021b). Corporeal landscapes: Can somaesthetics and new phenomenology come together? *Somaesthetics and Phenomenology, 7*(1), 15–28.

Griffero, T. (2022a). They are there to be perceived. In Z. Djebbara (Ed.), *Affordances in everyday life: A multidisciplinary collection of essays* (pp. 85–95). Springer.

Griffero, T.(2022b). Somaesthetics and pathic aesthetics. In J.J.Abrams(Ed.), *Shusterman's somaesthetics: From hip hop philosophy to politics and performance art* (pp. xx–xx). Brill.

Griffero, T. (2024). *Being a lived body: From a neo-phenomenological point of view*. Routledge.

Huelsenbeck, R. (1964). *Dada; eine literarische Dokumentation.* Rowohlt.

MAC VAL. *Romina de Novellis: Arachne*. Navigart. Retrieved March 30, 2026 from http://www.navigart.fr/macval/artwork/romina-de-novellis-arachne-290000000062188.

Maiese, M. (2010). *Embodiment, Emotion, and Cognition*. Springer.

Matteucci, G. (2019). *Estetica e natura umana. La mente estesa tra percezione, emozione ed espressione*. Roma: Carocci.

Motherwell, R. (1989). *The Dada Painters and Poets: An Anthology*. Harvard University Press.

Peirce, Charles S. (1931–1958). *Collected Papers of Charles S. Peirce*, 8 vols. Edited by Charles Hartshorne, Paul Weiss, and Arthur Burks. Harvard University Press.

Ramdom. *Arachne*. Retrieved March 30, 2026 from http://www.ramdom.net/en/arachne/.

Richter, H. (1964). *Dada Art and Anti-Art*. Thames and Hudson.

Richter, H. (1988). *Dada-Profile*. Verlag Die Arche.

Schmitz, H. (2002). Hermann Schmitz and the new phenomenology. In A. T. Tymieniecka (Ed.), *Phenomenology worldwide: Foundations – expanding dynamics – life – engagements. A guide for research and study* (pp. 491–493). Springer.

Shusterman, R. (2008). *Body consciousness: A philosophy of mindfulness and somaesthetics*. Cambridge University Press.

Shusterman, R. (2010). Soma and psyche. *Journal of Speculative Philosophy*, 24(3), 205–223.

Schmitz, H. (2011). *Der Leib*. De Gruyter.

Schmitz, H. (2019). *New phenomenology: A brief introduction*. Mimesis International. (Original work published 2009).

Snaith, A. (2025). *Writing Noise in Interwar Britain: Literature and the Politics of Sound*. Oxford University Press.

Straus, E. (1960). *Die Formen des Räumlichen: Ihre Bedeutungen für die Motorik und die Wahrnehmung* (1930). In *Psychologie der menschlichen Welt: Gesammelte Schriften* (pp. 141–178). Springer Verlag.

Tschaepe, M. (2021). Somaesthetics of discomfort. *European Journal of Pragmatism and American Philosophy, 13*(1). https://doi.org/10.4000/ejpap.2264

Tschaepe, M. (2024). Misfit mutiny: Somaesthetic discomfort against abjection, oppression, and exclusion of normativity. In L. Koczanowicz (Ed.), *Somapower: Somaesthetics reads politics* (pp. 26–41). Brill.

Tschaepe, M. (2025). *Somaesthetics of discomfort: Addressing identity, normativity, and alienation*. Netherlands: Brill.

Varela, F. J., Rosch, E., & Thompson, E. (1992). *The Embodied Mind: Cognitive Science and Human Experience*. MIT Press.

Wilke, T. (2022). *Sound Writing: Experimental Modernism and the Poetics of Articulation*. University of Chicago Press.

Somathorybics: The Governance of Bodies as Noise

Reza Shirmarz

Department of Communication Studies, Southern Illinois University Carbondale, ORCID: 0000-0002-1565-0351

Abstract: *This article introduces somathorybics as a framework for analyzing how institutions govern embodied presence once bodies are treated as noise rather than communicative media. It identifies four operators of sensory governance: 1) filtration constrains permissible presence and access; 2) compression renders embodied variation administratively actionable; 3) amplification scales vigilance through spectacle and smart systems; and 4) leakage names the everyday return of embodied interference through protest, micro-tactics, writing, and aesthetic indirection. The framework offers a portable vocabulary for describing sensory governance as infrastructural management of bodily legibility, not only discursive control, especially in authoritarian contexts where perception becomes a routine technology. Iran's compulsory modesty regime provides the article's concentrated case and demonstrates how law, culture, surveillance, and everyday enforcement transform women's bodily presence into a perceived form of sensory disorder. In the Iranian case, somathorybics foregrounds the management of embodied legibility, beyond the repression of speech.*

Keywords: *somathorybics, sensory governance, somaesthetics, noise, biopolitics, Iran, hijab*

Introduction

Communication traditions have long positioned embodiment and performance as central to how meaning takes shape, yet they have paid less attention to institutional practices of sensory governance. States and other institutions mark certain bodies as "noise" and govern perception itself by deciding what counts as visible, touchable, olfactory, movable, and vocal. Once institutions classify particular bodies as disorderly noise, governance becomes somatic and prescribes how bodies should appear, smell, move, and be felt in public. This shift recasts noise as political interference and spotlights power's ability to reorganize perception, interactional bandwidth, and affect. Here the signal becomes noise. What once counted as communication is reclassified as interference, and the work of governance moves into the senses.

I call this cross-sensory management of embodied interference *somathorybics*, the governance of bodies as noise. The term combines the Greek for "body" (sôma, σώμα) and "noise" (thórybos, θόρυβος), and it describes how the modesty regime maintains order at the level of bodies. It subsequently contributes to our understanding of how authoritarian regimes maintain order through forms of biopolitical governance and discipline of everyday life. As Heidi Kosonen (2020) observes, biopower and taboo function as regulatory systems that manage "risks and dangers to society," and can even "generate this threat… by their suppression of living and dying" (Kosonen 2020, 48, 60). Somathorybics subsequently marks the practices through which societies govern bodily noises perceived as threats through processes of normalization, categorization, as well as the staging of spectacle, a process that is always incomplete.

This essay specifies four operators of somathorybics. Initially, *filtration* marks a narrowing of sensorimotor capacity. Second, *compression* describes categorical flattening, in which heterogeneous practices are reduced to binary bins like proper vs. improper, and acceptable vs. unacceptable. Third, *amplification* highlights how vigilance is publicized and modeled: peers are enlisted and spectacle is staged (announcements, signage, and cases) to demonstrate the limits of what is allowed. Lastly, *leakage* names the everyday reappearance of interference, through micro-tactics of gaze, scent, color, touch, stride, and collective voice. Together, these elements shape everyday life in Iran, as in many societies, as one of smooth flows of disciplined bodies, with the occasional, undisciplinable eruption.

Iran's modesty regime provides a focused case through which to theorize somathorybics. From 1979 onward, an integrated apparatus of institutional laws, codes, and public pedagogy has construed feminine embodiment as interference to be governed via dress, comportment, proxemics, olfaction, gait, and voice. This article positions Iran as a concentrated case of sensory governance, a mode of maintaining order that classifies certain embodied displays as interference and then builds institutional routines to diminish, standardize, and publicize that interference. This exemplifies biopolitical governance at the level of conduct and everyday existence (Richards 2024, 3). Through an analysis of publicly accessible laws, human-rights reports, and scholarship, this study argues that when the body is governed as noise, perceptual filters are put in place to narrow perception and normalize self-monitoring, and how bodies nonetheless jam the signal by staging interference.

Theorizing Somathorybics

Somathorybics designates a modality of power that does not function merely through the censorship of speech or the regulation of overt messages. Instead, it shows how institutions govern bodies once bodily presence is interpreted as interference. When appearance, voice, movement, or sensorial expression is judged as disruptive noise, governance targets the sensorium itself. Recent somaesthetic–anthropological work frames this governance as the social organization of attention, how "meanings and values become felt qualities in the everyday use of (our) bodies" (Howes and Watson 2025, 5).

The conceptual foundation for this argument emerges at the intersection of two major traditions. On one side, somaesthetics understands the body as the ground of perception, since "the senses belong to and are conditioned by the soma" (Shusterman 1999, 302). It also treats the body as a locus of "meliorative cultivation" through disciplined bodily self-care (Shusterman 2008, 1). On the other side, noise and sonic studies treat "noise" as a political category shaped within war, media infrastructures, and sensory control (Goodman 2010, 6, 34). These studies also frame noise as a moral category grounded in "negative judgement" that authorizes routine regulation of what is classified as unwanted or inconsiderate sound (Thompson 2017, 4). Together, these literatures point to how the state's regulation of noisy bodies plays a crucial role in maintaining political control.

The governance of bodily presence can be analyzed as a question of perceptual conditions rather than message control. In this view, institutions configure the sensorimotor norms through which bodies are made publicly intelligible and socially legitimate. A key set of terms to analyze such processes comes from somaesthetics, which approaches bodily experience as a domain of inquiry as well as cultivation. Shusterman presents the project as simultaneously analytic and practical: "Somaesthetics can be provisionally defined as the critical, meliorative study of the experience and use of one's body" (Shusterman 1999, 302). Later, he stresses that

somaesthetic experience is materially rooted in bodily sensing and orientation, observing that "The somaesthetic senses are often divided into exteroceptive… proprioceptive… and visceral or interoceptive" (Shusterman 2008, 2). On this foundation, somathorybics treats sensorimotor conditions as objects of governance. It focuses on an institutional terrain where perceptual conditioning and bodily legibility are organized ahead of explicit meaning.

An essential turning point in this lineage is that somaesthetic cultivation is never beyond power. Shusterman's engagement with Michel Foucault emphasizes how bodily training can seem innocently "improving" while operating as political discipline; he writes that "'docile bodies' were systematically shaped by seemingly innocent body disciplines to advance certain socio-political agendas" (Shusterman 2000, 538). This insight is directly relevant to somathorybics. Governance does not have to prohibit specific statements. It can instead normalize perception, limit expressive range, and induce bodily compliance through embodied routines and institutional standards. Somaesthetics therefore provides a way to grasp how regimes of legitimacy emerge at the level of posture, gesture, comportment, as well as bodily presence, exactly the domain where bodies can be re-coded as "noise" rather than recognized and treated as communicative agencies.

Noise studies and soundscape scholarship, in turn, offer the political rationale that turns "noise" into a tool of governance. Jacques Attali's political economy of music positions noise as a force bound up with violence and control. He writes, "Noise is a weapon and music, primordially, is the formation, domestication, and ritualization of that weapon" (Attali 1985, 24). This formulation enables somathorybics to approach noise not as simple nuisance, but as a socially actionable designation that authorizes intervention. If music can historically function as the "domestication" of noise, then bodily governance can likewise operate as the domestication of embodied intensity, transforming disruptive bodies into acceptable forms via discipline, containment, and correction. R. Murray Schafer highlights the perceptual and normative aspect of this process by framing noise as the product of trained exclusion: "Noises are the sounds we have learned to ignore" (Schafer 1977, 4). This matters within a somaesthetic frame because bodily noise is not purely acoustic. It also includes culturally regulated bodily sonorities and their everyday legibility (Tarvainen 2019, 13). These claims provide an essential bridge for somathorybics. Noise is not a neutral description but a learned category through which perception is dismissed. In bodily terms, embodiment itself can be governed by teaching publics and institutions to read certain somatic presences, appearances, movements, sounds, or spatial occupations, as disturbances to be ignored, suppressed, or eliminated.

Bodily-noise governance can be understood as a process of normative classification. What becomes administrable is not measurable volume of sound. It is the moral judgment that renders a presence excessive or improper. Marie Thompson makes this shift explicit by arguing that noise judgment is rooted in affect and morality rather than acoustic properties alone. She argues that noise is formed through evaluative classification. Thompson writes, "A subject-oriented definition frames noise as a negative judgement of sound" (Thompson 2017, 4). She also emphasizes that "noise is both the subject of this book and its methodological strategy" (Thompson 2017, 4). On this account, noise governance operates as the regulation of what is treated as disruptive, contaminating, or out of place. Read alongside somathorybics, Thompson's formulation clarifies why institutions discipline bodies not primarily because they "lack meaning," but because embodied expressivity is rendered an illegitimate intensity that must be corrected, suppressed, or as I describe it, filtered.

To theorize the governance of bodily noise with precision, it is necessary to foreground voice and orality as domains where embodied remainder is made governable. Mladen Dolar provides a precise conceptual tool by characterizing voice as the material support of meaning

that nonetheless remains excessive to meaning. He writes that "the voice is the material support of bringing about meaning, yet it does not contribute to it itself." He distills this point into a succinct methodological proposition, stating that "the voice… is what does not contribute to making sense" (Dolar 2006, 15). This is the kind of threshold phenomenon somathorybics brings into view. Bodies are governed not just at the level of speech content, but through the embodied textures that spill beyond semantic control. Accordingly, institutions permit voice as long as it appears as a transparent conduit for intelligibility, yet they routinely intervene when voice becomes audible as body (timbre, accent, loudness, breath, trembling, and stutter), since the material remainder of voice can be construed as disturbance instead of meaning. Steven Connor pushes the discussion past the conceptual by assembling a rich, detailed archive of non-lexical vocal events like hums, sobs, and stutters, where bodily expressivity is rendered vulnerable to correction as well as shame. His depiction of sobbing as a break in speech illustrates how vocal materiality becomes governable: "The sob is at once a mangling of speech by inarticulate crying" (Connor 2014, 58). Furthermore, recent scholarship on somaesthetics and voice also widens the object beyond "speech" to bodily sound in general. Shusterman includes "laughing, screaming, coughing, sneezing, hissing, moaning, shouting and whistling," as well as "unwanted bodily sounds in our everyday lives" (Shusterman 2012c, 27, as quoted in Tarvainen 2019, 13).

Oral materiality (i.e., breath, spit, wheeze, and pant) further concretizes this politics by showing how interior bodily life is translated into public exposure. Brandon LaBelle's mouth-centered analysis gives a vocabulary for analyzing how vocal embodiment is policed as improper noise. Describing the sonic corporeality of sound poetry, he notes, "It wheezes, it spits, it moans and pants" (LaBelle 2014, 66). These descriptions are not simply aesthetic. They signal the governance problem somathorybics identifies. Bodily vocality becomes actionable as disturbance when institutions confer legitimacy on disembodied rationality and treat oral materiality as excessive or contaminating. In this sense, the mouth becomes one of the most politically vulnerable sites of bodily-noise governance because it publicly exposes the body's living materiality.

Bodily-noise governance involves more than regulating messages, it also organizes perception itself, it shapes how environments condition what becomes sensible, tolerable, and socially processable. For somathorybics, this way of organizing perception highlights a contemporary understanding of governance as increasingly infrastructural. Bodies are governed through environmental and systemic arrangements that surveil, categorize, and intervene in embodied intensity. The governance aspect is made even more apparent in scholarship that conceptualizes perception itself as a sphere of control. Steve Goodman's theorization of sonic power supplies a vocabulary to understand governance as sensory conditioning: "Media technologies discipline, mutate, and preempt the affective sensorium" (Goodman 2010, 34). This line directly supports somathorybics by recasting regulation as environmental and pre-discursive. Instead of simply banning speech, institutions can regulate perception, shape mood, intensify vigilance, and secure compliance through affective conditioning. Goodman further locates this process within infrastructures that connect organisms and systems, observing "a symbiosis of noise, bodies, and machines" (Goodman 2010, 6).

Noise classifications are better understood as epistemically made rather than neutral phenomena. They are not simply discovered in nature but generated via conceptual frameworks and trained listening practices. When institutions label bodily expression as noise, they regulate a regime of perception, authorizing some presences as meaningful while dismissing others as disturbance. Nina Sun Eidsheim states this bluntly and decisively: "how we think about sound matters" (Eidsheim 2015, 3). She reinforces the claim that noise classifications can function to

diminish or silence particular voices and bodies. Such as view, also grounds somathorybics as governance of the sensorium, not merely of discourse.

Bodily-noise governance can also be read through design logics. Technological paradigms structure bodily attention and legitimacy by prioritizing what can be disciplined. Concurrently, contemporary work in somaesthetic design shows that governance increasingly functions through technological paradigms that organize bodily attention and legitimacy. Höök and colleagues identify a profound absence within "embodied" design. They argue that "the actual corporeal, pulsating, live, felt body has been notably absent from both theory and practical design work" (Höök et al. 2015, 27). This critique has been echoed in disability design scholarship arguing that mainstream design often assumes a "standard body" and marginalizes difference through dis-ablism, in part because commercial design is market-oriented and organized around a "profitable standard" (Das and Ventura 2025, 94, 97).

The governance of bodily-noise can be amplified by interfaces and institutional technologies that convert bodily difference into deviation, and therefore, into an actionable target for correction. In this sense, cultivation is politically ambivalent rather than automatically emancipatory. Bodily experience can be cultivated for flourishing, but it can also be cultivated through regimes that establish and police bodily legitimacy. A. Tarvainen's integration of somaesthetics with music and voice confirms the compatibility and coherence of these claims, stressing cultivation as a defining somaesthetic principle: "One of the main ideas of somaesthetics is that bodily experience can be cultivated" (Tarvainen 2019, 8). Somathorybics takes this principle further by foregrounding the political stakes of cultivation. Bodily experience is not merely cultivated for flourishing; it is also governed through regimes that define and police bodily legitimacy.

Taken as a whole, these literatures provide the conceptual basis for somathorybics as a theoretical contribution by converging on a common claim: governance can function through perceptual conditioning and the management of embodied legibility. Somaesthetics legitimizes the body as cultivated perception and indicates how bodily discipline can be organized toward socio-political agendas. Noise and soundscape scholarship treat disturbance as a political and moral category formed through trained perception and enforcement. Voice and mouth scholarship demonstrates how embodied vocal remainder becomes governable precisely as it escapes semantic containment. Sonic warfare and vibrational listening locate governance in the affective sensorium and at the level of the epistemic making of sound itself. Somaesthetic design carries this trajectory by showing how institutional-technological systems confer bodily legitimacy through standards and interfaces oriented toward regularized variables, often at the expense of felt embodiment. Across these traditions, however, what remains under-developed is a single framework that specifies the institutional operators by which bodies are governed as noise across multiple nonverbal channels. Somathorybics fills this gap by defining governance not as a singular prohibition but as the four operators, filtration, compression, etc. in my schema, that restructure the sensorium and make bodily legitimacy actionable.

Somathorybics in Practice

This analysis suggests that a state can move beyond censoring speech. When bodily presence is read as interference, governance is routinized through habitual operators that reconfigure public perception and redefine what can be seen, heard, sensed, and safely performed in public. In Iran's modesty regime, "order" seeks to intervene in the body's perceptual legibility: what the body looks like, how it sounds, how it moves, how close it can be, and how it may appear in public.

To make the mechanism easy to follow, this section sets out the four previously-mentioned operators, and works through them as recurring ways institutions govern bodily noise. These operators do not refer to a single actor or a single episode of enforcement. They recur as administrative and cultural practices that fix a perceptual model of proper presence. Departures from that template become actionable grounds for warnings, reporting, and, eventually, punishment. Human Rights Watch's (2024) account bears out this logic, noting that the law "consolidates many measures already in place… and imposes additional severe penalties."

The evidence base comes from publicly available texts and documentation, including the Center for Human Rights in Iran's English translation of the Law to Support the Family Through Promotion of the Culture of Chastity and Hijab (2024), also from human-rights reporting on enforcement practices and institutional harms, and interpretive support from historical and academic accounts of post-revolutionary gender politics, women's protest, and cultural production. For the purposes of this analysis, the focus is on how the governing mechanism works, not a comprehensive account of social history.

Finally, the cultural field, including cinema, performance, music, visual art, and publishing matters in this sense because, by virtue of its circulation and repetition, it serves as a shared rehearsal space, continually training and habituating perception to standards of what counts as legitimate embodiment. The law itself positions arts and media as a central arena of governance, it explicitly identifies the "production and broadcasting of films and television series" as means to promote "Islamic lifestyle" and "chastity and hijab" (Center for Human Rights in Iran 2024, articles 8 and 9). On these grounds, arts are included not as an extra topic, but as a focal space where filtration, compression, and amplification are brought into view, and where aesthetic workaround takes form as leakage.

Filtration

Filtration is the operator by which acceptable presence gets pared down. It operates by tightening the spectrum of bodily forms that can show up without sanction, and marks improper embodiment as grounds for removal or corrective action. From a surveillance perspective, this is best understood as an access technology, since classifications function as "invisible doors that permit access to or exclude from participation" (Lyon 2003, 13). In practice, this filtration installs a threshold logic of participation, as Guidance Patrols "aim mainly to bar improperly veiled women from entering public spaces" (Akbari 2019, 6). This extends from parks and shopping centers to metro and bus stations, universities, government offices, cafés and restaurants, and cultural venues like cinemas or concerts, so entry depends on passing a bodily checkpoint.

In accounts of biometric bordering, the mechanism is cast as filtration, whose "ultimate aim" is "the filtering of presumably useful from non-useful border crossers" (Amoore 2006, 344). Within the built environment, filtration is anchored in exclusionary ownership logics: "property rights are necessarily exclusive," permitting the possessor "to exclude unwanted people from access" (Mitchell 2003, 19). The same access logic is further substantiated by UN expert reporting, which states that authorities "deny [women] access to public institutions, including hospitals, schools, government offices and airports, if they do not cover their hair" (United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights 2023).

Beyond access points, filtration also governs bodily appearance. It targets contour, movement, and exposure. *Minimizing visible contour* limits what can be read as bodily shape. Denunciations of "hair, curves, and bare skin" set concealment as the perceptual benchmark (Abdmolaei 2019, 117), and scrutiny includes "the length and fit of… sleeves, trousers and uniforms" (Amnesty

International 2024). *Limiting movement expressivity* similarly positions dress as a constraint on women's "bodily mobility" and as a disciplinary mechanism "intended to regulate women's movements and limit their access to public spaces" (Abdmolaei 2019, 21, 89). *Regulating hair and skin exposure* operates as a visibility threshold that marks the outer limits of what may register as publicly legible in the first place (Abdmolaei 2019, 21, 89, 117). In Islamic legal-ethical terms, this threshold is commonly mapped via the concept of awra, the designation of bodily zones that must be concealed, with specifications that vary across traditions and contexts (Boulanouar 2006). The point here is less doctrinal adjudication than institutional translation, how modesty vocabularies are made enforceable standards of public legibility.

In combination, these elements drive home that filtration is not only a dress rule, it is an access rule, one that works its way through domains of social life and not just clothing (Akbari 2019, 6; Parsa 2022, 87). When voice itself is gated (i.e., what venues may host women singers, what audiences may hear them, and what platforms may carry their sound), collective participation ends up contingent on passing a sensory checkpoint. Filtration thus works as a cross-domain eligibility test, governing who can enter, perform, work, and circulate in public space without being read as a disruptive presence.

The mechanism carries over to sound, where rules regulate when women's voices are permitted to be publicly heard as voice. Even as some constraints have softened, the state has "maintained its archaic ban on solo female vocals," redirecting women's singing into choirs, women-only venues, or online circulation rather than mixed audience performance (Siamdoust 2023, 578; Nooshin 2018). Practically, women vocalists are channeled into constrained formats. One singer reported, "I am… only allowed to work if I perform with a man," and described the difficulty of staging even women-only solo concerts (Center for Human Rights in Iran 2018). Enforcement can also be punitive. Singer Hiwa Seyfizade was reportedly arrested during a live performance after an official cited "unauthorised solo singing," alongside other detentions and account closures linked to women's performances (Amnesty International 2025).

Filtration is not only spatial. Beyond parks, malls, and metro gates, and beyond regulating clothing as a dress code, it reaches into employability and bureaucratic legitimacy by making "proper" appearance a condition for recognition as a legitimate professional, worker, or client of the state. The instruction to "dress with dignity and avoid appearing cheap or exposed in offices" captures the workplace as a conditional entry site, with the office effectively operating as a perceptual checkpoint (Sanasarian 1982, 126). The same logic appears in routine form. Women are "obliged to wear the Islamic hijab… including in workplaces," and documenting how compliance can shape access and standing, ranging from chador requirements for female lawyers (and guards denying entry) to workplace penalties and employer bans on women's make-up (Human Rights Watch 2017, 47–48).

Mobility is subject to filtration, so traversing the city becomes a sequence of potential checkpoints, stops and diversions. Testimonies document metro entrances where officials "do not allow you to enter," avoidance strategies such as staying off public transport to reduce encounters, and counter-measures including car impoundment and fines (Amnesty International 2024, 7). Mobility governance can take an infrastructural form, with "improper hijab… [being] captured on CCTV cameras on the roads," which effectively places the checkpoint inside circulation itself (Akbari 2019, 7). Transit is further reorganized through gendered mobility infrastructure, including "women-only buses and taxis" (Shahrokni 2020, 3), while the same eligibility logic carries into institutional gates and service systems, from denial of entry to "around 200" women students at a university entrance for not wearing the hijab, and spillover into health systems via pharmacy shutdowns and directives which require "Islamic dress code" for patients as well as

medical staff (UN Fact-Finding Mission on Iran 2024, 8). The cumulative effect is procedural, as access to transit, education, travel, banking, and services is repeatedly conditioned through filtering encounters where visibility itself can call forth exclusion.

Even without an overt stoppage, filtration exerts probabilistic force by shaping spatial routes and producing anticipatory self-governance. People move through the city as though policing were patchy and spatially uneven, selecting routes, venues, and times, where scrutiny is less probable. In Iranian fashion market interviews, one participant reports "search[ing] for the right place and time (where and when the police forces are less likely to be present)" and learning "safe locations" where one can go "without worrying about facing the police" (Ghaffari et al. 2019, 438).

The same dynamic appears as "going around moral police patrols," with collective tactics to track patrol movements and avoid their presence (Akbari 2019, 10). Evidence shows that anticipation restructures micro-decisions in advance, from avoiding parking "in busy places" and preferring "online taxi services" to reducing harassment risk, to avoiding public transport altogether, "We prefer to use our cars rather than using public transport" in order to minimize recurring entry-point confrontations (Amnesty International 2024, 2, 7). Women are similarly portrayed as "search[ing] for… secluded and unpopulated areas" to avoid "the prying gaze… of guards on the lookout for transgressors" (Shahrokni 2020, 11). In somathorybic terms, this kind of surveillance amounts to filtration by anticipatory avoidance. Proxemics and urban choreography are recalibrated not merely by checkpoints themselves, but by the learned forecasts of where a noise classification is most likely to occur.

Collectively, these mechanisms clarify why filtration is best framed as cross domain gatekeeping. It operates at entry points through threshold gating, within appearance through contour, movement, and exposure, within sound through vocal audibility, within work through professional recognition, within services through denial and refusal, and within mobility through both stoppage and anticipatory routing. In each instance, the state does more than enforce a rule. It establishes the terms under which bodies can appear, move, and be heard as legitimate. Filtration consequently acts as a cross domain eligibility test that determines who can enter, work, perform, circulate, and travel, in public space without being cast as a disruptive presence.

Compression

Compression follows filtration. Once perception has been narrowed, governance aims to make what remains rapidly sortable and actionable. What is at stake is a project of legibility that converts complex lived differences into administratively useful facts that can be processed and compared. Those comparisons often rely on standardizing heterogeneous appearances into a continuum so cases can be ranked, matched to a rule, and handled with minimal deliberation (Scott 1998, 80-81). This underlying move is as commensuration, where qualitative differences are converted into comparable quantities that can move through bureaucratic procedures (Espeland and Stevens 1998, 316). The consequences are not simply descriptive, because "classifications and standards give advantage or they give suffering" (Bowker and Star 1999, 6). At the enforcement interface, compression is maintained through routine decision devices that simplify clients and situations under constraint, so that the frontline practice of the lowest level administrator effectively becomes policy in action (Lipsky 2010, xii–xiii).

Enforcement in the case of Iran reveals compression most sharply through the catch-all category of "improper hijab," a category flexible enough to consolidate many sensory details

into one actionable label. The regime and policing discourse often gloss this as "bad hijab" (Persian: *bad-hejabi*), a broad designation for perceived "improper veiling" under compulsory hijab rules. This is why the definition remains unstable. The regime does not apply a stable or uniform meaning of "bad hijab," and assessments can pivot on granular cues like clothing color or tightness, or whether trousers are tucked into boots, so heterogeneous appearances are routinely compressed into a single enforcement category (Justice for Iran 2014, 3).

The compressive logic is evident in the way "bad hijab" is operationalized through an enumerative checklist of visible particulars such as hair showing, make-up, uncovered arms or legs, "thin and see-through" or tight clothing, and garments marked by "foreign" signs, so that multiple micro variations can be compressed into one sanctionable label (Pakpour 2015, 77). This legal-administrative definition also resonates with historical documentation of postrevolutionary regulation and ethnographic emphasis on everyday moral police enforcement and the extension of proper veiling into comportment and voice (Paidar 1995; Khosravi 2008). Somathorybically, the mechanism works by turning perceptual variation into a quick administrative decision, illustrated by the report's account of Mahsa Amini being detained on allegations of "improper hijab" and taken to the Vozara detention center to be "educated" about hijab restrictions (Human Rights Center, UC Berkeley School of Law 2025, 6).

The same logic works rhetorically by pushing dissent into moral extremes, so complex motives register legible only as a punishable "type." Women protesting compulsory veiling were branded with delegitimating sexualized labels, "naked women," "whores," and "American agents," compressing plural political claims into a single immoral category (Sanasarian 1982, 125). Contemporary documentation echoes the same moralizing compression through the language of chastity, noting threats of acid attacks and disfigurement as a tactic used to terrorize women considered "unchaste," a term that collapses a range of public behaviors into one stigmatized moral designation (Human Rights Center, UC Berkeley School of Law 2025, 19).

The 2024 chastity-and-hijab law formalizes compression by translating broad appearance categories into countable occurrences with a standardized escalation ladder. Under Article 48, after identity verification through police "smart platforms" and databases, the first instance fine is suspended but "will be notified… using smart platforms, SMS or the mail," with higher penalties triggered by repetition across subsequent instances, thereby turning embodied variation into an administratively tracked series of occurrences (Center for Human Rights in Iran 2024, 34).

In parallel, a reporting app workflow requires users to choose the "type of violation" including "improper hijab" or "removal of hijab," after which the app generates a real time text message to the registered vehicle owner, which makes compression a literal decision tree that converts perception into a standardized output (Independent International Fact Finding Mission on the Islamic Republic of Iran 2024, 13).

Compression also yields aesthetic templates. After the field is narrowed to proper versus improper, "proper" hardens into a recognizable look that is readily governed. Enforcement can hinge on fine-grained style markers like clothing color, tightness, and even boots while the official label stays broad and variable, so the category is reproduced via shifting style judgments instead of a stable definition. The judgment of entertainment agent is accepted as sufficient evidence. This is how broadness gets stabilized in practice. It is translated into discrete, legible labels like "no head covering" and "inappropriate dress," which then serve as standardized inputs for escalation. Compression recodes sensory nuance into administrable categories, and those categories return to everyday perception as common sense templates for identifying deviation.

Amplification

Amplification scales vigilance so that enforcement becomes an atmosphere, a felt quality that exceeds any single object or agent, "a quality which does not belong to them in their own right" (Anderson 2009, 79). It makes boundaries visible and widens vigilance by distributing surveillance across perception and social relations. Signage "emphasises the existence of surveillance and thereby amplifies its effect" (Cole 2004, 432), and lateral surveillance draws peers into monitoring so that "all are simultaneously urged to become spies" (Andrejevic 2005, 479). Media circulation, when repeated, stabilizes boundary cues by turning them into familiar scenes. Given that "spectacle itself is becoming one of the organizing principles of the economy, polity, society, and everyday life" (Kellner 2005, 58), warnings, recording, deputization, and exemplary cases operate less as isolated events and more as an ambient, continuous signal of risk.

One of the main amplification mechanisms is *distributed witnessing*. Article 36 of the 2024 law explicitly calls on public participation: "Citizens can report acts of unveiling, improper dress, or obscene clothing…" through a designated system (Center for Human Rights in Iran 2024, 26). This is amplification by design. Enforcement is no longer confined to police encounters but made ambient by the possibility that anyone can become a reporting node, a shift in which "surveillance responsibilities are being distributed to the public" (Reeves 2012, 240).

Documentation optics increasingly drives this operator, with photographing and recording functioning not only to punish but to teach watchability. Official statements indicate women deemed improperly veiled "would be photographed and filmed and handed over to the judiciary" (Justice for Iran 2014, 42). The recording act does more than capture evidence. It teaches the public that bodies are legible data and that classification can pursue you beyond the street, echoing the logic of "transforming the body into pure information" (Haggerty and Ericson 2000, 613).

By prioritizing smart systems, the law intensifies amplification through *automating detection and escalation*. Article 48 outlines a move toward "introducing smart platforms and systems… and using modern technology" to support identification and warning (Center for Human Rights in Iran 2024, 35). In somathorybic terms, amplification works by widening the sensing apparatus and converting perception into scalable infrastructure, consistent with the finding that "the proliferation of automatic alert systems makes it possible to systematically surveil an unprecedentedly large number of people" (Brayne 2017, 978).

Deterrence is also scaled through exemplary sanctions that extend beyond the punished person, including penalties, work restrictions, educational and professional consequences, and the public circulation of cases. Even when penalties are applied unevenly, their visibility and constant mention amplify the perceived boundary. The rationale is stated directly in the claim that "forms of public shaming and humiliation … are valued … precisely because of their unambiguously punitive character" (Garland 2001, 9).

Early post-revolutionary contention also reveals amplification through *counter spectacle and rumor*. A large counter-demonstration recasts protesters as enemies, while rumors identified women on the other side as wives of former SAVAK officials, the Shah's pre-1979 secret police and intelligence agency, widely associated with surveillance and political repression, (Sanasarian 1982, 126). Here amplification takes the form of narrative infrastructure. Interpretation is policed alongside garments, and the dynamic aligns with panic dynamics where a key distortion is "exaggerating grossly the seriousness of the events and the numbers involved" (Cohen 2011, 26).

A further mechanism is *cultural policy saturation*, which repeatedly circulates the perceptual template via high bandwidth media. Threats are framed in explicitly cultural media terms in the 2024 law, which names Hollywood, home theater networks, cyberspace, satellite channels, and computer games as vectors of influence (Center for Human Rights in Iran 2024, 6). This is amplification through image circulation at scale, matching the claim that "the spectacle is not merely the apparatus of media, but the relations between individuals themselves, as mediated by the stream of images…" (Debord 2021, 17). Somathorybics names this shift: enforcement becomes an atmosphere, where bodies are governed not only by rules and agents but by scalable perceptual infrastructures that make vigilance feel continuous.

Leakage

Leakage refers to how interference tactically reappears, as bodies re-thicken perception under constraint. The term is not meant to romanticize resistance. It is also not a claim that all modesty practice is oppressive. Instead, it functions as a neutral mechanism category for how controlled systems generate everyday micro-variations, workarounds, and occasional eruptions that exceed the intended filter (Scott 1990, 199). Through the lens of epistemic disobedience, leakage becomes a struggle over what counts as public knowledge of the body, marking moments when embodied practice, testimony, and aesthetic form refuse the regime's authorized templates for what can be seen, said, or believed (Mignolo 2009, 159–160; Rancière 2004, 12). In this sense, leakage involves practices that make perceptible what dominant interpretive frames obscure and practices that build shared, cooperative capacities to insist on alternative intelligibilities, not simply individual acts of defiance (Fricker 2007, 162; Medina 2013, 26).

Everyday micro tactics across senses also generate this effect, as small adjustments thicken agency without necessarily taking the form of overt defiance. Somathorybic micro-tactics include glance choreography, time-shifted fragrance, chromatic seams and texture accents, widened stride under crowd concealment, cooperative haptics in crowds, and choral voicing that diffuses individual timbre into collective sound. The aim here is not romanticization but recognition. These acts are ordinary byproducts of a perceptual regime that induces continuous self-management where power is organized so that it "should be visible and unverifiable" (Foucault 1977, 110).

Writing and cultural voice can operate as leakage by restoring presence where visibility is constrained. The logic is expressed in the statement that "Writing… could be considered no less a transgression than unveiling" (Milani 1992, 6). Here leakage not limited to bodily display can include the reappearance of voice, authorship, and public address as embodied stakes, particularly where excluded groups must "invent and circulate counterdiscourses" and "formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs" (Fraser 1990, 67).

A key boundary condition for somathorybics is that the veil is not merely a compliance object but also a communicative medium with multiple meanings. Veiling can function as a communicative practice whose meanings shift with context, and in some settings it can become "a vehicle for resistance" (El Guindi 1999, 13). This matters for analytic neutrality. Somathorybics tracks governance operators instead of fixing a single moral meaning of covering, and this fits the broader claim that "dress is a situated bodily practice … embedded within social relations" (Entwistle 2000, 17).

Artists often emerge as specialists in leakage because art is built on *indirection, coding, and rerouting*. In cinema, leakage is frequently achieved through stylistic workaround, including

lighting, staging, framing, allegory, offscreen implication, and controlled sound. The example of strategic concealment, unveiling "masked by a lighting scheme that strategically covers…" (Naficy 2012, 124), demonstrates the ambivalence of leakage, which simultaneously operates as constraint compliance while keeping bodily presence partially available. This dynamic can be situated within the broader politics of indirect expression under domination, where a "hidden transcript" serves as a "critique of power" spoken "behind the back of the dominant" (Scott, 1990, xii).

Sound is another channel of leakage. Although rules of modesty forbid women from singing publicly, these prohibitions do not fully hold. Moments still occur when a woman's singing voice "breaks through" the barrier (Naficy 2012, 476). The voice here is bodily remainder, audible presence that exceeds permitted categories and cannot be fully compressed, which recalls the affective exposure that can accompany vocal emergence, where "an affect of shame… accompanies voice" (Dolar 2006, 90).

Finally, leakage often forces recalibration, as new tactics invite new countermeasures, which revise the filter. The procedural design of the 2024 law, including identification systems, warnings, and escalating steps (Center for Human Rights in Iran 2024, 35), suggests institutional anticipation of leakage, and a feedback-ready apparatus built to absorb, classify, and respond to recurring reappearances of interference. This adaptive logic reflects the control-society premise that "you never finish anything" (Deleuze 1992, 65), because governance operates via continuous adaptation instead of reaching a settled endpoint.

Closing Synthesis

Across the case materials, the four operators work as a cycle rather than a sequence. They repeatedly somathorybify public space by converting embodied variation into governable noise and by making self-monitoring routine. Somathorybics reads official categories as instruments of rule and tracks alternative knowledges of presence that persist under constraint. Filtration sets the terms of appearance by deciding who may appear, where, and in what form. Compression makes embodiment actionable by sorting variation into proper and improper templates and by recoding dissent as a case. Amplification scales deterrence through recordings, witnesses, and circulation that normalize boundaries as common sense. Leakage returns interference through protest, counter-spectacle, and micro-tactics in writing and performance. Leakage does not end the apparatus. It forces recalibration and the cycle restarts under revised thresholds.

By specifying somathorybics as the process that makes bodies governable as noise, its main contribution is a transportable vocabulary for sensory governance that lets communication theory describe bodily legibility as something managed through infrastructure, not just through discourse. Institutions can govern the body as an object of perception and administration, but they cannot govern "the soma" as lived experience, which persists as a site of excess and return. Although this article treats Iran as a concentrated case, versions of this system have emerged, and can emerge, across very different political settings, whenever institutions treat embodied presence as an interference problem to be managed. The operator set generalizes to other arenas where bodies are treated as noise to be filtered, compressed, amplified, and managed, including schools and workplaces, cultural and media industries, clinical and therapeutic regimes, and platform moderation systems where perception itself becomes a political technology.

References

Abdmolaei, Shirin. 2019. *Chic Resistance: Women, Fashion, and Politics in Iran.* Women Living Under Muslim Laws.

Akbari, Azadeh. 2019. *Spatial|Data Justice: Mapping and Digitised Strolling against Moral Police in Iran.* Development Informatics Working Paper no. 76. Centre for Development Informatics, Global Development Institute, The University of Manchester. https://hummedia.manchester.ac.uk/institutes/gdi/publications/workingpapers/di/di_wp76.pdf

Amnesty International. 2024. "Iran: Draconian Campaign to Enforce Compulsory Veiling Laws through Surveillance and Mass Car Confiscations." March 6. https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2024/03/iran-draconian-campaign-to-enforce-compulsory-veiling-laws-through-surveillance-and-mass-car-confiscations/

Amnesty International. 2025. "Iran: Authorities Target Women's Rights Activists with Arbitrary Arrest, Flogging and Death Penalty." March 17. https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2025/03/iran-authorities-target-womens-rights-activists-with-arbitrary-arrest-flogging-and-death-penalty/

Amoore, Louise. 2006. "Biometric Borders: Governing Mobilities in the War on Terror." Political Geography 25 (3): 336–351. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.polgeo.2006.02.001

Anderson, Ben. 2009. "Affective Atmospheres." *Emotion, Space and Society* 2 (2): 77–81. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.emospa.2009.08.005

Andrejevic, Mark. 2005. "The Work of Watching One Another: Lateral Surveillance, Risk, and Governance." *Surveillance & Society* 2 (4): 479–497. https://doi.org/10.24908/ss.v2i4.3359

Attali, Jacques. 1985. *Noise: The Political Economy of Music*. Translated by B. Massumi. University of Minnesota Press.

Boulanouar, Aisha Wood. 2006. "The Notion of Modesty in Muslim Women's Clothing: An Islamic Point of View." *New Zealand Journal of Asian Studies* 8 (2): 134–156.

Bowker, Geoffrey C., and Susan Leigh Star. 1999. *Sorting Things Out: Classification and Its Consequences*. MIT Press.

Brayne, Sarah. 2017. "Big Data Surveillance: The Case of Policing." *American Sociological Review* 82 (5): 977–1008. https://doi.org/10.1177/0003122417725865

Center for Human Rights in Iran. 2018. "She's a Professional Iranian Singer but Is Banned from Singing on Stage in Her Country." January 24. https://iranhumanrights.org/2018/01/iranian-female-vocalist-we-never-get-a-chance-to-practice-our-art-in-a-professional-setting/

Center for Human Rights in Iran. 2024. *Translation of the Islamic Republic of Iran's "Law to Support the Family Through Promotion of Culture of Chastity and Hijab"*. December. (Translated from the original Farsi into English by CHRI; Farsi version published by Vokala Press on November 30, 2024.) https://iranhumanrights.org/wp-content/uploads/Hijab-Law-Final-CHRI-Translation.pdf

Cohen, Stanley. 2011. *Folk Devils and Moral Panics: The Creation of the Mods and Rockers*. 3rd ed. Routledge.

Cole, Mark. 2004. "Signage and Surveillance: Interrogating the Textual Context of CCTV in the UK." *Surveillance & Society* 2 (2/3): 430–445. https://doi.org/10.24908/ss.v2i2/3.3387

Connor, Steven. 2014. *Beyond Words: Sobs, Hums, Stutters and Other Vocalizations*. Reaktion Books.

Das, Shilpa, and Jonathan Ventura Shenkar. 2025. "Somaesthetic Socio-Cultural Design for Disability: Rethinking Body Marginality." *The Journal of Somaesthetics* 11 (1): 92–111. https://doi.org/10.54337/ojs.jos.v11i1.10586

Debord, Guy. 2021. *The Society of the Spectacle*. Edited by R. Adams. Unredacted Word.

Deleuze, Gilles. 1992. "Postscript on the Societies of Control." October 59: 3–7.

Dolar, Mladen. 2006. *A Voice and Nothing More*. MIT Press.

Eidsheim, Nina Sun. 2015. *Sensing Sound: Singing and Listening as Vibrational Practice*. Duke University Press.

El Guindi, Fadwa. 1999. *Veil: Modesty, Privacy and Resistance*. Berg.

Entwistle, Joanne. 2000. *The Fashioned Body: Fashion, Dress and Modern Social Theory*. Polity Press.

Espeland, Wendy N., and Mitchell L. Stevens. 1998. "Commensuration as a Social Process." *Annual Review of Sociology* 24: 313–343. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.soc.24.1.313

Foucault, Michel. 1977. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. Translated by A. Sheridan. Pantheon Books.

Fraser, Nancy. 1990. "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy." *Social Text*, no. 25/26: 56–80.

Fricker, Miranda. 2007. *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing*. Oxford University Press.

Garland, David. 2001. *The Culture of Control: Crime and Social Order in Contemporary Society.* Oxford University Press.

Ghaffari, Mahsa, Aliakbar Jafari, and Özlem Sandıkcı. 2019. "The Role of Mundane and Subtle Institutional Work in Market Dynamics: A Case of Fashion Clothing Market." *Journal of Business Research* 105: 434–442. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2019.03.029

Goodman, Steve. 2010. *Sonic Warfare: Sound, Affect, and the Ecology of Fear*. MIT Press.

Haggerty, Kevin D., and Richard V. Ericson. 2000. "The Surveillant Assemblage." *The British Journal of Sociology* 51 (4): 605–622. https://doi.org/10.1080/00071310020015280

Höök, Kristina, Anna Ståhl, Martin Jonsson, Jennifer Mercurio, Anna Karlsson, and Eva-Carin Banka Johnson. 2015. "Somaesthetic Design." Interactions 22 (4): 27–33. https://doi.org/10.1145/2770888

Howes, David, and Mark K. Watson. 2025. "Somatic Attention: An Introduction to Somaesthetics and Anthropology." The Journal of Somaesthetics 11 (1). https://doi.org/10.54337/ojs.jos.v11i1.10773

Human Rights Center, University of California, Berkeley School of Law; Strategic Litigation Project, Atlantic Council; and Iran Digital Archive Coalition. 2025. *Gender Persecution in the Islamic Republic of Iran: An Open Source Investigation for the Iran Digital Archive Coalition*. Report. January. https://humanrights.berkeley.edu/publications/gender-persecution-in-the-islamic-republic-of-iran/

Human Rights Watch. 2017. "It's a Men's Club": *Discrimination against Women in Iran's Job Market.* May 25. https://www.hrw.org/report/2017/05/26/its-mens-club/discrimination-against-women-irans-job-market

Human Rights Watch. 2024. "Iran: New Hijab Law Is a Severe Blow to Women's Rights." October 14. https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/10/14/iran-new-hijab-law-adds-restrictions-and-punishments

Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on the Islamic Republic of Iran. 2024. *Detailed Findings of the Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on the Islamic Republic of Iran* (UN Human Rights Council document A/HRC/55/CRP.1, updated July 8, 2024). https://www.ohchr.org/en/hr-bodies/hrc/ffm-iran/index

Justice for Iran. 2014. *Thirty-Five Years of Forced Hijab: The Widespread and Systematic Violation of Women's Rights in Iran. Justice for Iran.* https://justice4iran.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/Hejab-Report-JFI-English.pdf

Kellner, Douglas. 2005. *Media Spectacle and the Crisis of Democracy: Terrorism, War, and Election Battles.* Paradigm Publishers.

Khosravi, Shahram. 2008. *Young and Defiant in Tehran*. University of Pennsylvania Press.

Kosonen, Heidi. 2020. "Suicide, Dangers to Self and Social Bodies: Taboo, Biopower, and Parental Worry in the Films Bridgend (2015) and Bird Box (2018)." The Journal of Somaesthetics 6 (2): 48–63. https://doi.org/10.5278/ojs.jos.v6i2.5739

LaBelle, Brandon. 2014. *Lexicon of the Mouth: Poetics and Politics of Voice and the Oral Imaginary.* Bloomsbury Academic.

Lipsky, Michael. 2010. *Street-Level Bureaucracy: Dilemmas of the Individual in Public Services.* 30th anniversary ed. Russell Sage Foundation.

Lyon, David. 2003. *Surveillance as Social Sorting: Privacy, Risk, and Digital Discrimination*. Routledge.

Medina, José. 2013. *The Epistemology of Resistance: Gender and Racial Oppression, Epistemic Injustice, and the Social Imagination.* Oxford University Press.

Milani, Farzaneh. 1992. *Veils and Words: The Emerging Voices of Iranian Women Writers.* Syracuse University Press.

Mignolo, Walter D. 2009. "Epistemic Disobedience, Independent Thought and Decolonial Freedom." Theory, Culture & Society 26 (7–8): 159–181. https://doi.org/10.1177/0263276409349275

Mitchell, Don. 2003. *The Right to the City: Social Justice and the Fight for Public Space.* Guilford Press.

Naficy, Hamid. 2012. *A Social History of Iranian Cinema. Vol. 4, The Globalizing Era, 1984–2010.* Duke University Press.

Nooshin, Laudan. 2018. " 'Our Angel of Salvation': Toward an Understanding of Iranian Cyberspace as an Alternative Sphere of Musical Sociality." *Ethnomusicology* 62 (3): 341–374. https://doi.org/10.5406/ethnomusicology.62.3.0341

Pakpour, Parvin. 2015. *Identity Construction: The Case of Young Women in Rasht* (Studia Iranica Upsaliensia 27). Doctoral dissertation, Uppsala University. Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis. https://www.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:845051/FULLTEXT01.pdf

Paidar, Parvin. 1995. *Women and the Political Process in Twentieth-Century Iran*. Cambridge University Press.

Parsa, Amin. 2022. "Hijab: A Name That Became a Code." *Retfærd: Nordisk Juridisk Tidsskrift* 45 (2): 85–95.

Rancière, Jacques. 2004. *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible.* Translated by G. Rockhill. Continuum.

Reeves, Joshua. 2012. "If You See Something, Say Something: Lateral Surveillance and the Uses of Responsibility." *Surveillance & Society* 10 (3/4): 235–248. https://doi.org/10.24908/ss.v10i3/4.4209

Richards, Serene. 2024. *Biopolitics as a System of Thought*. Bloomsbury Academic.

Sanasarian, Eliz. 1982. *The Women's Rights Movement in Iran: Mutiny, Appeasement, and Repression from 1900 to Khomeini.* Praeger.

Schafer, R. Murray. 1977. *The Tuning of the World.* Knopf.

Scott, James C. 1990. *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts.* Yale University Press.

Scott, James C. 1998. *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed.* Yale University Press.

Shahrokni, Nazanin. 2020. *Women in Place: The Politics of Gender Segregation in Iran.* University of California Press.

Shusterman, Richard. 1999. "S*omaesthetics: A Disciplinary Proposal." The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 57 (3): 299–313.

Shusterman, Richard. 2000. "Somaesthetics and the Body/Media Issue." *Body & Society* 6 (3–4): 533–548.

Shusterman, Richard. 2008. *Body Consciousness: A Philosophy of Mindfulness and Somaesthetics.* Cambridge University Press.

Shusterman, Richard. 2012. *Thinking through the Body: Essays in Somaesthetics.* Cambridge University Press.

Siamdoust, Nahid. 2023. "Women Reclaiming Their Voices for Life and Freedom: Music and the 2022 Uprising in Iran." *Iranian Studies* 56: 577–583. https://doi.org/10.1017/irn.2023.15

Tarvainen, Anne. 2019. "Thinking Voice and Somaesthetics: A.I. Training." *European Journal of American Studies* 14 (4).

Thompson, Marie. 2017. *Beyond Unwanted Sound: Noise, Affect and Aesthetic Moralism.* Bloomsbury Academic.

United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. 2023. "Repressive Enforcement of Iranian Hijab Laws Symbolises Gender-Based Persecution: UN Experts." Press release. April 14. https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2023/04/repressive-enforcement-iranian-hijab-laws-symbolises-gender-based

Toward a Somaesthetic Participatory Cognitive Science of ADHD: From Feelings of Restlessness to the Somatic Noise Hypothesis

Tomokatsu Kono

Graduate School of Science, Hokkaido University, ORCID: 0009-0003-9670-9427

Abstract: *This paper explores a style of inquiry that might be called a somaesthetic participatory cognitive science of ADHD. As a concrete demonstration, it focuses on feelings of restlessness in ADHD and interprets them as bodily feelings that can disturb the aesthetic quality of everyday experience. It then develops this interpretation into the somatic noise hypothesis, a hypothesis that can be examined within cognitive science: feelings of restlessness may function as noise that interferes with interoceptive bodily signals involved in prospective memory (PM) and thereby contribute to PM-related inattentive symptoms of ADHD.*

Keywords: *ADHD; somaesthetics; participatory cognitive science; somatic noise; interoception; prospective memory; Feldenkrais Method*

1. ADHD as a Diagnostic Category

Attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) is a widely recognized psychiatric diagnostic category classified as a neurodevelopmental disorder in the DSM-5-TR, the latest edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (American Psychiatric Association 2022). According to the DSM-5-TR, ADHD is diagnosed on the basis of symptoms of inattention and/or hyperactivity-impulsivity that have persisted for at least six months and meet additional diagnostic conditions (American Psychiatric Association 2022).

ADHD is now generally understood as a condition marked by causal heterogeneity (Sonuga-Barke et al. 2010). Various neuropsychological hypotheses have also been proposed to explain ADHD, including Sonuga-Barke's triple-pathway model (Sonuga-Barke et al. 2010), the state regulation deficit hypothesis (van der Meere 2005), and the mind wandering hypothesis (Bozhilova et al. 2018). Nevertheless, many aspects of the causal factors underlying ADHD remain unclear.

Evidence-based interventions include pharmacological approaches, such as methylphenidate, and non-pharmacological approaches, such as cognitive behavioral interventions (Maniadaki and Kakouros 2017; National Institute for Health and Care Excellence 2018). These interventions may be effective in managing symptoms, but their effects are not permanent; in medical terms, they are generally considered non-curative (Subcommittee on Children and Adolescents with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactive Disorder 2019). Since these interventions do not always resolve the difficulties faced by people with ADHD, continued scientific research on ADHD remains necessary for developing additional intervention options.

2. Recent Developments in ADHD Research and the Aim of This Paper

In recent scientific research on neurodevelopmental disorders, including ADHD, increasing emphasis has been placed on involving neurodivergent people in the research process and incorporating their insights into their own experience. This shift has emerged in response, at least in part, to the rise of the neurodiversity movement. Sonuga-Barke and colleagues, who occupy a central position in mainstream ADHD research, describe this recent development as follows:

> […] involvement of people with ADHD in the ADHD research process is increasingly seen as vital—allowing them to give advice and help shape the research process and order its priorities by providing essential insights into their experience of the condition.
>
> (Sonuga-Barke et al. 2023, 513)

More recently, in their research program "Regulating Emotions—Strengthening Adolescent Resilience" (RE-STAR), Sonuga-Barke and colleagues have sought to integrate a Young Researcher Panel (Y-RP), consisting of ten young people diagnosed with ADHD and/or autism, into the core of the translational research process as members of the research team. The panel participates across the scientific cycle, from theory formation, experimental hypothesis generation, and methodological development to contributing to new interpretations of research findings and disseminating results (Sonuga-Barke et al. 2024).

RE-STAR is innovative as a model case of participatory cognitive science: it brings neurodivergent people's experiential insights into the research process as a whole. At the same time, however, Sonuga-Barke and colleagues have not yet addressed the question of what kind of philosophical framework might help neurodivergent people interpret their own experience.

What I mean by this is that experiential insight does not arise in a conceptual vacuum. Human beings always interpret their own experience through some framework, often an implicit one. For example, whether feelings of restlessness, distractibility, impulsivity, or fatigue experienced by people with ADHD are understood as merely internal mental phenomena or as embodied experiences can significantly alter both how people with ADHD make sense of themselves and what scientific questions researchers come to ask. For this reason, participatory cognitive scientific research on ADHD requires explicit reflection on what kind of framework can productively guide the interpretation of their experience.

The aim of this paper is to introduce *somaesthetics* as one promising philosophical framework for interpreting ADHD experience. More specifically, I use somaesthetics to offer a new interpretation of the experience of feelings of restlessness in ADHD and to formulate a scientific hypothesis, which I call the somatic noise hypothesis. Through this demonstration, the paper shows how somaesthetics may help people with ADHD interpret their own experience within participatory cognitive scientific research on ADHD.

3. Why Somaesthetics? A Candidate Framework for Participatory Cognitive Science

This section first offers a brief overview of somaesthetics and then explains why it can serve as a useful interpretive framework for ADHD research.

Somaesthetics originally emerged as a field within aesthetics. In its early phase, it developed as a critique of mainstream aesthetics, which had long neglected embodiment. Today, however,

somaesthetics has become a broader philosophical arena in which various academic and practical fields intersect. Its founder, Richard Shusterman, describes somaesthetics as an attempt to return aesthetics to its etymological meaning: aesthesis, or "perception, consciousness, and feeling," through the philosophical and practical study of embodied experience. He also describes it as "an exploratory orientation for new research in philosophy of mind" (Shusterman 2012, 3). In line with this orientation, the present paper explores a possible new development in philosophy of cognitive science with the aim of advancing participatory cognitive science research on ADHD.

The first reason for adopting a philosophy that emphasizes embodiment in this research is that it accords with a recent trend in psychological and cognitive scientific research: the increasing emphasis on interoception. Although there are only three studies on interoceptive sensitivity in people with ADHD (Wiersema and Godefroid 2018; Kutscheidt et al. 2019; Tebrizcik et al. 2025), the number of publications on interoception has been increasing in the sciences of mind more broadly (Khalsa et al. 2018, 502), and embodiment is increasingly discussed in mental health research in interoceptive terms (Khalsa and Verdonk 2024). This makes it important to prepare a framework through which people with ADHD can interpret their own experience as embodied.

Somaesthetics is one promising candidate for such a framework. It draws on two important philosophical sources: Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of embodiment and the pragmatist tradition of William James and John Dewey. From the former, somaesthetics inherits the idea that the body should not be regarded merely as a physical object, nor conscious experience as a mental phenomenon detached from the body. Rather, body and consciousness are understood as two aspects of a unified experience, which Shusterman calls the *soma*, or *somatic consciousness* (Shusterman 2012, 5). According to Shusterman, our conscious experience is always lived in an embodied way, and somatic consciousness is "an indispensable medium for all perception" (Shusterman 2012, 3).

From pragmatism, by contrast, somaesthetics inherits its practical orientation. Somaesthetics is concerned not only with interpreting embodied experience theoretically, but also with enriching it and enhancing its quality through somatic practice. In this spirit, it encourages philosophers themselves to refine the quality of their own experience through somatic practices and to deepen their thinking on that basis. Shusterman, for example, developed his philosophy while training in Zen meditation and the Feldenkrais Method of Somatic Education, usually referred to simply as the Feldenkrais Method (Shusterman 2012, 15, 22).

This practical orientation raises the question of why the present paper adopts somaesthetics rather than another contemporary philosophy of embodiment. After all, enactive approaches influenced by phenomenological accounts of embodiment have already been developed in ways directly relevant to ADHD and psychiatry more broadly. In the case of ADHD, Maiese's affective framing deficit hypothesis offers an enactive account of ADHD (Maiese 2012), and de Haan's enactive psychiatry provides a broader enactive framework for understanding psychiatric disorders and neurodiversity (de Haan 2020).

I treat such enactive work as an important ally of somaesthetics. Nevertheless, I do not place it at the center of the present argument. This is because the aim of this paper is not only to interpret ADHD experience as embodied, but also to show how such interpretation can be connected to the transformation and enrichment of everyday experience for people with ADHD. Since participatory scientific research on ADHD is carried out collaboratively with people with ADHD, its results should ideally be useful to them and contribute to improving their everyday experience. In light of this aim, somaesthetics is especially suitable because it offers an explicitly

pragmatic and practice-oriented philosophy of embodiment, whereas this practical orientation is less central to Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology and many enactive approaches.

In the next section, I introduce the somaesthetic idea of "the body as background" and "the body as figure" by drawing on "The Body as Background," chapter 2 of Shusterman's *Thinking through the Body* (Shusterman 2012).

4. The Body as Background and Figure

This section introduces the somaesthetic idea of the body as background and the body as figure (Shusterman 2012, 47–67). The idea of regarding the body as background, however, did not originate with somaesthetics. One of the most important twentieth-century philosophers to have developed this view of the body is the French phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty. In *Phenomenology of Perception*, he writes:

> One's own body is the always implied third term of the figure-ground structure, and each figure appears perspectivally against the double horizon of external space and bodily space.
>
> (Merleau-Ponty 2012, 103)

Let us consider a concrete example. Suppose that I am writing a paper on my laptop. My attention is directed toward the manuscript, while the glass of water on the desk, the desk itself, and the chair on which I am sitting remain in the background of my experience. This does not mean that I do not feel the chair at all, or that the glass of water is absent from my visual field. Rather, they are simply less likely to become the focus of consciousness. When one thing in the external world becomes foregrounded as figure, other things recede into the background as ground. According to Merleau-Ponty, this figure-ground structure is fundamental to our conscious experience (Merleau-Ponty 2012, 4).

The point of Merleau-Ponty's claim in the passage quoted above is that this two-term relation between one thing and other things surrounding it in external space is always implicitly shaped by a third term: one's own body. To see how this third term operates, suppose that thirst gradually arises. My attention then becomes more likely to turn from the manuscript to the glass of water. The water becomes figure, while the manuscript recedes into the background. Once I drink and my thirst is satisfied, the manuscript again returns to the foreground. This shift within the figure-ground relation in external space is mediated by a change in bodily feeling: the arising and disappearance of thirst. In this sense, bodily feeling functions as the ground against which things in external space become salient as figure.

Merleau-Ponty himself held that the body cannot, in the strict sense, become figure, but is in principle always background:

> Now, the permanence of one's own body is of an entirely different type: it is not to be found as the result of an indefinite exploration. […] Its permanence is not a permanence in the world, but a permanence on my side. To say that my body is always near to me or always there for me is to say that it is never truly in front of me, that I cannot spread it out under my gaze, that it remains on the margins of all of my perceptions, and that it is with me.
>
> (Merleau-Ponty 2012, 93)

Leaving aside the question of principle, it is certainly true, from a practical point of view, that if the body constantly came to the foreground of conscious experience, smooth and spontaneous action would often be disrupted. If I were intensely thirsty, or if I were suffering from severe lower back pain, such bodily discomfort would be clearly foregrounded, the manuscript would recede entirely into the background, and I would have to stop writing. For spontaneous action to be possible, it is often desirable for the body to remain in the background of conscious experience. It should not always come to the foreground; rather, it should function transparently as the hidden third term—the background of the background, so to speak.

Shusterman partly agrees with this view, but from a pragmatist perspective inherited from John Dewey, he writes:

> In other words, I am not urging the impossible task that the somatic background always be brought to the foreground and that all spontaneity be eschewed. Full transparency of our actions and feelings is not only unachievable but not worth achieving in practice; on most occasions, our focus is best directed elsewhere, to the world in which we must act. […] But for pragmatism, these distinctions are functional and flexible, not absolute. This means that some elements of the background can be brought into the foreground and that in certain practical contexts such foregrounding is valuable.
>
> (Shusterman 2012, 65)

From the standpoint of somaesthetics, which emphasizes not only describing or interpreting bodily experience but also pragmatically transforming and enriching it, foregrounding bodily feeling has advantages when done at the right time and in the right way. One such advantage is the improvement of habits (Shusterman 2012, 63).

Consider severe lower back pain that makes it difficult to concentrate while sitting and writing. One possible short-term strategy is to push the pain into the background, whether through mental effort or with the help of painkillers, and continue writing. Sometimes this may be the best available short-term solution. Yet it may be more sustainable to foreground one's habitual way of using the body and attempt to improve it. If such improvement succeeds, the pain may decrease, the somatic quality of sitting and writing may improve, and this may contribute to a better quality of life.

As we have seen, the body, as the hidden third term in the figure-ground structure of conscious experience, profoundly shapes the way we experience the world. This is precisely what Merleau-Ponty shows. Yet somaesthetics, as a form of pragmatist philosophy, is distinctive in that it seeks to bring this hidden third term—the body—into the foreground of conscious experience when necessary, to improve it by some practical means, and thereby to enhance the quality of our everyday experience.

In the next section, I use this concept of figure-ground structure to analyze the experiential organization of feelings of restlessness, which appear to be common among people with ADHD, by drawing on the narratives of interlocutors in Nielsen's (2020) anthropological study.

5. A Somaesthetic Interpretation of Feelings of Restlessness in ADHD

This section focuses on feelings of restlessness in ADHD and offers a new philosophical interpretation of them from a somaesthetic perspective. There are two reasons for focusing on feelings of restlessness. First, even if they are not specific to people with ADHD, they are

sufficiently common among people with ADHD to have long been included in the DSM diagnostic criteria. Second, my own experience as a qualified teacher of Awareness Through Movement lessons in the Feldenkrais Method of Somatic Education has suggested that these feelings may be worth examining from a somaesthetic perspective.

From the standpoint of somaesthetics, which emphasizes the philosophical significance of experience, it is somewhat regrettable that the DSM-5-TR diagnostic criteria for ADHD focus primarily on behavior and say very little about subjective experience. There is, however, a noteworthy exception among the criteria for hyperactivity and impulsivity. In criterion c, the DSM-5-TR states: "Often runs about or climbs in situations where it is inappropriate. (Note: In adolescents or adults, may be limited to feeling restless)" (American Psychiatric Association 2022, 69). Earlier versions of the DSM emphasized the subjective character of this experience even more clearly, using the phrase "subjective feelings of restlessness" in the corresponding criterion (American Psychiatric Association 1994, 84; 2000, 92).

As shown above, feelings of restlessness have long appeared in the DSM diagnostic criteria for ADHD. Yet, to my knowledge, they have rarely been examined by ADHD researchers, with the exception of Nielsen (2020). Nor does the DSM itself explain what such feelings are like. This is one reason why they deserve further philosophical and empirical attention.

The second reason for focusing on feelings of restlessness is more directly connected to somaesthetic practice. I am a qualified teacher of Awareness Through Movement lessons in the Feldenkrais Method of Somatic Education, usually referred to simply as the Feldenkrais Method. The Feldenkrais Method is a somaesthetic method developed by Moshe Feldenkrais. In practice, it has often been regarded as helpful for reducing excessive muscular tension in action. In my own teaching, several people diagnosed with ADHD have reported that their feelings of restlessness improved after a single Awareness Through Movement lesson. Of course, empirical research is necessary to determine whether the Feldenkrais Method actually has such an effect on feelings of restlessness in people with ADHD. Nevertheless, my experience as a Feldenkrais Method teacher suggests that feelings of restlessness in ADHD may be a form of somatic feeling that deserves systematic academic investigation.

In what follows, I draw on Nielsen's (2020) qualitative data in order to better understand the character of these feelings, their embodiment, and especially their role within the figure-ground structure of conscious experience discussed in the previous section.

Nielsen's study is based on anthropological interview data interpreted through Thomas Fuchs's phenomenological account of temporality. I cannot present the full scope of her analysis, which understands ADHD as a problem of temporality rooted in embodiment. Instead, I focus only on the interview passages concerning feelings of restlessness. These materials are valuable for deepening a somaesthetic understanding of these feelings in ADHD. Drawing on them, Nielsen characterizes feelings of restlessness as "being unable to find inner calmness" (Nielsen 2020, 114). The following passage is part of the narrative of John, one of Nielsen's interlocutors with ADHD:

> I could get all sick from that inner restlessness that just wanted to get out or something. I had to act on it, I had to do something. It was like if you have to do something, but you do not know what. And it slowly builds up all the time, and gets worse and worse, and you do not know what you are supposed to do.
>
> (Nielsen 2020, 114)

As John's narrative shows, when feelings of restlessness are thematized as figure within experience, they appear as unpleasant feelings. These feelings seem to drive one from within, producing a sense that one must act or do something. Kenny, another interlocutor, describes his own experience of feelings of restlessness even more explicitly as a bodily experience:

> KENNY: Mostly, I can feel the tensions here [he points at his head] and it is like ... it is like trembling electricity through the brain "bizzzz." Those are the physical symptoms. And then I realize that I start shaking my legs [he is moving one of his legs restlessly up and down].
>
> AUTHOR: What is up with that leg?
>
> KENNY: Well, it is nothing now. But it is because the energy accumulates. And it has to come out somehow. When I go to a meeting, for example, where we have to sit on our butts and are being taught from the black board – then my legs start moving. I fiddle with something. It is like carbonic acid all over and that energy needs to be released. So, I will sit and jump a bit.
>
> AUTHOR: So that is the valve?
>
> KENNY: Yes, it is. It brings calmness.
>
> (Nielsen 2020, 119)

The first point that is worth noting from a somaesthetic perspective is that Kenny experiences feelings of restlessness as tension within the body. In other words, they are not merely mental experiences, but experiences lived through the body. This passage also describes the relation between feelings of restlessness and symptoms of hyperactivity, such as shaking one's legs or bouncing while seated. For Kenny, these hyperactive movements seem not to be mere symptoms. Rather, they appear to function as strategies for at least temporarily drowning out feelings of restlessness and gaining calmness.

Further, Susan, another of Nielsen's interlocutors, describes in an interview how her experience of feelings of restlessness changed before and after taking ADHD medication:

> I get an inner calmness. I guess that's the best way to describe it. For example, when reading bedtime stories to my kids, […] I did it, but it was not the nice experience that I wanted it to be — before I got the medication. Because my head was speeding 180 [km/h] while I was reading. I did not have the calmness to do what I was doing. […] I also tended to be really short-tempered and everything just shot out of my mouth and maybe sometimes inappropriately. The medication helps with that as well. It is a kind of general calmness in the body. I have so much more calmness in my body.
>
> (Nielsen 2020, 115)

One important point in Susan's narrative is that ADHD medication—presumably methylphenidate[1] —appears, at least in her case, not only to have reduced behavioral symptoms

1 Nielsen (2020, 115) does not specify which ADHD medication this "medication" refers to. Elsewhere, however, she writes, "Susan […] has difficulties controlling her temper, and, especially before she started taking Ritalin, […]" (Nielsen 2020, 94). I therefore infer that the medication mentioned on page 115 is likely also Ritalin, that is, methylphenidate.

related to impulsivity but also to have alleviated feelings of restlessness.

From a somaesthetic perspective, however, what is even more important is that before taking medication, Susan was able, on the surface, to read bedtime stories to her children, yet because she experienced feelings of restlessness and lacked sufficient calmness, this activity did not become the "nice experience" she wanted it to be.

Using the concept of figure-ground structure introduced in the previous section, we can interpret Susan's experience as follows. When she was reading stories, what she was reading was presumably foregrounded as figure in her conscious experience, since she was at least able to read it. Yet while she was reading, feelings of restlessness continued in the body as the ground of her experience. These feelings did not necessarily prevent her from completing the task of reading bedtime stories. Nevertheless, they seem to have interfered with the quality of her reading experience as a whole.

This is an especially important point from an aesthetic perspective. Reading bedtime stories to one's children is not simply a task to be completed. Its meaning lies, at least in part, in savoring a series of aesthetic qualities with one's whole body: the sparkling, expectant look in the children's eyes while they listen to the story; the stillness brought by the calm tone of the parent's reading voice; the soft warmth of the bedtime atmosphere; the gentle drowsiness that gradually fills the room as the story continues in a quiet voice; and the peaceful sleeping faces of the children who have fallen asleep before one knows it. Susan's remark that "it was not the nice experience that I wanted it to be" can therefore be interpreted as suggesting that feelings of restlessness prevented her from fully savoring the kinds of aesthetic qualities that might have been available in the here and now. In this sense, feelings of restlessness disturbed her embodied presence: her capacity to dwell bodily in the aesthetic qualities of the situation as it unfolded.

Taken together, these interpretations suggest that when feelings of restlessness appear as figure within experience, they are felt as a lack of calmness in the body. When they recede into the background while one is engaged in another activity, they may function as a kind of noise that interferes with one's embodied presence—that is, one's ability to savor the aesthetic qualities of everyday life in the here and now—and thereby diminish the quality of daily experience. This is my somaesthetic interpretation of Nielsen's qualitative data. In the next section, I show how this interpretation can be developed into a more specific hypothesis connected to mechanistic research in cognitive science.

6. The Somatic Noise Hypothesis: From Somaesthetic Interpretation to Participatory Cognitive Science

In the previous section, I interpreted feelings of restlessness in ADHD as bodily feelings that can alter the quality of one's embodied experience of the external world. When foregrounded, they are experienced as unpleasant bodily feelings; when they recede into the background of experience, they may still function as noise that interferes with one's ability to savor the aesthetic quality of an activity. In this section, I develop this somaesthetic interpretation into a specific scientific hypothesis: the somatic noise hypothesis.

This section does not aim to fully develop the hypothesis. Rather, it shows how interpreting the experiences of people with ADHD from the standpoint of somaesthetics can lead not only to the reinterpretation of experience, but also to hypotheses that can be empirically tested within cognitive science. In this sense, the following discussion should be understood less as a complete presentation of the somatic noise hypothesis than as a demonstration of a mode of inquiry that might be called *somaesthetic cognitive science*.

More specifically, the somatic noise hypothesis aims to explain a particular kind of inattentive symptom in ADHD, especially those that seem to be related to event-based prospective memory (PM). PM refers to the ability to remember and carry out an intended action at the appropriate moment in the future (Einstein and McDaniel 1990). PM is commonly divided into event-based and time-based forms. Event-based PM is the type of PM in which a particular event, or PM cue, triggers the retrieval of a previously formed intention.

For example, suppose that before leaving home, I form the intention to mail an envelope on my way to work. Yet while walking to the office, I become absorbed in other thoughts. Although the mailbox that should have served as the PM cue enters my visual field, I pass by it without mailing the envelope. Only after arriving at the office do I realize, "Oh, I forgot to mail it." This would be an example of event-based PM failure.

Among the inattentive symptoms listed in the DSM-5-TR, criterion i seems at least partly related to this kind of PM difficulty: "Is often forgetful in daily activities, e.g., doing chores, running errands; for older adolescents and adults, returning calls, paying bills, keeping appointments" (American Psychiatric Association 2022, 68–69). This reading is supported by previous research suggesting that people with ADHD tend to show difficulties in event-based prospective memory, especially under naturalistic or cognitively demanding conditions (Altgassen et al. (2019)).

One influential neuropsychological hypothesis that may help explain this kind of difficulty is the mind wandering hypothesis of ADHD (Bozhilova et al. 2018). According to Bozhilova and colleagues, mind wandering occurs when attention drifts away from the current primary task and toward task-unrelated internal thoughts or images. The basic idea of the hypothesis is that people with ADHD tend to experience spontaneous mind wandering more frequently, and that this tendency is related to inattentive symptoms.

This hypothesis is certainly important. However, it does not seem sufficient by itself to explain the kind of inattentive tendency described in DSM-5-TR criterion i, namely being "forgetful in daily activities," insofar as this tendency involves PM failure. This is because people without ADHD also presumably engage in mind wandering quite often in everyday life. Few people remain continuously focused only on the task of mailing an envelope from the time they form the intention to do so until they actually arrive at the mailbox (Umeda 2022). In such situations, many people, not only people with ADHD, are likely to fall into task-unrelated thoughts.

Nevertheless, people without ADHD seem more likely than people with ADHD to return to the task at the moment they see the mailbox and to realize, "Right, I was supposed to mail the envelope." The issue, then, is not simply how frequently mind wandering occurs. Even frequent mind wandering would not necessarily lead to PM failure if one could reliably return to the task when the relevant cue appears. The more important question is therefore how awareness arises that allows one to exit mind wandering and notice the PM cue at the appropriate moment—and why this awareness may be more easily disrupted in ADHD.

This question is crucial for considering PM from the standpoint of somaesthetic cognitive science. In psychology, the retrieval process in PM is usually formulated as a two-stage process in which *remember-that* is followed by *remember-what*. Meier and Zimmermann (2015) offer an especially clear account of this process:

> Upon recognition of a prospective memory target participants often move back in their chairs, sometimes accompanied by exclamations like "oops," "aha," "now I have to do something," "what I am supposed to do now?" […]. At this point, the prospective component (remember that) is fulfilled, but participants do not necessarily know yet what exactly they have to do,

that is, the retrospective component (remember what) still has to be remembered.

(Meier and Zimmermann 2015, 1)

As their account shows, the process of prospective memory is usually understood as unfolding in two stages. First, one remembers that there is something one has to do. Only afterward does one remember what that something is—for example, that one has to mail the envelope. Ordinary experience also supports this distinction. One may clearly remember that there was something one had to do, while still being unable to remember exactly what it was. In this sense, *remember-that* and *remember-what* are distinct processes. Yet if we examine these two processes more closely, it seems plausible that before the explicit and verbal sense that "there is something I have to do," there is often a more primitive and difficult-to-verbalize stage of awareness, which may correspond to the "oops" mentioned in Meier and Zimmermann's description.

This stage of awareness was investigated psychophysiologically by Umeda et al. (2016) in their study of prospective memory and interoception. Their research suggests that PM cue detection may not be completed solely by cognitive processes in the brain, but may also be supported by autonomic bodily signals, such as changes in heart rate, and by interoceptive sensitivity to those signals. It should be noted, however, that their study did not examine people with ADHD.

In Umeda et al.'s experiment, larger changes in heart rate at the moment when the PM cue was presented were associated with better PM performance. They also found that higher cardiac interoceptive sensitivity, measured by a heartbeat detection task, was associated with better PM task performance. Of course, this study alone does not allow us to conclude that larger heart-rate changes or higher interoceptive sensitivity cause successful PM performance. Nevertheless, it suggests that, in the early stage of PM, before one explicitly remembers that one has something to do, bodily signals may already be involved.

In somaesthetic terms, we might say that PM cue detection may involve a subtle felt sense arising from the body as the background of experience. By "felt sense," I mean the kind of bodily sensed meaning discussed by Eugene Gendlin in his theory of Focusing, a body-oriented psychotherapy: a subtle sense of meaning that is not yet clearly verbalized but is bodily felt in relation to a situation or concern (Gendlin 1996). For example, at the moment when the mailbox enters one's visual field, even before one can explicitly say to oneself, "I have to mail the envelope," a small bodily sense that something is not yet settled may arise. This felt sense may then lead to *remember-that*, the awareness that "there was something I had to do," and further to *remember-what*, the retrieval of the specific content: "Right, I had to mail the envelope."

The important point here is that this initial awareness may not be a purely cognitive process occurring only in the brain. Rather, it may be supported by somatic signals arising from the body.

Inspired by Umeda's findings, I came to consider the possibility that in people with ADHD, reduced interoceptive sensitivity may impair PM processing and thereby contribute to certain inattentive symptoms. At present, there are only three studies that focus on interoceptive sensitivity in people with ADHD. Although one of them reports a null result (Wiersema and Godefroid 2018), the other two conclude that interoceptive sensitivity is reduced in the ADHD group compared with the control group (Kutscheidt et al. 2019; Tebrizcik et al. 2025). If ADHD does indeed involve reduced PM performance due to reduced interoceptive sensitivity, the next question is by what mechanism this might occur.

The somatic noise hypothesis proposed in this paper answers this question as follows: in

ADHD, feelings of restlessness may function as noise that interferes with interoception. As a result, signals arising from the body in the earliest stage of PM processing may be more difficult to detect, PM performance may decline, and this decline may contribute to PM-related inattentive symptoms in ADHD.

In this sense, the somatic noise hypothesis should not be seen as detached from the aesthetic argument developed in the previous section. Rather, it extends that argument in the direction of cognitive science. Feelings of restlessness may interfere with the ability to remain attentive to the aesthetic qualities of the present situation; at the same time, they may also interfere with the bodily awareness needed for cognitive functions such as prospective memory to operate smoothly. In other words, somatic attentiveness to aesthetic quality and PM cue detection may both be affected by noise arising from the body as the background of experience.

This hypothesis can also be connected to Maiese's (2012) affective framing deficit hypothesis, an enactive account of ADHD. Maiese argues that ADHD involves a dysfunction in "affective framing," the embodied and affective process through which task-relevant information is filtered and made salient. The somatic noise hypothesis gives this philosophical account a more concrete formulation in the specific setting of PM: for an external cue to appear as relevant to action—as figure against the ground of many other things—subtle bodily signals may be needed. If feelings of restlessness function as somatic noise, they may mask such signals, so that one fails to notice the external cue and this failure may eventually be categorized as a symptom of "inattention."

The somatic noise hypothesis may also offer a partial account of hyperactivity and impulsivity in ADHD. In Kenny's narrative, discussed in the previous section, shaking his legs or moving his body was not described simply as an outward symptom of hyperactivity. Rather, it was described as a strategy for releasing the "energy" accumulated in the body and for gaining calmness, even if only fleetingly. If feelings of restlessness are experienced unpleasantly as somatic noise, bodily movement can be understood as a practical attempt to mask that noise, at least temporarily, with the kinesthetic sensations produced by hyperactive movement.

John's narrative likewise suggests a connection between feelings of restlessness and impulsivity. As we saw, feelings of restlessness can appear as an urge to act, a sense that one must do something without knowing what one is supposed to do. In this way, the somatic noise hypothesis may help explain some PM-related inattentive symptoms, as well as some aspects of hyperactivity and impulsivity, by starting from bodily experience.

At this point, another question emerges: in physiological terms, where do feelings of restlessness originate? Strictly speaking, the source of feelings of restlessness is unlikely to be reducible to a single bodily system. It may be more natural to understand them as a form of somatic experience arising from the complex interaction of various bodily systems—including the autonomic nervous system, the endocrine system, and the musculoskeletal system—and the environment.

Nevertheless, I would like to present one scientifically testable hypothesis: feelings of restlessness may be related to excessive muscular tension. Studies in rehabilitation science by Stray et al. (2009, 2013) suggest that people with ADHD may have difficulties inhibiting or releasing muscular tension during movement, independently of Developmental Coordination Disorder, which often co-occurs with ADHD. Stray and colleagues also report that methylphenidate has an immediate effect on such excessive muscular tension and the motor regulation problems associated with it, although this effect diminishes and disappears as methylphenidate is metabolized.

When these findings are considered together with Susan's narrative in Nielsen (2020), in which feelings of restlessness appear to be alleviated by medication, presumably methylphenidate,

and with Kenny's description of feelings of restlessness as a sense of tension in the body, a further hypothesis emerges: excessive muscular tension may be one source, among others, of feelings of restlessness. Of course, this hypothesis requires empirical testing. From a somaesthetic perspective, however, it becomes possible to consider excessive muscular tension, feelings of restlessness, interoceptive sensitivity, and PM failure and PM-related symptoms of inattention as part of a single hypothetical scientific relation.[2]

From the hypotheses developed so far, several testable predictions can be derived. If feelings of restlessness function as somatic noise that interferes with interoception, then stronger feelings of restlessness should be associated with weaker awareness of PM cues and lower PM performance. Conversely, when feelings of restlessness are alleviated, PM cues may become more salient and PM performance may improve. In addition, if excessive muscular tension is one source, among others, of feelings of restlessness, then somatic practices that reduce excessive muscular tension, such as the Feldenkrais Method,[3] may alleviate feelings of restlessness and, as a result, reduce some PM-related inattentive symptoms as well as some hyperactive and impulsive symptoms of ADHD.[4]

These remain hypotheses. Nevertheless, they have a form that can be tested through a combination of qualitative research, psychophysiological experiments, and intervention studies.

The argument developed so far shows that somaesthetics is not merely a philosophy for interpreting ADHD experience. By understanding feelings of restlessness as noise that interferes with bodily signals through which the body, as the background of experience, organizes action and perception, we can formulate PM-related inattentive symptoms, hyperactivity, impulsivity, and the diminished aesthetic quality of everyday experience as continuous problems open to empirical investigation, including intervention studies.

7. Feelings of Restlessness as an Occasion for Creative Self-Stylization

In the previous section, I formulated feelings of restlessness as somatic noise in order to connect somaesthetic interpretation with cognitive scientific research. From the standpoint of somaesthetics, however, this is not the whole story. Feelings of restlessness need not be understood only as noise to be eliminated.

Lower back pain, for example, may indeed function as noise that interferes with the activity of sitting at a desk and writing. Yet for those who are willing to regard it not merely as something to be suppressed, but also as a sign that one's bodily habits may have room for further refinement, it can become an occasion for self-stylization: a creative opportunity to learn a new way of using the body that places less strain on the lower back. Similarly, if feelings of restlessness are understood as signals that some form of excessive somatic tension is present and that one may still learn new ways of acting with less tension, they can be regarded not merely as noise, but also as an occasion for creative self-stylization.

Through such self-stylization, people with ADHD may become better able to remain bodily present in the here and now, to savor its aesthetic qualities, and thereby to improve quality of life.

2 As a practitioner of the Feldenkrais Method, I have several times observed cases in which excessive muscular tension and feelings of restlessness in people with ADHD seemed to improve together after an Awareness Through Movement lesson. Since these observations were not made in controlled experiments, they of course do not count as scientific evidence. Still, I regard them as observations that could serve as a starting point for empirical research on the possible relation between excessive muscular tension and feelings of restlessness.

3 Moshe Feldenkrais, the founder of the method, writes that the exercises "will relieve both mental and muscular tension" (Feldenkrais 1980, 63). Readers interested in the experiential dimension of this claim may try the following freely available lesson from the Feldenkrais NYC YouTube channel and observe how their own mental and muscular tension, as well as their feelings of restlessness, change during and after the lesson: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3uYY2Wlq5GM

4 For a theoretical account of the relevance of mindful movement practices, including the Feldenkrais Method, to ADHD, see Clark et al. (2015).

8. Future Directions

Finally, I indicate future directions for the participatory somaesthetic cognitive science of ADHD proposed in this paper. Rather than presenting the somatic noise hypothesis as a completed theory, this paper has shown how a somaesthetic interpretation of feelings of restlessness can generate cognitive scientific hypotheses. Future research should develop this line of inquiry through qualitative research, quantitative assessment, and psychophysiological and intervention studies.

First, further qualitative research is needed on the lived bodily experience of feelings of restlessness in ADHD. As we have seen, feelings of restlessness have long appeared in the DSM diagnostic criteria, yet research on what these feelings are actually like remains extremely limited. Nielsen's (2020) study is a valuable exception. Future research should investigate more broadly, for example through interviews, how people with ADHD experience feelings of restlessness and how they understand these feelings in relation to particular body parts, urges to move, affective states, and environmental conditions. In doing so, it will be important to examine how feelings of restlessness relate to embodied presence, the aesthetic quality of daily experience, and the possibility of creative self-stylization.

Second, methods are needed for quantitatively assessing feelings of restlessness. In ADHD research, there has already been an attempt to develop a scale such as Weyandt et al.'s (2003) Internal Restlessness Scale. However, this scale appears to address "internal restlessness" primarily at a psychological or cognitive level. For the purposes of the present paper, it will be necessary to develop methods that can assess feelings of restlessness at a more bodily or somatic level. As a first step, it may be useful to develop a simple method for rating the intensity of feelings of restlessness at a given moment, similar to the numerical rating scales widely used in chronic pain research (Farrar et al. 2001).

Third, psychophysiological research is needed to examine the somatic noise hypothesis directly. Umeda et al. (2016) suggest that cue detection in event-based prospective memory may involve autonomic bodily signals, such as changes in heart rate, and interoceptive sensitivity to those signals. However, their study did not examine participants with ADHD. Future research should therefore measure event-based PM task performance, heart-rate changes, interoceptive sensitivity, and the intensity of feelings of restlessness simultaneously in people with ADHD. In designing such studies, it will be important to bear in mind the suggestion by Altgassen, Scheres, and Edel (2019) that, in event-based PM tasks, simple laboratory tasks may not sufficiently reveal differences between ADHD and control groups. It would therefore be desirable to design tasks that are more naturalistic, that involve a certain degree of cognitive demand, and that have an appropriate level of difficulty.

Fourth, these lines of research should be pursued in a participatory manner that incorporates people with ADHD themselves into the research process. Experiences such as feelings of restlessness cannot be adequately understood through external observation alone. They require an approach in which external observation is brought into dialogue with the narratives, practical knowledge, and self-interpretations of those who live through such experiences. This is why participatory research is especially important in this context.

I hope that the somaesthetic framework proposed in this paper will help people with ADHD connect their own experience both to participatory cognitive scientific inquiry and to practical transformation.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank Satoshi Umeda and Yuri Terasawa for kindly answering my questions about Umeda et al. (2016), and Roeljan Wiersema for discussing ADHD with me during my stay at his lab, including issues related to Wiersema and Godefroid (2018). I would also like to thank Shogo Tanaka for generously sharing his knowledge of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology over the years. I am deeply grateful to my academic supervisor, Professor Masahiro Matsuo of Hokkaido University, for his generous encouragement and many helpful discussions over the years, and to my colleague Shohei Hidaka for his longstanding support of my research. I am also deeply grateful to Taijiro Sawada, Ilan Jacobson, and Mari Minato, my Feldenkrais mentors, and to Eilat Almagor, Educational Director of the Feldenkrais Professional Training Program Japan VIII, for their guidance, which helped shape my philosophical thinking through embodied practice. I also thank the reviewer for the constructive comments on an earlier version of this paper and for the generous and careful reading from which the manuscript greatly benefited. I thank Mark Tschaepe, the editor of *The Journal of Somaesthetics*, for his support during the review and revision process. This work was supported by JSPS KAKENHI Grant Number JP23KJ0064, awarded under the JSPS Research Fellowships for Young Scientists program.

References

Altgassen, Mareike, Anouk Scheres, and Marc-Andreas Edel. 2019. "Prospective Memory (Partially) Mediates the Link between ADHD Symptoms and Procrastination." *ADHD Attention Deficit and Hyperactivity Disorders* 11: 59–71. doi: 10.1007/s12402-018-0273-x.

American Psychiatric Association. 1994. *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*. 4th ed. American Psychiatric Association.

American Psychiatric Association. 2000. *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*. 4th ed., text rev. American Psychiatric Association.

American Psychiatric Association. 2022. *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders.* 5th ed., text rev. American Psychiatric Association Publishing.

Bozhilova, Nadia S., Giorgia Michelini, Jonna Kuntsi, and Philip Asherson. 2018. "Mind Wandering Perspective on Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder." *Neuroscience & Biobehavioral Reviews* 92: 464–76. doi: 10.1016/j.neubiorev.2018.07.010.

Clark, Dav, Frank Schumann, and Stewart H. Mostofsky. 2015. "Mindful Movement and Skilled Attention." *Frontiers in Human Neuroscience* 9: 297. doi: 10.3389/fnhum.2015.00297.

de Haan, Sanneke. 2020. *Enactive Psychiatry.* Cambridge University Press. doi: 10.1017/9781108685214.

Einstein, Gilles O., and Mark A. McDaniel. 1990. "Normal Aging and Prospective Memory." *Journal of Experimental Psychology: Learning, Memory, and Cognition* 16 (4): 717–26. doi: 10.1037/0278-7393.16.4.717.

Farrar, John T., James P. Young Jr., Linda LaMoreaux, John L. Werth, and R. Michael Poole. 2001. "Clinical Importance of Changes in Chronic Pain Intensity Measured on an 11-Point Numerical Pain Rating Scale." *Pain* 94 (2): 149–58. doi: 10.1016/S0304-3959(01)00349-9.

Feldenkrais, Moshe. 1980. *Awareness Through Movement: Health Exercises for Personal Growth.* Penguin Books.

Gendlin, Eugene T. 1996. *Focusing-Oriented Psychotherapy: A Manual of the Experiential Method.* Guilford Press.

Khalsa, Sahib S., Ralph Adolphs, Oliver G. Cameron, Hugo D. Critchley, Paul W. Davenport, Justin

S. Feinstein, Jamie D. Feusner, et al. 2018. "Interoception and Mental Health: A Roadmap." *Biological Psychiatry: Cognitive Neuroscience and Neuroimaging* 3 (6): 501–13. doi: 10.1016/j.bpsc.2017.12.004.

Khalsa, Sahib S., and Charles Verdonk. 2024. "Interoception and Mental Health." *In Interoception: A Comprehensive Guide*, edited by Jennifer Murphy and Rebecca Brewer, 265–316. Springer. doi: 10.1007/978-3-031-68521-7_9.

Kutscheidt, Katrin, Thomas Dresler, Justin Hudak, Beatrix Barth, Friederike Blume, Thomas Ethofer, Andreas J. Fallgatter, and Ann-Christine Ehlis. 2019. "Interoceptive Awareness in Patients with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)." *Attention Deficit and Hyperactivity Disorders* 11 (4): 395–401. doi: 10.1007/s12402-019-00299-3.

Maiese, Michelle. 2012. "Rethinking Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder." *Philosophical Psychology* 25 (6): 893–916. doi: 10.1080/09515089.2011.631998.

Maniadaki, Katerina, and Efhymios Kakouros. 2017. *The Complete Guide to ADHD: Nature, Diagnosis, and Treatment*. Routledge. doi: 10.4324/9781315316031.

Meier, Beat, and Thomas D. Zimmermann. 2015. "Loads and Loads and Loads: The Influence of Prospective Load, Retrospective Load, and Ongoing Task Load in Prospective Memory." *Frontiers in Human Neuroscience* 9: 322. doi: 10.3389/fnhum.2015.00322.

Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. 2012. *Phenomenology of Perception.* Translated by Donald A. Landes. Routledge. doi: 10.4324/9780203720714.

National Institute for Health and Care Excellence. 2018. *Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder: Diagnosis and Management*. NICE Guideline NG87. National Institute for Health and Care Excellence. https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/ng87.

Nielsen, Mikka. 2020. *Experiences and Explanations of ADHD: An Ethnography of Adults Living with a Diagnosis.* Routledge. doi: 10.4324/9781315142197.

Shusterman, Richard. 2012. *Thinking through the Body: Essays in Somaesthetics*. Cambridge University Press. doi: 10.1017/CBO9781139094030.

Sonuga-Barke, Edmund, Paraskevi Bitsakou, and Margaret Thompson. 2010. "Beyond the Dual Pathway Model: Evidence for the Dissociation of Timing, Inhibitory, and Delay-Related Impairments in Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder." Journal of the *American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry* 49: 345–355. doi: 10.1097/00004583-201004000-00009.

Sonuga-Barke, Edmund J. S., Stephen P. Becker, Sven Bölte, Frank C. Verhulst, Philip Asherson, Tobias Banaschewski, Joseph Biederman, Jan K. Buitelaar, Samuele Cortese, David Coghill, et al. 2023. "Annual Research Review: Perspectives on Progress in ADHD Science—from Characterization to Cause." *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry* 64 (4): 506–32. doi: 10.1111/jcpp.13696.

Sonuga-Barke, Edmund J. S., Susie Chandler, Steve Lukito, Myrofora Kakoulidou, Graham Moore, Niki Cooper, Maciej Matejko, Isabel Jackson, Beta Balwani, Tiegan Boyens, et al. 2024. "Participatory Translational Science of Neurodivergence: Model for Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder and Autism Research." *The British Journal of Psychiatry* 225 (1): 127–31. doi: 10.1192/bjp.2023.151.

Stray, Liv Larsen, Torstein Stray, Synnøve Iversen, Anne Ruud, and Bjørn Ellertsen. 2009. "Methylphenidate Improves Motor Functions in Children Diagnosed with Hyperkinetic Disorder." *Behavioral and Brain Functions* 5: 21. doi: 10.1186/1744-9081-5-21.

Stray, Liv Larsen, Øystein Kristensen, Mona Lomeland, Marit Skorstad, Torstein Stray, and Finn Egil Tønnessen. 2013. "Motor Regulation Problems and Pain in Adults Diagnosed with ADHD." *Behavioral and Brain Functions* 9: 18. doi: 10.1186/1744-9081-9-18.

Subcommittee on Children and Adolescents with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactive Disorder. 2019. "Clinical

Practice Guideline for the Diagnosis, Evaluation, and Treatment of Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder in Children and Adolescents." *Pediatrics* 144 (4): e20192528. doi: 10.1542/peds.2019-2528.

Tebrizcik, Burcu Göz, Alexandra L. Georgescu, Susannah Pick, and Eleanor J. Dommett. 2025. "Interoceptive Abilities in Adults with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder." *Biological Psychology* 202: 109161. doi: 10.1016/j.biopsycho.2025.109161.

Umeda, Satoshi. 2022. "Nō to karada no hataraki kara miru 'kokoro' no kagaku" [The science of the mind as seen from the workings of the brain and body]. *Mita Hyoron Online*, March 7, 2022. https://www.keio.ac.jp/ja/about/public-relations/mita-hyoron/features/03-2-5/.

Umeda, Satoshi, Saiko Tochizawa, Midori Shibata, and Yuri Terasawa. 2016. "Prospective Memory Mediated by Interoceptive Accuracy: A Psychophysiological Approach." *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society B: Biological Sciences* 371 (1708): 20160005. doi: 10.1098/rstb.2016.0005.

van der Meere, Jaap J. 2005. "State Regulation and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder." In *Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder: From Genes to Patients*, edited by David Gozal and Dennis L. Molfese, 413–33. Humana Press. doi: 10.1385/1-59259-891-9:413.

Weyandt, Lisa L., Wendy Iwaszuk, Katie Fulton, Micha Ollerton, Noelle Beatty, Hillary Fouts, Stephen Schepman, and Corey Greenlaw. 2003. "The Internal Restlessness Scale: Performance of College Students with and without ADHD." *Journal of Learning Disabilities* 36 (4): 382–89. doi: 10.1177/00222194030360040801.

Wiersema, Jan R., and Elke Godefroid. 2018. "Interoceptive Awareness in Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder." *PLOS ONE* 13 (10): e0205221. doi: 10.1371/journal.pone.0205221.

Embodied Vibrations: Noise, Mood, & Subtractive Synthesis in High Intensity Acoustic Experiences

Jordan Kokot and Aaron Michael Smith

Jordan Kokot, University of Colorado, Colorado Springs, ORCID: 0000-0003-0352-526X

Aaron Michael Smith, Independent Scholar, ORCID: 0000-0002-9204-3133

Abstract: *In this paper, we argue that the acoustic phenomenon of Sympathetic Resonance and Subtractive Synthesis can be deployed to clarify the somaesthetics of mood and attention. Leaning on recent work on the notion of "atmosphere" and several classic conversations about the sharedness of moods from thinkers like Hubert Dreyfus and Sarah Ahmed, as well as on a reading of music theory and an analysis of experimental music performances, we argue that Subtractive Synthesis provides a model for understanding how lived presence and attention emerges as co-constituent with the noisiness of life. Put more bluntly, Subtractive Synthesis allows for the possibility of a "Sympathetic Resonance," where a given person, properly calibrated through the unfolding of their embodied life "vibrate" alongside or in the midst of the possibilities of a given moment. This understanding of embodied attention clarifies the necessity of pluralism in lived engagements and suggests that political attempts to homogenize experience are not only doomed to fail but based on a fundamental misunderstanding of the sharedness of our attentional realities.*

Keywords: *Sympathetic Resonance, Attunement, Atmosphere, Experimental Music*

Noise, Atmosphere, and Intensity

Life is often loud. In the modern world, perhaps more than ever before, we are constantly beset by a range of messy, noisy, confusing, and often destabilizing auditory experiences that put pressure on our capacity to cope with our shared environment. This noisiness is so pressing that Susan Buck-Morss has (alongside Walter Benjamin) suggested that the condition of modernity is one of shock (Buck-Morss 1992, 16). Our bodies rumble as trucks vibrate the air around us and the ground under our feet, our phones and devices constantly ring with updates and alerts, our washers beep, our televisions blare, and far too many of us are confronted with the violent explosions and earth-shattering collapse caused by munitions and weaponry. According to Buck-Morss, Cressida Heyes, and others, one common response to this shock is a kind of self-anesthetization, or a volitional dulling of our senses to minimize or drown out the chaotic noisiness that threatens to overwhelm us (Heyes 2020, 2).

In general, noise is treated as something that confronts, challenges, disrupts, and even damages us and our capacity to engage with our world and each other.[1] This characterization

1 According to Vasilicos et al, "noise is often referred to in at least five main registers: (a) as clamour, commotion, or din; (b) as disagreeable or

is often apt—trauma of all sorts emerges from the chaotic and noisy disruption of life. Noise can cause deep discomfort.[2] And yet, there are many among us who seek out the noisy and chaotic, perhaps most often through music. Heavy metal, punk rock, hardcore, and even less culturally provocative forms of music play into an aesthetics of the loud and the messy, and people continue to flock in droves to crowded sweaty basements where highly distorted and chaotic auditory experiences rattle their bones and destabilize their sense of time and space.

These experiences of what James Dow refers to as "heavy timbres" (Dow 2026) might fit well into Heyes' account of the anaesthetics of experience—of deliberate numbing to cope with the chaotic uncertainty of modern life (Heyes 2020, 3). But they might also tap into something less modern and perhaps "deeper" about human experience. Though this possibility won't be fully explored here, in what follows we will suggest that noise, acoustic and otherwise, might be one of conditions for the possibility of human attention and presence. In short, noise of nearly all kinds might be understood as the chaotic field of possibilities out of which our attention and presence are able to be formed.[3] In that way, noise may be the inexhaustible well of our possibilities, and, consequently, something we should be careful with when trying to minimize.

In a 2007 lecture on Heidegger's *Being & Time*, Hubert Dreyfus claims that the "ontology of moods" is experienced as "shared atmospheres [within] which people...resonate" (Hubert Dreyfus 2007). Dreyfus here seems to imply that the affective "atmosphere" of our shared embodiment can be understood in terms of a kind of auditory phenomenon–a sympathetic vibration or "resonance" within the background "noise" of an event or situation. He goes on to say that there can be "breakdowns" in this resonance, where people "aren't resonating with anything. They are just [encountering] some debris in their minds" (Hubert Dreyfus 2007)

Dreyfus (and, through him, Heidegger) are here engaging with a core question in somaesthetics—in what way are we able to gain access to a shared sense of an environment or experience? Or, more directly, how is it that human persons are able to tap into and exist in the midst of a shared environmental reality or situation—what we might call an "atmosphere" or the shared mood of an event or space?

Conversations about somaesthetics and atmospheres have become increasingly common in recent years. In addition to several conferences in 2024 and 2025,[4] there have been a number of important articles[5] published on both a general somaesthetic understanding of "atmosphere" and applications of the concept to discussions of technology and spirituality. Building on Gernot Böhme (2017, 2021) and Albert and Chen (Albert and Chen 2023), Tschaepe and Hunter describe atmospheres as "what brings together human situations and qualities of environments…" (forthcoming, 1). Further, atmospheres "may be considered as the space of experience within a particular context or situation that necessarily contains a certain mood or tone….They are *mood-defining spaces* or *spatially extended moods*" (forthcoming, 2). For Albert and Chen, an atmosphere is "the haptic sensation of being in the world at a specific place and time, the actuality of existence" (Albert and Chen 2023, 78). More colloquially, atmospheres are the vibe or the energy of a space and/or event that can be picked up by individual human participants. Types of spaces and events commonly generate certain kinds of atmospheres—

vexatious sounds; (c) as manifestations that disturb, obscure, and make uncertain; (d) as stimuli or data that are irrelevant or devoid of meaning; (e) as sheer sound or sound that is unidentified" (Vassilicos et al. 2025, 4). In what follows, our sense of noise is intended to touch on all four.

2 See (M. D. Tschaepe 2024), especially Chapter 2 for a careful discussion of the many valences of discomfort.

3 This view is related to Alva Noë's observation in Strange Tools, that perception is a kind of achievement that takes place in part through our capacity to non-thematically block out or restrict our vision by winnowing down the field of our attention (Noë 2016, xii).

4 Including the 2024 "Somaesthetics of Atmosphere conference hosted by the Center for Mind, Body, and Culture, and the follow-on conference "Atmospheres of the Spiritual: Somaesthetic Explorations" the following year.

5 Including (Anderson 2009), (Mark D. Tschaepe and Hunter forthcoming), (Fiala 2023)

spas are relaxing, sports games are exhilarating, fireside chats are cozy, and so on, and everything from architecture, to cleanliness, to the excitement, or lack thereof, of participants can contribute to an atmosphere (Mark D. Tschaepe and Hunter forthcoming, 2).

Building on Heidegger's infamous discussion of "mood" or "attunement" [*Stimmung*] in *Being and Time*, Dreyfus seems to suggest that we can gain access to the sharedness of an atomosphere in terms of an acoustic metaphor (Heidegger 1962, chap. 5). In short, the experience of the "mood" or "atmosphere" of a space or situation can be understood in terms of a) how a given person "resonates" with the atmosphere of a space, and b) how the space and atmosphere themselves are attended to in virtue of a kind of "subtraction" or removal of extraneous potential objects of attention for the sake of the focal phenomenon. In other words, we are able to find ourselves in an at least partly sensible coherence with the world around us through resonant encounters with different "threads" hiding within the noise of being. Likewise, we are able to gain access to these threads in virtue of how we are already "tuned" to be able to experience them. For instance, gaining access to the atmosphere of a given concert might depend a) on whether I had experienced and enjoyed similar acoustic experiences previously, b) if I am well rested and not experiencing any physical limitations, c) if I am appropriately disposed to the style of the social environment, and so on.

The sharedness of moods is a commonly noted phenomenon. A holiday party can be cheery or dull, time with friends can be melancholic or joyful, a classroom experience can be enriching or tense, and so on. However, some of the most potent and least articulable examples of shared moods involve live music performances, many of which are characterized by senses of connection and resonance among concert-goers on the one hand, and extreme bodily and auditory intensity on the other. In this paper, we explore the acoustic metaphor and suggest that careful attention to the somaesthetics of noise can give us insight into the sharedness of moods while also helping to answer questions about why some people seek out intense auditory experiences. For the work at hand, we are particularly interested in experimental heavy music, or music that involves intense and often overwhelming auditory experiences characterized by seemingly chaotic sonic features, high volume, body vibrations, and what is colloquially referred to as "noise."

These kinds of experiences reveal how the process of "resonating" with that noisy intensity expresses a particular kind of enactive/co-constitutive engagement between a person and their world, and, ultimately, why attention to noise and noisiness have the potential to disrupt the normative politics of homogeneity expressed by contemporary political powers. Through examining high intensity auditory experiences ("noise shows," doom, metal, etc.), we argue that the auditory phenomenon of Sympathetic Resonance and Subtractive Synthesis can be deployed to reveal core aspects of lived experience. In particular, we argue that Subtractive Synthesis provides a model for understanding how lived presence and attention in a particular environment or situation emerges as co-constituent with the noisiness of life. Put more bluntly, a process of Subtractive Synthesis (understood as the process by which certain sub-frequencies are stripped away from a noisy composite source to reveal a resonant signal) allows for the possibility of a "Sympathetic Resonance," where a given person, properly calibrated through the unfolding of their embodied life is able to "vibrate" alongside or in the mist of the possibilities of the moment they are currently encountering. This understanding of embodied attention clarifies the necessity of pluralistic dynamism in lived engagements with a given moment and suggests that attempts to homogenize experience are not only doomed to fail but based on a fundamental misunderstanding of the sharedness of our attentional realities.

The following argument proceeds in four stages. In Part 1 ("A Somaesthetics of Embodied

Noise"), we provide an overview of a somaesthetics of mood and atmosphere inspired by Hubert Dreyfus and Sarah Ahmed and then provide our first foray into an account of intense auditory experiences. In Part 2 ("Acoustic Technics"), we provide a brief overview of the science and history of Sympathetic Resonance and Subtractive Synthesis, with an eye to how these two concepts can inform our understanding of moods and atmospheres. In Part 3 ("Resonance & Resistance") we apply the concepts developed in Part 2 to clarify the account offered in Part 1, and ultimately suggest that this way of approaching the somaesthetics of atmosphere encourages us to prioritize dynamism, plurality, and emphasis on experiences of noise as a way of counterbalancing forces that aim to enforce normative and homogenizing understandings of how to best share our reality.

Part 1: A Somaesthetics of Embodied Noise

Dreyfus, Ahmed, & Resonance

Hubert Dreyfus' 2007 lectures on *Being and Time* are a tour-de-force in philosophical interpretation. While mostly remaining close to the inciting text, Dreyfus also embarks on several attempts at expanding and enriching Heidegger's approach to phenomenology, often inspired by questions and comments from his students. Of particular note is one such exchange with a student while discussing Section 1, Chapter 5, of *Being and Time* titled "Being-In as Such." This chapter is dedicated to characterizing how Dasein[6] encounters itself as always already attuned to the world it inhabits in a variable yet particular way. In other words, our being is largely characterized by a disposition or mood that unfolds variably throughout the moments of our life, but also provides our sense of the tone, energy and "vibe" of a given experience. According to Dan Dahlstrom,

> Moods are different ways in which we are oriented to this or that, ways that disclose our situation holistically (albeit not completely). They affect how the world and entities within the world appear to us, e.g. as inviting or irritating, enthralling or threatening. Moods are pre-reflective, and they are matters neither of our choice nor our making. Instead they come over us as part of our thrownness into the world. (Dahlstrom 2013, 113)

All of this is to say that moods, though variable and dynamic, are what grounds our orientation in the world, and help characterize and shape the field of our possible engagements. According to Sara Ahmed, "a mood is thus rather like an atmosphere: it is not that we catch a feeling from another person but that we are caught up in feelings that are not [fully] our own" (Ahmed 2014, 15). For Ahmed, importantly, we can often miss out on connecting with a particular mood. To become attuned to another person or a group involves an often deliberate process that can be derailed or disengaged for any number of reasons. In other words, perhaps contra Heidegger, we are not simply receptive to moods but instead take an active role in opening ourselves to the possibility of certain moods while also characterizing our willingness to engage with certain kinds of sociality.

Perhaps prefiguring Ahmed, Dreyfus too describes moods as "shared atmospheres [with] which people...resonate" (Hubert Dreyfus 2007). The term resonate is of particular importance, and highlights Ahmed's concerns about how and in what way we are able (or not able) to enter into moods. For Dreyfus, these are "breakdowns" in resonance, where people "aren't resonating with anything. They are just [encountering] some debris in their minds" (Hubert Dreyfus 2007). Earlier in the same lecture, he suggests that when people are out of sync with a given mood,

> it's like saying a string in the piano is attuned to middle C but it's not resonating to middle

6 Heidegger's word for a human person, often translated as both "Being-Here" and "Being-There."

> C. No, in Heidegger's language…when you're attuned to it, that just *means* that that aspect of the situation is what matters to you...it isn't that everybody has to be in the *same* mood, it's that when you're in any mood, it's the atmosphere…so that *everything* is disgruntling to the disgruntled person, even though in fact *everything* isn't disgruntling really, because everything can be promising [for example] to the happy upbeat person. If it's a mood, [the person in the mood] senses it as the whole situation…that's what they attune to, that's what they resonate to. Everything else in the situation they are blind to. (Hubert Dreyfus 2007)

In other words, resonance is not a matter of mere opinion, nor can we by fiat force ourselves to resonate with a given situation. When we enter into a mood, we participate in an only semi-volitional resonance with the possibilities made available by the coming together of our existing conditions and the affordances of the space of the mood (the venue, the group of people, the friends, etc.). Even so, moods aren't merely private. While everyone in a given group experiences a mood from their particular perspective, bringing their own sedimented and embodied history to bear on the present experience, people who are genuinely disconnected from the mood of a space are, in a sense, out of touch with what is on offer.

This tension raises a potent set of questions. Under what circumstances are we able to resonate with a given mood or atmosphere, and in what ways do our various personal idiosyncrasies light up different aspects of our shared reality? In other words, what accounts for both our success and failures in aligning with one another through our moods? Likewise, how are we to account for the differences in ways we respond to the mood on offer?

Noise & Heaviness

Before proceeding to unpack the above questions, it will be helpful to examine a particular kind of mood. Many of us are familiar with the various ways that live music can generate specific kinds of moods. The particular tone and quality of the music, the presence and energy of a crowd, the choices in lighting, venue, and stage direction all come to bear on developing a specific mood in the space. Frequently these moods are characterized by a kind of "easy access" dynamic flow that has the effect of smoothing over rough edges and inviting people into a mostly coherent and fluid set of experiences. Most popular forms of music fit this description. While the music and mood may not be to everyone's taste, the environment and music play into existing musical conventions that are accessible to a wide audience.

Experimental music (here including genres like noise, industrial, ambient, drone, free improv, and so on) takes on a profoundly different strategy. As the title suggests, experimental music tends to eschew traditional musical conventions and "experiment" with the possibilities of sound, sometimes regardless of whether those possibilities would produce traditionally "pleasant" experiences. Though not universal, many of these experiments are distinctly "noisy" in the sense that they present chaotic and often seemingly disorganized auditory experiences that defy easy classification into melody, rhythm, or any of the other conventional markers of traditional music. Of particular note (among many) are artists like Sissy Spacek (2025), Lawrence English (2022), and SUNN O))) (2026), all of whom regularly experiment with different ways of constructing and organizing sounds that produce audible environments characterized by dissonance, intensity, discomfort, and a lack of traditional musical organizational structure. To a listener more accustomed to popular music, these artists are all distinctly noisy and often unsettling.

Similarly, the live performances by artists like these tend to lean into pushing the limits of intelligibility in both auditory and embodied ways. Venues are variable, but are often small,

dark, and cramped while various instruments, synthesizers, and other sound production technologies are routinely amplified well beyond the range of comfortable hearing. SUNN O))) is particularly famous for producing soundscapes that are so intense that they induce involuntary bodily vibrations and resonances among concert goers. The mood of these spaces varies widely as well, ranging incredibly active and energetic to meditative and almost trance like. Lawrence English, for instance, often uses sampled recordings of natural environments (e.g., a blizzard in Antarctica[7]) layered repetitively over the top of one-another to induce a wave-like sense of repetition and abstraction.

Key to all of these performances is how the artists involved deliberately confront their audiences with sounds that are deliberately disruptive, alienating, disorienting, and confusing, often bordering on Julia Kristava's sense of the abject (Kristeva 2010). Indeed, to use Samantha Pentony's language, in environments like these, meaning seems to "collapse," and the mood is one of dissolution into a passive reception of the possibilities of audible experience (Pensstony 1996). In performances where heaviness is prioritized, there is often a sense of melting or dissolving into the noise as one's body is compelled to vibrate at whatever low frequencies are generated by amplifiers.

What makes performances like these appealing to audiences and what might they tell us about atmospheres, moods, and how we gain access to them? The answers to the first question are as variable as audience members themselves, but in what follows we will suggest that these kinds of noisy and chaotic experiences are attractive in part because they open an atmosphere of experimental vulnerability where audience members are both invited into a dynamic play of sonic and embodied possibilities while at the same time overcome by their receptivity to resonances laden into their sedimented and embodied being. In other words, experimental music makes demands on a listener based on their existing physical, psychological, and historical personhood while also inviting dynamism and variability in how those demands unfold internally. The mood is there for us to pick up (in fact, in some performances, it almost forces itself on us), but its noisiness provides a space where the interaction between our cognitive and perceptual systems and the sound on offer is open to new possibilities of pattern formation and engagement.

Part 2: Acoustic Techniques

To clarify the above account, it will be helpful to provide an overview of several concepts that are central to the study of acoustics. Though Subtractive Synthesis and Sympathetic Resonance are the two concepts most germane to this inquiry, in what follows we will also highlight the harmonic series, overtones, and Fourier transforms. This overview should allow for a more careful engagement with Dreyfus' acoustic metaphor.

Subtractive Synthesis

Subtractive Synthesis is a technique of forming complex timbres. Starting from a noise generator (or other complex sound) and using a series of filters, frequency bands are removed from the initial sound, resulting in a new timbre. The metaphor of sculpting is helpful in making sense of the phenomenon. A sculptor may begin with a basic material (a block of wood or stone) and then slowly carry away the "excess" till they reach the desired shape. This process is in contrast to *creatio ex nihilo* or creation from *tabula rasa*. Instead, in a sense, the desired object is "lying dormant" within the "noise" of the original object, be it stone, wood, or literal noise, and the artist must perform a series of operations to strip back the noise from the original tonality,

7 (English 2022)

revealing the desired "signal."

The human voice produces the specific and differentiated sounds necessary for human speech through a similar process. Roughly put, we push our breath out of our lungs and through our throat, which, through a series of muscle contractions, induces oscillations and wave patterns in the medium of the breath, which are again reshaped by mouth position. The result is a sound which has been winnowed into a shape that can be appreciated by the perceptual and cognitive systems of a listener as intelligible speech. The noisiness of our breath, filtered through our particular body, mouth, and nose, creates the timbre of our particular speaking voice (Einbond 2013, 57–58).

As a technique for producing music, Subtractive Synthesis was first developed in the 1950s during the early days of electronic music.[8] Its inverse, Additive Synthesis, was developed in preceding decades as a method of creating new timbres by combining multiple simple oscillators and recording the resulting combination or overdubbing them (Huff 2020, 85). Given the tape-based technology of the time and the bulk and expense of oscillators, it was exceedingly difficult to build sufficiently complex timbres. A composer would have to record the sine wave from an oscillator onto a piece of tape and then combine multiple sine waves together onto a four-track tape recorder. If more than four was desired, a composer would then have to repeat the process on a new piece of tape and then record over the top of the previous four-track recording. A composer would then have to repeat the process on a new piece of tape and then record that new piece on top of your previous four-track recording (Huff 2020, 91–98). Additive Synthesis was also a logical extension of Western classical music. Most early electronic musicians were trained in traditional orchestration where the desired timbre was built via a combination of particular orchestral forces.

This historical precedent for Subtractive Synthesis is reflected in John Cage's attribution to Debussy the claim "I take all the tones there are, leave out the ones I don't want, and use all the others" (Cage 2010, 118). However, the origin of Subtractive Synthesis can be traced most clearly to the so called "cold war" between German studios and their preference for "pure sound" and the French radio use of more collage-based tape techniques now known as *musique concrète* (Toop 1979, 380; Huff 2020, 21, 76, 81). German composers such as Karlheinz Stockhausen and Herbert Eimert and their *elektronische musik* emphasized "pure synthesis" techniques that employed noise generators and simple filters to build complex timbres without needing to resort to manipulating instrumental recordings or collaging pre-existing sounds. At the same time, French *musique concrète* composers such as Pierre Schaeffer and Pierre Henry were already deploying the same technique, but mostly using pre-existing sound sources filtered into new sounds. Subtractive Synthesis was famously utilized in Stockhausen's 1954 piece *Studie II* and was used again in his 1956 piece *Gesang der Jünglinge*, remembered as one of the first Western electronic music "masterpieces" (Huff 2020, 85; Toop 1979, 391; Morgan 1991, 466).

Harmonic Series / Overtones

To clarify Subtractive Synthesis and Sympathetic Resonance, it is helpful to first understand the harmonic series, overtones, and partials. All sounds (other than the simple sine wave) contain a complex mixture of many sounds at various frequencies.

Within every sounding tone, at varying intensities and forming timbre, lies "a whole series of higher musical tones which we call the harmonic upper partial tones" (Helmholtz and Ellis 1895, 22). The simple ratios described by the Pythagoreans when experimenting with

8 One famous example comes from the early electronic music experiments in the WDR studio in Köln, (Huff 2020, 85).

monochords and the proportionate properties of strings and their divisions can be used to build up this "harmonic series." As a basic illustration, if we divide a length of string in half and then pluck the shortened string with the same force, we will cause that string to vibrate twice as fast as the full string, giving a ratio of 1:2. This causes the sound to become one octave higher than the original string. If we divide our initial string into three equal parts, we develop the ratio of 1:3, creating a tone an octave plus a fifth higher than the original tone. As Cazden writes,

> The harmonic series…is further interpreted to provide an elegant, automatic and inescapable natural guide to…a gradation among consonant values of intervals, with those lowest in the series, and hence of simpler ratio, being superior, and with those requiring higher numbers placed in decreasing rank order of natural perfection… (Cazden 1980, 130)

According to Adrian Rice,

> Each harmonic oscillator will have a lowest possible frequency, f, which determines the note created when oscillations occur along the whole length l of the string or air column. This fundamental frequency f almost always has accompanying faster sound waves called overtones which, ideally, have frequencies $f, 2f, 3f, 4f, 5f$, etc. Consequently, the wavelengths of these harmonic overtones will be $l, ½\,l, ⅓\,l, ¼\,l, ⅕\,l$, and so on. It is from this sequence of "harmonic" wavelengths that the harmonic series gets its name. (Rice 2011, 269)

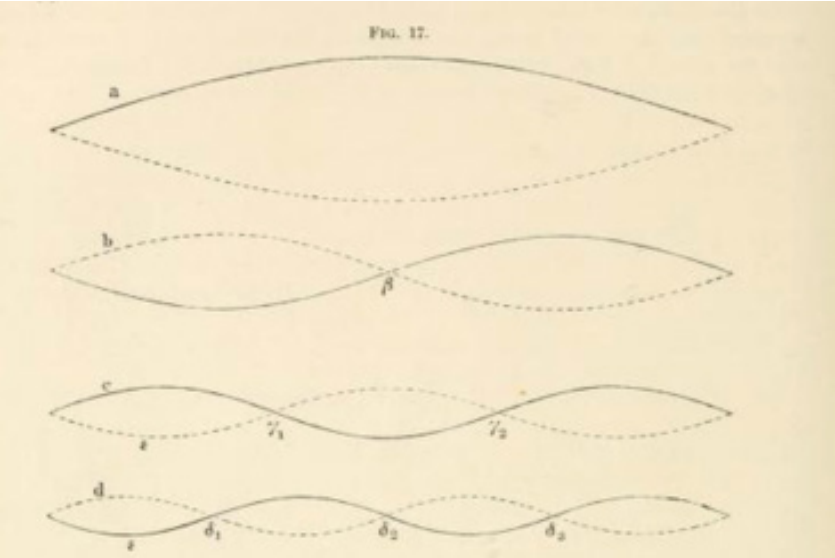


Figure 1: Helmholtz's Diagram of the Harmonic Series (Helmholtz & Ellis, 1895, p. 46)

These "harmonics" or "partials" can be found by lightly touching your finger against a string instrument's strings at proportional intervals.

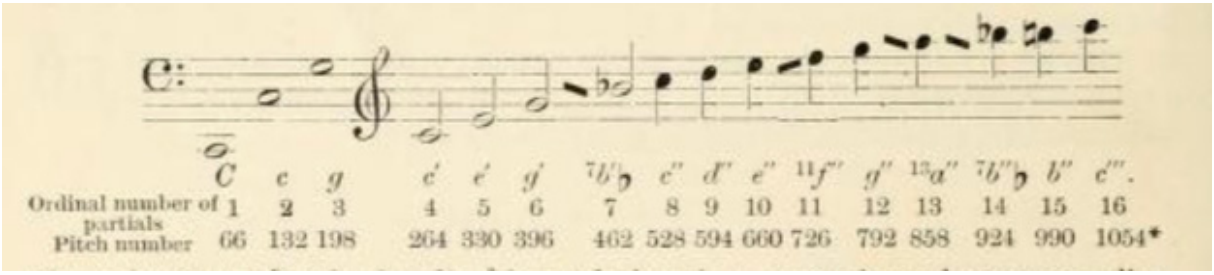


Figure 2: The harmonic series based on the fundamental of C2, including partial numbers and "pitch number" (or frequency in Hertz) (Helmholtz & Ellis, 1895, p. 22)

Fourier Transforms

Those sounds can then be broken down into their constituent parts via Fourier transforms.[9] Henrich Helmholtz is credited for first applying the concept of Fourier transforms to sound waves, arguing that "any given regular periodic form of vibration can always be produced by the addition of simple vibrations, having pitch numbers which are once, twice, thrice, four times, &c., as great as the pitch numbers of the given motion," and further, that

> any vibrational motion of the air in the entrance to the ear, corresponding to a musical tone, may be always, and for each case only in one single way, exhibited as the sum of a number of simple vibrational motions, corresponding to the partials of this musical tone. (Helmholtz and Ellis 1895, 34)

Interestingly, Helmholtz goes on to stress how these "simple vibrations" may or may not be readily perceptible themselves,

> ...any form of vibration, no matter what shape it may take, can be expressed as the sum of simple vibrations, its analysis into such a sum is quite independent of the power of the eye to perceive, by looking at its representative curve, whether it contains simple vibrations or not, and if it does, what they are. (Helmholtz and Ellis 1895, 34)[10]

Rayleigh describes Fourier's achievement as, "...it has been proved by Fourier, that the most general single-valued periodic function can be resolved into a series of circular functions, having periods which are submultiples of that of the given function" (Rayleigh and Lindsay 2011, 17)

This application of Fourier transforms makes possible the construction and filtering of sounds. If we know that a complex sound has a wide range of frequencies involved in its propagation, then we can choose to remove a selection of frequencies and still leave enough remaining such that the sound isn't entirely attenuated.

Sympathetic Resonance

In short, Sympathetic Resonance can be understood as the way in which an object or material might be induced into parallel vibrations by an appropriate wave. Two analogues might help to clarify Sympathetic Resonance for the non-acoustician. First the common phrases "we're on the same frequency" and "that resonates with me" generally indicate more than simply mutual

9 Fourier transforms are named for Jean-Baptiste Fourier, the 18th century mathematician and physicist who, through the study of heat waves, discovered that complex waveforms can be broken down or decomposed into simple sine waves. As a corollary, simple sine waves can then be composed into more and more complex forms. For more on Fourier and Fourier transforms, see (Stein and Shakarchi 2003).

10 Today, the Fourier transform can be calculated on computers by a version of it called FFT or fast-Fourier-transform. See (Huff 2020, 77) and (Toop 1979, 383).

understanding. Instead, they gesture towards a deep, implicit, even embodied connection. Generally, this type of personal resonance is akin to how a tuning string vibrates in "sympathy" with a nearby sound source of the appropriate frequency.

A second example is perhaps more instructive. Consider a hand-dial radio. In order to listen in to a given radio station, the listener must manually adjust a dial that corresponds to an internal component that allows the receiver to pick up specific frequencies. When the radio dial lands on a frequency that matches the transmission of a near enough radio signal, the two come into resonance with each other, and the internal mechanism of the radio transforms that resonance into audible sound. The way of opening a channel between a receiver and a transmitter is through a mechanical and electric adjustment so as to allow the receiver to "inhabit" the same frequency as the transmitter.

In general, Sympathetic Resonance is a property of material objects to vibrate "in tune" with or at the same frequency as an encountered wave. Sound, which describes waves that are detectable by the human auditory systems, is the result of some kind of concussive action that causes the air around the impact to move in a wave pattern. Human hearing in general is made possible by the capacity of the tympanic membrane and other ear structures to vibrate in frequency with (to resonate with) ambient airwaves.

As the term implies, resonance (ultimately derived from the Latin *re+sonare*, or literally "sound again") contains an element of repetition and continuation. What is repeated are the highs and lows (more formally, crests and troughs) of the sonic wave form as it crashes into a material that can mirror its vibrational frequency, and, by extension, how the sound "keeps sounding" through the new material. According to Helmholtz, Sympathetic Resonance occurs when bodies "*continue* to perform…vibrations." It is worth quoting Helmholtz at length:

> Such an effect occurs in the phenomenon of Sympathetic Resonance. This phenomenon is always found in those bodies which when once set in motion by any impulse, continue to perform a long series of vibrations before they come to rest….provided the periodic time of the gentle blows is precisely the same as the periodic time of the body's own vibrations, very large and powerful oscillations may result. But if the periodic time of the regular blows is different from the periodic time of the oscillations, the resulting motion will be weak or quite insensible…. When, for example, the strings of two violins are in exact unison, and one string is bowed, the other will begin to vibrate. (Helmholtz and Ellis 1895, 22)

Resonance is the act of sound interacting with either a surface (in the case of the resonance of a space, echo, reverb, etc.) or another vibrating body continually until it ceases vibrating either the body itself or the air, whichever fades first.

To understand how one instance of vibration could put another, physically disconnected body into vibration, we must first understand another derivation of *sonare*: consonance, or per its etymology, "sounding-with" or "sounding-together" (Cazden 1980, 126).[11] In short, the multiple frequencies that become options for Sympathetic Resonance only exist in virtue of how they are consonantly related to each other. The aspect of objects that decides whether they resonate alongside one another is tied to the relationship between consonance and dissonance.

Debates have raged through music theory and musicology for decades regarding whether consonance and dissonance are culturally learned or mathematically and biologically inherent.[12]

11 See also (Parncutt and Hair 2011)

12 See (Cazden 1980). While it is our considered position that these two views are compatible and perhaps even mutually constitutive of each other, for the purposes of this paper, we are adopting the psychoacoustic "tuning system" terminology put forward by Cazden and clarified by (Cohen 2022) (wherein harmony is derived from the Greek term harmonia, which indicates a "fitting together").

Regardless, consonance occurs when two or more sounds can be heard together in such a way that they seem to blend or cohere with each other. For instance, a C played in two separate octaves appear matched with one another even though the sound waves are themselves quite different. For Carl Stumpf, consonance occurs as a sort of "fusion" that occurs when two or more tones "fuse" together into a "sum but not a whole" (Stumpf 1883, 127)[13]

The opposite of consonance, dissonance, occurs when two or more sounds seem to "clash."[14] Patrizio Barbieri provides much of the scientific background regarding *consonance* and *resonance* in his 2001 paper ""Galileo's" coincidence theory of consonances":

> A musical note is characterized by its frequency, i.e. the number of vibrations per second produced by the body emitting it. According to the above theory, the greater the number of "coincident" (i.e. in-phase) vibrations of the notes making up an interval, the greater its consonance. In the unison, for example, all the vibrations of the two sounds are coincident; in the octave, expressed by the frequency ratio 2:1, coincidence occurs every other vibration of the upper note; etc. In conclusion, the degree of consonance was thus defined (1) by the greater or lesser blend of the sounds, and (2) by the number of in-phase vibrations that went to strike the eardrum (assuming that the out-of-phase vibrations, instead, brought disturbance). (Barbieri 2001, 201)

Quoting the second century Adrastus, Barbieri continues:

> [Two] sounds are mutually consonant when—on a string instrument—in playing one, the other simultaneously proceeds to sound, by a certain property of sympathy. Hence, for the same reason, if both are played at the same time, from their blend a sweet and pleasant sound will reach the ear.[15]

Here Adrastus refers to *sympatiam* or sympathy when explaining consonance. When a sound is consonant and has "a certain…sympathy," "the playing of one" string causes "the other…to sound." Consonance can similarly be demonstrated with a piano and a viola. If I play the open G string on my viola while the hammers are not blocking the piano strings from vibrating, the piano begins sounding as well. On closer observation, the same exact string as was played on the viola (G3) is also vibrating inside the piano. Importantly, some other strings will also begin to vibrate, though with varied intensities. Barring other factors, the vibrating strings on the piano will have a close ratio with the pitch that initiated the consonance.

These frequencies can be predicted with knowledge of the harmonic series. For example, I can predict that G4 will be the second-most intense vibration after playing G3, and then D4, etc. [16]This vibration of strings, or other physical objects for that matter, in response to the resonating of another sonic source, without direct physical contact, is called "Sympathetic Resonance."

---

13 Quoted in (Guernsey 1928, 177)

14 As Andrew Baker writes in his translation of Porphyry's Commentary on Ptolemny's Harmonics, the term 'Consonance' comes into English from Greek by way of a somewhat rough Latin translation. He writes that the Latin term 'consonare' is supposed to "to represent synēchēsis 'combined sound' (ēchos), 'sounding together.'" He continues, "typical uses of the cognate verb synēchein appear [elsewhere in the text], where they refer to the resonances set up in some material by another sound, or to the 'sympathetic' response of one string to another when the latter is Struck" (Porphyrius (234-305) and Barker 2015, 213).

15 Consonant ad se mutuo soni, quorum altero pulsato (in instrumento fidibus instructo) reliquus, per quondam proprietatem et sympatiam, simul sonat. Atque, ob eandem causam, utrisque simul pulsatis, lævis grataque ex mistione vox exauditur.

16 Setting aside the equal-temperament of the modern piano.

Part 3: Resonance & Resistance

Returning to where we started our inquiry, we say again, perhaps a bit more clearly, that life is often loud, and frequently noisy. We are perpetually bombarded with a vast array of stimuli from nearly every direction, each with a multiplicity of possible meanings. In the language of Parts 1 and 2, the frequencies available for our engagement are essentially limitless and far beyond our capacity to meaningfully cognize. Instead, over the course of our lives, we develop a variety of capacities and rubrics to winnow away (to subtract out) those frequencies that are less relevant for the moment at hand. In other words, our system of attention is constructed out of our embedded habits of subtracting away (of carving out) various possible meanings to leave behind (or reveal) a central set of frequencies that allow us to engage with whatever moment is at hand. This process is partially volitional, but largely non-thematic—my particular way of filtering out incidental frequencies is usually not a cognitive accomplishment, but one rooted in habits and dispositions developed over the course of my life. When I see a rock wall as something available for me to climb, it is because I have had training and past experiences that allow me to see it in that particular way. For someone afraid of heights or untrained in belaying, harnesses, carabiners, and so on, the rock wall is merely a colorful obstacle. This process of subtracting away incidental aspects of perceptual and embodied experience is strongly analogous to the account of Subtractive Synthesis outlined above.

Likewise, in order to pick up and make sense of a particular aspect of my environment (e.g., a mood or atmosphere), that aspect must have something within me with which to generate a resonance. The point is not that there is some kind of sounding note out there that triggers a Sympathetic Resonance in me. Rather, my sense of myself as an embodied system of possibilities is activated in my engagement with what is on offer in my environment. My sense of the world as filled with objects, activities, agents, moods, and so on becomes alive out of how my system of engagement and understanding is made possible in this particular space.

Importantly, our resonances are variable internally as well. As with the example of octaves resonating above, I may embody patterns that may resonate more or less distantly with whatever tone is being played. To continue the metaphor, when a G3 is played, my neighbor might resonate at a G3, but I might only have available a consonance at a D4.

In terms of moods and atmosphere, and returning again to experimental music, part of what is so engaging about loud, noisy, chaotic, and audibly intense environments is that they both activate and disrupt our pre-filtered (pre-subtracted) synthesis while simultaneously providing a dynamic landscape (or, rather, soundscape) where new patterns of meaning can be formed out of the possibilities elicited in our resonance. More directly, experimental performances both activate aspects of our embedded capacities to resonate with a mood, while at the same time leaving profoundly open how that mood plays out internally. We still exist in a shared atmosphere with our fellow performance goers, but at the same time, we are made acutely aware of how our engagement with the piece of work at hand is profoundly particular and individual.

This last point opens up the possibility of a radically noisy politics. Where much of contemporary political conversation is organized around how to encourage or, in more problematic cases, compel a kind of unity where the noisy and chaotic elements of experience are homogenized into a predictable and consistent set of community expectations, the above account of atmospheres points out that our political and personal possibilities emerge directly out of the noise, and that our engagement with that noise is inevitably both radically particular and open to communal connections. We share in moods, but we can only share in them out of our particular way of subtracting and resonating with the people and place around us.

It is no secret that many contemporary political leaders and movements have a distinct aversion to difference and the reality that our perspectives are varied, dynamic, and rooted in our particular histories, embodiments, and ways of life. While it is not the purpose of this paper to provide a thoroughgoing critique of these movements, many seem to rest on the idea that a better world is one where experiences are uniform, predictable, and consistent from person to person. The aversion to difference is, in a sense, an aversion to noise, to the idea both that the world often breaks into our experience and compels us to engage with it in unpredictable, confusing, and even unsettling ways, and to the reality that, even in existing together in community, the very possibility of sharedness emerges out of the messy, noisy wildness of our lived histories. Trying to eliminate or deaden that noise borders on fascism in the way that it undercuts the origin and substance of the creative dynamism. While in no way completed, the view of moods and atmospheres offered here provides the beginning of an alternative way of understanding how difference structures and makes possible both meaningful community and human life more generally.

References

Ahmed, Sara. 2014. "Not in the Mood." *New Formations* 82 (82): 13–28. https://doi.org/10.3898/NeWF.82.01.2014.

Albert, Juan, and Lin Chen. 2023. "Working with Atmospheres to Improve Our Planet's Mood." *Art, Style, Art & Culture International Magazine* 11 (11): 77-92. https://doi.org/doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.7651390.

Anderson, Ben. 2009. "Affective Atmospheres." *Emotion, Space and Society* 2 (2): 77–81. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.emospa.2009.08.005.

Barbieri, Patrizio. 2001. "'Galileo's' Coincidence Theory of Consonances, from Nicomachus to Sauveur." *Recercare* 13: 201–32.

Böhme, Gernot. 2017. *Atmospheric Architectures: The Aesthetics of Felt Spaces*. Bloomsbury Academic. https://philarchive.org/rec/BHMAAT-3.

Böhme, Gernot. 2021. "Atmosphere." *Online Encyclopedia Philosophy of Nature*, no. 1 (June). https://doi.org/10.11588/oepn.2021.1.80607.

Buck-Morss, Susan. 1992. "Aesthetics and Anaesthetics: Walter Benjamin's Artwork Essay Reconsidered." *October* 62: 3. https://doi.org/10.2307/778700.

Cage, John. 2010. *Silence: Lectures on Nothing*. (Middletown).

Cazden, Norman. 1980. "The Definition of Consonance and Dissonance." *International Review of the Aesthetics and Sociology of Music* 11 (2): 123–68. https://doi.org/10.2307/836494.

Cohen, David E. 2022. "From Ramos to Rameau: Toward the Origins of the Modern Concept of Harmony." *Journal of Music Theory* 66 (1): 1–42. https://doi.org/10.1215/00222909-9534115.

Dahlstrom, Daniel O. (Author). 2013. *Heidegger Dictionary*. Bloomsbury.

Dow, James. 2026. "Heavy Timbres: What Makes Heavy Music Heavy?" In *The Heaviest Ideas in the Universe: A Philosophy of Heavy Metal*, edited by J. Aaron Simmons and Benjamin W. McCraw. Wiley.

Einbond, A. 2013. "Subtractive Synthesis: Noise and Digital (Un)Creativity." In *Noise in and as Music*, edited by A. Cassidy and A. Einbond. University of Huddersfield Press. http://unipress.hud.ac.uk/catalogue/books/noiseinandasmusic.php.

English, Lawrence. 2022. *Viento*. N/A. https://lawrenceenglish.bandcamp.com/album/viento.

Fiala, Jessica. 2023. "Sensing the Virtual: Atmosphere and Somaesthetics in Virtual Reality." *The*

Journal of Somaesthetics 8 (March). https://doi.org/10.54337/ojs.jos.v8i2.7365.

Guernsey, Martha. 1928. "The Rôle of Consonance and Dissonance in Music." *The American Journal of Psychology* 40 (2): 173–204. https://doi.org/10.2307/1414484.

Heidegger, Martin. 1962. *Being and Time*. Translated by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson. Blackwell publ.

Helmholtz, Hermann von, and Alexander John Ellis. 1895. *On the Sensations of Tone as a Physiological Basis for the Theory of Music*. With University of California Libraries. London, New York : Longmans, Green, and Co. http://archive.org/details/onsensationsofto00helmrich.

Heyes, Cressida J. 2020. *Anaesthetics of Existence: Essays on Experience at the Edge*. Duke University Press.

Hubert Dreyfus. 2007. *Philosophy 185 - Fall 2007 (Being & Time)*. University of California, Berkeley, December 5. http://archive.org/details/ucberkeley_webcast_itunesu_461120554.

Huff, David. 2020. "Sounds Themselves: Intersections of Serialism and Musique Concrète in Karlheinz Stockhausen's 'Elektronische Studie I.'" Doctoral, University of North Texas. https://doi.org/10.12794/metadc1707329.

Kristeva, Julia. 2010. *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*. Translated by Leon Roudiez. Columbia University Press.

Morgan, Robert P. 1991. *Twentieth-Century Music: A History of Musical Style in Modern Europe and America*. W W Norton & Co Inc.

Noë, Alva. 2016. *Strange Tools: Art and Human Nature*. Reprint edition. Hill and Wang.

Parncutt, Richard, and Grahm Hair. 2011. "Consonance and Dissonance in Theory, Practice and Science." Conference on Interdiciplinary Musicology, Glasglow, March 9. https://www.academia.edu/87391418/Consonance_and_Dissonance_in_Theory_Practice_and_Science_Richard_Parncutt_and_Graham_Hair_Conference_on_Interdisciplinary_Musicology_30_8_3_9_2011_Glasgow_Read_by_Graham_Hair_accompanying_Powerpoint_by_Richard_Parncutt_At_last_year_s_Conference_on_Interdisciplinary_Musicology_in_Sheffield_we.

Pensstony, Samantha. 1996. "Kristeva's Theory of Abjection in Relation to the Fairy Tale and Post Colonial Novel." *Deep South* 3 (2). https://www.otago.ac.nz/deepsouth/vol2no3/pentony.html.

Porphyrius (234-305), and Andrew Barker. 2015. *Porphyry's Commentary on Ptolemy's Harmonics: a Greek text and annotated translation*. http://archive.org/details/barker-porphyrys-commentary-on-ptolemys-harmonics-gr-en-2015.

Rayleigh, J. W. S., and Robert B. Lindsay. 2011. *The Theory of Sound, Volume One: Unabridged Second Revised Edition*. Dover Publications.

Rice, Adrian. 2011. "The Harmonic Series: A Primer." In *Mathematical Time Capsules: Historical Modules for the Mathematics Classroom*, edited by Amy Shell-Gellasch and Dick Jardine. MAA Notes. Mathematical Association of America. https://doi.org/10.5948/UPO9780883859841.035.

SissySpacek. 2025. *Non-Linear*. No Holiday. Album. https://sissyspacek.bandcamp.com/album/non-linear.

Stein, Elias M., and Rami Shakarchi. 2003. "Fourier Analysis | Princeton University Press." April 6. https://press.princeton.edu/books/hardcover/9780691113845/fourier-analysis.

Stumpf, Carl. 1883. *Tonpsychologie*. With University of California Libraries. Leipzig : S. Hirzel. http://archive.org/details/tonpsychologie02stum.

SUNN O))). 2026. Sunn O))). Sub Pop Records. Album. https://sunn.bandcamp.com/album/sunn-o-2.

Toop, Richard. 1979. “Stockhausen and the Sine-Wave: The Story of an Ambiguous Relationship.” The Musical Quarterly LXV (3): 379–91. https://doi.org/10.1093/mq/LXV.3.379.

Tschaepe, M. D. 2024. Somaesthetics of Discomfort: Addressing Identity, Normativity, and Alienation. Brill. https://brill.com/display/title/71227.

Tschaepe, Mark D., and Michael P. Hunter. forthcoming. Traffic Atmospheres and AI: Somaesthetics and Levels of Automation in Transportation Technology.

Vassilicos, Basil, Giuseppe Torre, and Fabio Tommy Pellizzer, eds. 2025. *The Experience of Noise: Philosophical and Phenomenological Perspectives*. Springer Nature Switzerland. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-82802-7.

"Noise belongs to everyone" – interview with Vilho Koivisto, a noise musician

Janne Vanhanen

Aesthetics, University of Helsinki, ORCID: 0000-0001-7817-4578

Abstract: *The interview with Vilho Koivisto, a Finnish noise music practitioner, explores topics related to noise vis-à-vis music, the practices of making, performing, recording as well as releasing and distributing noise, and the audience of noise music. In our conversation Koivisto reflects upon his own becoming aware of noise music and his acquiring of the skills needed to create, perform and publish noise, the contemporary noise music scene and relation between performer and the audience.*

Keywords: *Noise music, sound, texture, chaos, structure, performing, publishing*

1. Introduction

In order to gain more insight into conceptual and practical aspects of noise in a musical context, I wanted to interview Vilho Koivisto, a Finnish noise music practitioner. Koivisto is not only a recording and performing artist, but he also runs the record label Satatuhatta with a catalogue of over 120 releases and, in addition, distributes other labels' output via mail order. All in all, Koivisto can be considered a major actor within the international noise music network. On 24th of January 2026 I took the journey to Kiiminki in Northern Finland, near the city of Oulu, to discuss topics related to noise music: Koivisto's own journey to appreciating noise, his practices of making and performing noise as well as publishing and distributing work. The recorded interview was conducted in Finnish and subsequently translated to English without omissions. I have included a few footnotes to explicate some details for the reader who is not well-versed in the noise music subculture.

2. Interview

JV: We are here at Vilho Koivisto's place to discuss practices and different aspects related to noise music. Present are Vilho, a well-known noise musician, best recognized through his solo project Aprapat. I am Janne Vanhanen, conducting the interview.

Let us begin with a very fundamental question: how and when did you become aware of noise music and started to be interested in it?

VK: A difficult question to start with! If I try to recall, my first, perhaps earliest memories of noise, or of noise in a musical context, are from sometime after the early 2000s. Having been on a musical journey of exploration all my life and always searching for new and more

interesting musical experiences, at some point you inevitably end up encountering noise music and experimental music. One of the first noise artists I remember hearing was probably Merzbow.[1] His music was relatively easily available and distributed through labels associated with heavy metal music. It might even have come via Boris.[2] I listened to Boris quite a lot, and they had many collaborations with Merzbow. One of my first proper encounters with noise was precisely the album Merzbow and Boris made together, although it cannot be straightforwardly categorized as noise. Sonic Youth was also heavily in rotation; they've been described as noise rock, and through them I encountered something that wasn't yet pure noise – harsh noise – but where louder elements in music began to interest me.

JV: It seems to be a fairly common trajectory that noise is discovered through the outer edges of more "musical" music.

VK: Yes, very much through that route. When it comes to more direct noise, free jazz was perhaps the musical style that taught me to listen to sound texture and chaos. It opened the gates to the world of harsh noise. Of course, when you first listen to it, you don't really get anything out of it and wonder how anyone can listen to this, but fairly quickly points of engagement begin to emerge through experimental music, free jazz, and free improvisation.

JV: You mentioned texture. Is that something you then find in harsh noise – this sense of the tactility of sound?

VK: Yes, the feel of sound is important. Perhaps as musical taste develops, the need for music to have a certain structure or formula – such as in pop music or so-called "normal" music – falls away. That is, the idea that music should follow specific patterns. And you're always seeking surprise and something new. What interested me in sound was indeed texture: certain timbres or elements, whatever one might call them, that speak to you more and kind of tickle the ear canals. You end up liking those more than others. For example, the sound of an electric guitar. There are good sounds and then slightly worse ones – or not necessarily worse but sounds that don't align as well with your own ear. Or more generally, how a record sounds, how it is mixed or mastered – you can grasp a certain kind of atmosphere that exists in the texture of sound as such. Perhaps these are matters of taste. Rather than relating to musical structures, they delve more into the quality of sound itself.

JV: Noise music is a somewhat paradoxical term in the sense that if music is understood – as in a dictionary definition – as organized sound, then in noise music sound itself is the central element. Of course, there has to be some kind of framework in which sound can appear at all, so order manifests itself in some form, but it is not the main point.

VK: Noise music is certainly music in the sense that it is recorded sound, but the nature of the work is somewhat different – it speaks in a different way. Chaos is also what is interesting about it.

JV: What about the next step, when you began to think that you could also create something like this yourself? How did that start?

VK: When you go deep enough down the noise rabbit hole… Of course, I had always been interested in making music and had had some projects earlier, but when you start thinking about how this [noise music] is made and become extremely interested in how you could do it yourself – because you spend so much time with it, listening to it and becoming more and more invested – then naturally you start to think that you might try making something yourself someday. I had actually made experimental music earlier as well, but not noise as such. I do remember that

1 Probably the most well-known name in noise music, Merzbow is the project of Japanese artist Masami Akita. He has released experimental music and noise music under the Merzbow moniker since 1979, accumulating a vast discography of several hundred releases.

2 Boris is a Japanese drone and doom metal band formed in the early 1990s.

as a very small child I recorded a lot with cassette players and banged around making different sounds, so in that sense there was already an interest in different kinds of sounds back then.

As noise records started to accumulate and began to take on a larger role in my musical activity, after probably about a year of turning the idea over in my head that I should start, I came across a four-track tape recorder in absolutely pristine condition at a flea market. I thought, I'll buy this and now I'll start making noise. I looked up some basics, read a lot of zines, and asked friends and acquaintances where one might begin. After a few months, maybe half a year, of experimenting on my own, recording, and beginning to find a sound I liked, I thought that this could perhaps be released in some form.

JV: If one thinks of noise as a musical genre, the listener–creator ratio is probably quite different from that in many other kinds of music.

VK: It's probably the case that about 80 percent of listeners also make noise themselves. Maybe not quite that many, but a great many people are at least interested in how it is made. There really isn't another musical style like it, where the relationship is so strong. Those who only listen are in the minority. I would almost dare to claim that this is the case.

JV: In addition to making noise, you also began to engage in publishing activities, which have grown quite extensive – your Satatuhatta[3] record label's catalogue already contains well over one hundred releases. At what point did it occur to you that you could also start releasing noise?

VK: The idea had been simmering for a very long time that I wanted my own record label and to start releasing records at some point. As a committed music listener and record collector, it had always been in the back of my mind that I'd like to release things myself as well, but how and what kind of releases… With noise, the threshold was perhaps lower. It also played a role that the first release emerged almost naturally, when Veikko[4] and I recorded the first The New Boyfriends cassette. There was no initial plan to self-release it or release it at all, but we liked it, and I thought that if ever there was a right moment to start a label, this was it. We set it up and made an edition of 50 copies. I had to ask around about where cassettes could be produced, and it turned out there was a cassette duplication plant right here in Finland. That's how it started, and the publishing activity really took off from there. The next few releases were my own solo project, and I think the second Boyfriends cassette came out around then, and after that the Moozzhead[5] cassette, which is when I started releasing music by other artists as well. That really pulled me in. Once you start releasing things, the threshold for making contacts in the noise world drops significantly, because through trading recordings you suddenly get access to a lot more things to listen to.

JV: And at that point your understanding of the whole field probably deepens as well. In noise especially, but also in other subcultures, small-scale publishers are the factor that creates the network in which things operate and through which information circulates.

VK: Exactly. And it was precisely that hands-on aspect – the fact that the releases were quite DIY and small in scale – that interested me. That you don't immediately have to invest in some big release and then worry about where to distribute it and end up standing there with hundreds of records that don't move out of the closet anywhere. You start small, and in that way it has gradually expanded little by little.

JV: Probably quite naturally, through new contacts?

3 The Finnish word "satatuhatta" means "one hundred thousand" in English.

4 In addition to being a member of The New Boyfriends, Veikko Rajanen also releases noise music under the monikers Mogao and The Räty.

5 A harsh noise project of Oskari Mertalo, who self-released a couple of cassettes in late 1990s and, after one release in 2015, returned to the scene in 2020 with the Satatuhatta cassette discussed above and many other subsequent releases.

VK: Contacts increased, interest increased, and print runs grew along with that. At some point, though, I ran into the situation where I was doing a lot of trading with other labels, and I started accumulating multiple copies of the same release. It was no longer enough just to have my own listening copy. That's when the distro [distribution], the record shop side of things, started quite naturally. That was sort of the second leap, after which everything really began to branch out. Extremely interesting tinkering.

JV: "Branching out" really is a good word – organic expansion.

VK: Yes. There was no original intention as such; it just carried me along.

JV: Thinking about the early days of the Satatuhatta label – perhaps also in relation to the nature of noise itself – I noticed that when Satatuhatta releases started appearing, there was still a strong influence from the early-2000s Finnish power electronics[6] style. It felt like Satatuhatta stood apart from that, and that this was at least one factor contributing to a shift toward focusing more on sound itself, on a more abstract, sound-oriented form of noise and on exploring sound textures. Do you agree that something like this kind of development took place?

VK: Yes, very much so – especially over the last five or six years. I've noticed new projects popping up like mushrooms after rain, and they rely on something other than just transgression, which noise musicians used to emphasize much more strongly. Of course, you can't say that every production was like that, but like you mentioned – what dominated in the early 2000s and earlier decades – did play a bigger role. When I listened to a lot of noise earlier on, I used to wonder why there always had to be a certain kind of imagery, certain kinds of black-and-white covers. It was somehow tied to the genre. I found that odd, because I personally experienced noise as a more colorful and even joyful kind of music. There are so many more elements in the sound itself than in extra-musical aspects. My own approach naturally came from my personal preferences and interests. I wanted to make releases that reflected my own tastes. Both styles have their strengths, of course, but at some point, there was a bit of saturation and fatigue.

JV: Maybe there was a sort of latent demand for this [new kind of noise]. As you said, you can think of noise history as having two main strands. If you look at the history of typical Japanese noise, there's a focus on sound texture or sheer sound pressure as a way of producing effects. On the other hand, there's the line that comes from Whitehouse or even earlier from Throbbing Gristle, where you position yourself antagonistically toward "normal" culture or the mainstream.

VK: Yeah, and they're extremely effective projects and still really good in their own context. But when later projects come along where the imagery and the sound don't really correlate, or when the music becomes familiar enough that you begin to expect it – it becomes predictable. And that applies to pretty much anything.

JV: Desensitization. If you rely only on feedback and screaming, at some point its impact starts to fade.

VK: I don't know how a very colorful or cheerful theme would even fit with Whitehouse… Although their later records were a bit more colorful, of course.

JV: Right, different priorities. What I was thinking about is that if you try to characterize noise as sound, it's precisely the abundance of detail – the feeling that it's not fully under the listener's control and that it overflows your senses because of the multiplicity of textures. Noise based on that might withstand repeated listening better than the sharper, clearer Whitehouse-

6 Power electronics is a style derived from late 1970s industrial music originators such as Throbbing Gristle and SPK that utilizes imagery and themes of oppressive power in an ambiguously critical, yet somewhat celebratory manner. Perhaps the first power electronics act is Whitehouse, formed in 1980, that took the shock tactics of industrial music to new level with themes of genocide, sadism, abuse *et cetera*. In Finland, Mikko Aspa's project Grunt and his record label Freak Animal, as well as Pasi Markkula's Bizarre Uproar (and later his label Filth & Violence) were major proponents of the Finnish noise scene from mid-1990s onward.

type method. When information comes in excess, that's where something emerges that art philosophy would call the sublime: an experience that feels overwhelming, that you can't fully grasp. That's where the appeal of noise-as-sound seems to lie.

VK: Yes. In a certain kind of harsh noise, the flood of information is so dense that you always pick out slightly different things. The listening volume also matters a lot. At a low volume it can sound very different than when listened to very loudly, and each listen can sound different because it's so amorphous and yet still has a certain core. Your state of mind can also influence it. If it's pure chaos, the senses try to form structures that may not be findable – or may not even exist. You hear it differently depending on your own preferences, like all music. Of course you need to train your "noise ear" as well, to learn how to enjoy it – how to pick out and find things you like.

JV: When we talk about the listener's control over sound, I'm also thinking about it from the maker's perspective. You have experience with that. What's your relationship to sound material when making noise music? Is everything under your control, or are you aiming for a situation where the sound slightly gets out of hand?

VK: The best situation is when you're balancing on the edge – when things are about to get out of hand, but you can still somehow keep them under control. That's the most dangerous and at the same time the most fertile situation – both as a creator and as a listener. For the creator it might be terrifying, but for the listener it's ideal. That edge where it might fail – or might just rise to a higher level. As a creator I want to be in control; full improvisation would be horrifying to me. With Aprapat, I'd say I know what I'm doing about 70–80 percent of the time, and there's a small margin for improvisation even in live situations – the set is given room to live. With The New Boyfriends it's almost the opposite: it's nearly completely improvised. It's a bit like jazz – you agree on themes and return to them now and then, but otherwise it's entirely improvised.

JV: Since this came up, I haven't seen The New Boyfriends live, only some video recordings. How much control do you have on stage? It looks like someone might get hurt when scrap metal is flying around, there's a concrete mixer going and you're shoveling metal junk with a pitchfork.

VK: It is under control, and it has to be. Of course the risk factor increases when there's that kind of chaos, but the situation is very carefully thought out in advance and safety comes first, basically. So it's not total chaos, even if it looks like it – and of course it partly is, and when you get swept up in it and it takes over, then sure, you let loose. But even if the stage is full of junk, every piece of metal and every element has been tested individually. Everything has a function – it's not junk for the sake of junk; every piece has its own sound. More is more, and that's how different sounds emerge. Especially in recording situations, but also live. It is a kind of throwing-around, but your senses have to stay alert. The worst situations have actually been when junk starts rolling off the stage and flying back onto it [thrown by the audience]. That's something you can't control yourself. There have been a few really scary moments. When we played at Flow Festival,[7] I nearly panicked mid-set because the smoke machine pumped out so much smoke that you couldn't see anything. We had to stumble around blindly and throw around metal junk, which led to a few dangerous situations – but luckily the organizers noticed themselves that it wasn't wise to add more smoke into the mayhem. But nothing has actually happened yet. It's like any construction site: safety first.

JV: A very good principle in that situation. Thinking about Aprapat – have the live

7 Flow Festival in Helsinki is one of the biggest music festivals in Finland, thus placing The New Boyfriends' performance there in 2023 undoubtedly among the highest profile noise concerts even internationally. A link to video recording of the concert can be found in The New Boyfriends: *Live and Dangerous* 3" CD release (SATATUHATTA-111, 2025). An audience video recording from a smaller scale event at 2024 Narraus festival in Pori, Finland, is availabe at https://youtu.be/00kbHpncCck?si=7Klbr5NWtxF7C54t

performances evolved or changed over time?

VK: Definitely. For a long time I thought I wouldn't even do live performances with Aprapat, because I couldn't figure out how to translate the process into a live context. Recorded Aprapat and live Aprapat were almost like two different things. There was a three-year break in recording, and live performance took on a bigger role. Maybe in the future the live side will start feeding back into the recording side. I got a lot of help with recording and with thinking about the project as a whole – how to look at it and at my own work. Playing live is incredibly educational. I more or less got the technical setup together in one go for the first gig, and it hasn't changed that much since – some elements have been added. There was also a lot of scrap metal stuff in Aprapat, and I thought about how to bring that to the stage, but luckily, I have The New Boyfriends where I can throw junk around, so I don't want to bring that same thing into the solo project. The solo work functions more through tape manipulations, although there's always a bit of a physical element present, and I've been bringing that in more. It's constantly evolving, and you're always coming up with new things that might work better. Experimental music in general is always searching for new perspectives on how to develop, so that it doesn't just repeat itself.

JV: I remember a visually striking element at the *Viimaa ja villasukkia* concert in Lahti, where you were pouring crushed glass.[8]

VK: Yeah, there was a big tub of crushed glass. Glass is one of my favorite elements in general, and it's been used a lot in noise. There's really no finer sound. The way particles, glass granules and shards, sound when you handle them – you can influence the sound a great deal – whether you rub the shards against something, what size they are, and so on. There are an enormous number of different possibilities. What I've been using at recent shows is a metal trough into which I pour crushed glass. I thought for a long time about what else I could do also in terms of visual appearance, because live solo noise is otherwise quite restrained. This made it possible to create a certain visual impact, plus a sound source that is something other than pre-recorded material. The process is more or less the same as how I record for releases as well.

JV: When performing – what is your relationship to the audience? Do you react to or take into account the kind of atmosphere there is on the audience's side?

VK: Not very much. I don't even dare to look at the audience! I have a bit of stage fright, and performing is always slightly tense. I just focus on my own thing. Sometimes I might glance up. You do sense the atmosphere in a live situation, but it takes quite a lot of concentration to keep your focus on what you're doing, so that your thoughts don't start wandering too much.

JV: And of course, when you have a technical setup like that, you also have to keep it under control somehow.

VK: You really have to listen very carefully. Monitor speakers play a crucial role in being able to hear what you're actually doing – so that you're not playing blindly.

JV: And noise gigs can take place in very different kinds of venues. I've seen Aprapat myself in many different spaces. That affects how close the audience is to the performer, and so on – what you can even do there.

VK: Yes, absolutely. There are a lot of small, intimate spaces where people are standing right next to the table. They're watching at arm's length what's being done with the equipment. Of course they can also be further away, but generally these are intimate spaces. It's quite nice that they're places you don't often encounter elsewhere.

JV: That's probably one reason why noise performances can get by with relatively small setups, since most acts are one-person configurations. You don't need a proper stage like with a

8 The concert with a six-artist lineup was held on 22nd of February 2025 in Vaahterasali, Lahti, Finland. The Finnish language concert title Viimaa ja villasukkia translates as "icy winds and woollen socks".

band.

VK: Yeah – just enough tables! This classic…

JV: …noise table!

VK: Exactly. We were somewhere – maybe in Norway – where they had reserved a huge amount of time for changing setups between sets, maybe even half an hour. We just said: reserve three tables for us, and that's it – five minutes and we're done. In a place like that they hadn't even considered that this is how it works.[9]

JV: That kind of efficiency has probably been refined in noise circles…

VK: …maximized efficiency.

JV: Based on this, it probably hasn't occurred to you to adopt a transgressive relationship to the audience in performance, which has been one possible strategy in the history of noise. Things like Hanatarash driving a bulldozer through a venue wall, or Einstürzende Neubauten at the Institute of Contemporary Arts in London, drilling into the floor and cutting railings to pieces with angle grinders.[10] You don't have that kind of tendency to physically engage with the venue or the audience?

VK: No, not really – and I probably wouldn't have the courage in that situation either. That kind of audience engagement has long been a practice in noise, and especially in power electronics. It's partly artificial and also an expected stylistic device. I don't know… When I'm in the audience, I just want to enjoy the performance and not participate in it in any way. From that perspective, it would be insanely annoying if you suddenly had to participate or were forced into it. I also think about my own performances from the audience's point of view – what I myself would want as a listener. Those Hanatarash things are of course interesting as a topic, but especially with The New Boyfriends I explain very carefully to the venue what kind of mess is coming. I don't want to cause unnecessary trouble for anyone. I often bring my own vacuum cleaners and clean the venue afterward.

JV: A ritual of its own. As a side note, in contemporary theater in the previous decade – the 2010s – audience participation was something of a trend. You sat there in the audience feeling slightly tense.

VK: It's a horrible feeling. I've been to performances like that too, but on average the noise listener is a shy, delicate person, so you can't really get people like that to participate in situations like that. It becomes a bit like coercion.

JV: One thing that makes noise music interesting is that it's difficult to define it very strictly on a conceptual level, because it has so many dimensions – and the concept of noise itself is broad. In Finnish, noise is translated as *häly* or *melu*. The former is a term from acoustics: in *häly* there is no periodic vibration that could be assigned a value, such as a specific musical note. *Melu*, on the other hand, relates to reception – it has the dimension of being disturbing. Noise in an artistic or musical context seems to contain both elements, at least in the sense that it uses sound that is not easy to notate and that can only really be grasped by listening. On the other hand, there is also the aspect of disturbance. What do you think – does noise have to include a disturbing element, or something that isn't easily absorbed in reception? If it doesn't have that, does it cease to be noise?

9 The "noise table" custom discussed here takes the form of one table per performer, who prepares the necessary setup – audio connections between sound sources, contact microphones, effects pedals and such – well before the start of the performance. In that way switching between performers can be handled quickly.

10 Hanatarash, a Japanese noise project started by Yamantaka Eye and Mitsuru Tabata, became infamous due to their often dangerous live performances. The bulldozer incident happened in 1985 at a Tokyo club Toritsu Kasei Super Loft. Einstürzende Neubauten – a German industrial band – performed and sparked a near-riot at the ICA in 1984. Decription of the Hanatarash performance can be found at https://disciplinemag.com/features/hanatarash-bulldozer-gig-photo-gallery/ and account of the Einzstürzende Neubauten ICA concert at https://www.electronicsound.co.uk/features/time-machine/einsturzende-neubauten/

VK: It doesn't cease to be. In principle, noise music is music. For someone, radio playlist rock can be horrible noise if it's disturbing to them. In that case it is noise or an awful racket. As you say, it basically relates to something unpleasant, but that terminology… Noise: *häly* or *melu*… Noise is perfectly fine! Rock music is rock and pop is pop – rock isn't *kivimusiikki*.[11] It depends a lot on the listener how it's experienced. If it's experienced as noise, as disturbing racket, then that's what it is – but almost everyone who enjoys noise listens to it as music. It can even function as calming background music, in a way.

JV: Yes, at least at lower sound levels – even harsh noise is almost like white noise.

VK: Exactly, it blends into the background. And even very basic sounds that occur naturally – factory sounds or construction sites – are, in principle, not monotonous, but they can be very calming.

JV: And your own attitude plays a big role.

VK: It plays a role in absolutely everything – how you experience it and how you want to listen to it.

JV: When you focus on something, you start finding more and more details in it. As you've said, listening to noise is in a way a learned skill. Probably a large part of those who encounter noise music for the first time wonder what there is to get out of it. It's an interesting question how the people who become interested in noise are selected and end up getting involved. I don't know if there's necessarily a clear answer, but a fairly broad engagement with music probably provides a foundation for it.

VK: I don't know anyone who immediately likes noise as music in itself. Of course there are probably many people who are drawn to the imagery and the intensity. Coming from heavy metal, for example, you might be looking for those themes – "wow, this is extreme stuff" – and listen thinking "this is good, this is how it should be." From the academic side, people come in through texture or through the concept of music itself. You can enter that world from many directions. And something that's very present in contemporary noise is the social factor, the live side – that is, there are many people who don't really concentrate on releases at all, but do a lot of live performances. That too is one factor that branches out from other marginal music scenes. I was surprised when there was some noise festival in Denmark last year: I only recognized one or two names among the performers, and there were dozens of artists on the lineup. The threshold for doing it is very low, and the live aspect emphasizes that. There are many ways of getting into the scene. And of course there's also the record-collector aspect.

JV: The sheer number of releases really is remarkable. And this is of course connected to the subcultural aspect – that the threshold for publishing is lower when releases are made independently or at least on a grassroots level.

VK: The threshold is low. There are noise artists who have been active for decades, who are in a way big names, but who are not really in a stronger position than a newcomer. For example, a major artist might release a great record on a big label and not necessarily sell that much or be talked about, while some completely unknown name releases a self-produced cassette run of ten copies, and everyone is in a panic: "Where can I get this?" If it's praised, everyone wants it. Noise can interest anyone – it just has to be good. That's really the only factor. What's emphasized is uniqueness. It's abstract sound, but you can still recognize the creator by their own sound. That's the most important thing in noise – not repeating the same formula or trying to imitate anyone. Maybe like in all music. I don't really separate noise from other music in principle, even though there are of course small cultural nuances. All noise enthusiasts just want to hear more and more

11 One literal translation of rock music would be *kivimusiikki* i.e. "stone music" in Finnish.

sounds.

JV: To wrap up, we could still think about this: when we talked about performing as Aprapat and developing as an artist... You probably adopt certain practices and learn them, and from those a kind of foundation or routine is formed, on top of which you can then develop something new again. But what about as a publisher? That requires quite a lot of discipline to make the process work efficiently. What kind of learning process has that been for you?

VK: A continuous learning process. I started from scratch, and every release has taught new lessons. I want to do things myself. I want to have control. I want to do as much as possible by hand. I want to do the layout myself. The covers always feature the artists' own artwork unless they want me to do it. I had to learn image-editing software from the ground up. Then there's making and duplicating cassettes – of course I'd always messed around with tapes, but when I had a few done at duplication plants, there were always some bad copies mixed in, which started to annoy me immensely. I realized that you can get much better results when you do it all by yourself. Your skill with tape decks and duplicating tapes also develops over time, and you want to improve more and more in that respect too. I've set up various decks, and now I have a pretty good setup that allows me to make cassette releases myself with a fairly low threshold. Of course it's very time-consuming. It requires a lot of care and, as you said, discipline to keep everything under control. And the work doesn't end when you've finished a run of a hundred tapes and sent artist copies – when orders start coming in, that's when you really need discipline to get the releases shipped all over the world as quickly as possible. I'm a record collector myself and order a lot of records, so I want them to arrive as quickly as possible. It's very hard for me to understand situations where you place an order and then the items just hang around somewhere for weeks and weeks without being shipped, because in principle they should be on the way at least the next day. Of course I can't quite manage that myself, but I do try to get packages out within a few days at most. This requires quite a lot of scheduling, because if the process starts to lag, the pile of undone tasks just grows and grows, and it becomes difficult to catch up.

JV: Time management.

VK: Time management – and efficiency. Finding those little shortcuts that make the process more and more efficient. But there's no magic tool that would make the work really fast – your evenings and weekends still go into packing orders. This also affects my own recording work, in that there's less and less time available for it. But it's enjoyable work; otherwise I wouldn't be doing it.

JV: Good that it doesn't feel like a burden.

VK: No, not at all! What would be nicer than tinkering with these releases – cassettes, CDs, and vinyl records. I'd be doing that anyway.

JV: Finally, I'd like to ask a fairly broad question. Do you have any thoughts about the current state or position of noise? It has clearly risen in popularity, and performances and releases are appearing at least at the same pace as during some earlier "golden ages" of noise. Is there something you would expect or hope for – either in terms of content or ways of working – that there could be more of?

VK: It's hard to say what there could be. Noise is probably bigger now than it has ever been. It feels like things are happening everywhere, and there are many people interested in noise. If anything, since it feels easy to start a noise project – and it is easy – you might hope that people would take a bit of time to search for their own voice. The pace of releases is great – it's fantastic that there are more and more releases, and what could be better than records – but maybe to reflect a bit… I can't really speak on behalf of anyone else about what they should do, but perhaps not to think of noise in extra-musical terms – "noise for the sake of making noise" –

but, like in all art, to bring your own unique contribution. Especially new artists should try to find their own voice and sound that genuinely interests them. It's easy to let a distortion pedal buzz and call it noise, but what makes it stand out from the mass is your own sound, your own preferences. That's something you could sit down with and take time to find. Although, I don't know – this can also tip over into overthinking, and then some of the very best things might never happen. Many classics were just thrown together without really knowing what was being done, and they sound absolutely fucking great.

JV: At least then you're not playing it safe – you're taking risks – but there's also the risk of failure.

VK: You have to take risks! Also in publishing policy. But right now the situation is really pleasant from the listener's and noise enthusiast's point of view. There's a lot of material, a lot of live gigs, a lot of releases, new artists constantly emerging, and older artists reviving their activity – so what's not to like? It doesn't need to go anywhere else. Just more noise for people to hear. More crossover gigs and more noise into the mainstream. There's no need to listen in isolated trenches. Noise really does belong to everyone.

JV: And you could also think that this allows the sharing of surprise and a sense of newness again, when it's not only the scene insiders who already know everything.

VK: That's important – exposure to new things as well.

JV: This has been a very positive perspective, so let's end on that note, without any complaints at the end, because as you said, the situation is currently very active, with new artists emerging and older ones producing great material.

VK: Yes. And one more thing: when new artists emerge, what I've noticed in recent years is that the material is already very mature. There's a lot of noise listening behind it; people know what they want to sound like. You're honestly taken aback by how good it can be – records that would be considered absolute classics if they had been released in the 1990s are now coming out as demos.

JV: So the field is alive and well – renewing itself, and the foundations are solid. Okay, let's end here. Thank you!

VK: Thank you!

3. Commentary

Is noise music *music*? Noise and music as terms seem to be opposed in many cases – noise as unstructured sound,[12] unwanted or interfering disturbance versus music as the art of arranging sounds in time in order to produce an aesthetically valuable experience. Yet, from the perspective of production and reception, noise music can well be considered as one genre of music, since it shares the medium, content and practices with other musical genres. There are artists making noise music, playing it in a live concert setting, making and publishing audio records. This point of view comes up convincingly in Vilho Koivisto's interview, and it is true that noise has many affinities with other forms of experimental music and subcultural genres such as ambient, electronic music, extreme metal, hardcore punk, industrial *et cetera*, all characterized by DIY approach to making and distributing music, arranging performances and spreading information.

What, then, distinguishes noise music as a particular category? Here a perspective relevant to somaesthetics can be glimpsed. Noise music, like any other music, is intentionally produced organized sound – even though in noise music the level of organization may often be nearly

12 Experimental musician Bruce Russell (2009, 23) refers to "an area between other forms of music where all of the 'rules' which hold them apart cease to apply. All musics bleed into this Empty Quarter, some exist more within, and some more without, its bounds. i) Being beyond 'music', it is noise. ii) Being beyond 'rules', it is free."

non-existent and the method chaotic. But, in my estimation, what is distinct to noise music is the challenge it presents to the anticipatory structure through which music is customarily recognized and enjoyed. In his influential theory of anticipation, musicologist Leonard B. Meyer argues in *Emotion and Meaning in Music* (1956) that musical pleasure arises from the play of expectation: listeners internalize stylistic norms as anticipatory habits, and emotion is generated when those expectations are delayed, fulfilled, or violated. Music moves us because it shapes and manipulates our predictions in time, creating tension and release through the confirmation or disruption of what we have learned to expect.

Renowned Norwegian experimental noise musician Lasse Marhaug describes the noise/music relation succinctly: "Noise is about the sound itself, and how you structure that sound is what defines it as music" (Marhaug 2013, 129). In noise music, the element of noise – the presence of sound-in-itself – is highlighted. Also the musical structure tends to be obscured or overwhelmed by the material presence of complex and/or loud sound, shifting the reception from intellectual anticipation to affective, bodily experience in the present moment. This would align noise music with somaesthetic considerations where aesthetic experience is understood as fundamentally grounded in the lived, sensing body's immediacy rather than in cerebral contemplation. In the case of noise as a source of aesthetic experience, it is exactly the sublime overflow or overload of the senses that produces, in Koivisto's words, "the best situation ... when you're balancing on the edge – when things are about to get out of hand, but you can still somehow keep them under control. That's the most dangerous and at the same time the most fertile situation."

Thus, even though with noise music one encounters a common process of getting acquainted with the art form to understand and appreciate it – a process that Koivisto describes in the interview – the pleasure derived from noise would still be fundamentally immediate and affective. The noise sub-genre of harsh noise wall (HNW) turns this here-and-now temporality of sound's presence to the maximum: artists such as The Rita (Sam McInlay), Vomir (Romain Perrot) or Richard Ramirez produce monolithic, unchanging sound "walls" of static noise. In HNW sound is pushed beyond representation of forms into pure material presence, evidently tactile one, due to the high sound pressure literally pushing against the audience. There is no narrative progression, only duration, intensity, and immersion. However, focusing on this sound monolith reveals the layers of different frequencies that compose the wall-like constant timbre, making the aesthetic experience similar to contemplating drone music, or in a different medium, a minimalist sculpture or color field painting where being present in the actual moment is key.

Drawn from the above paragraphs, I suggest that what is at stake in noise music is sound pushed beyond representation into pure material presence. *Embodied sound*. Embodied as meaning both sound revealed as vibratory force pushing air and our bodies as the receivers of that material movement. Sound pressure forces the audience and the performers to confront their thresholds of comfort. Awareness of the body as a space of connection and reception is increased and the model of passive listening is being challenged. *Complex sound*. Complex as chaotic, non-standard frequencies interacting to create previously unheard timbres and bringing about new kinds of affects.

Some scholars seek to position noise in an antagonistic relation to music in order for noise to remain noise, a kind of music's adversary (see e.g. Hegarty 2022). Yet, if we take heed of at least some noise musicians, such as Koivisto and Marhaug above, noise for them seems intertwined with music in terms of medium (sounds, more or less noisy), practices (playing, recording, distributing) and appreciation (aesthetic pleasure). The view of Koivisto and Marhaug (and many others) is inclusive: we encounter sound-as-noise in every musical structure and structure-as-

music in the noisiest sonic manifestation. In my interpretation, it is this potential emergence of noise in every auditory context that Koivisto means by stating that noise really belongs to everyone.

References

Hegarty, P. (2022). "Noise Not Music." In *Noise as a Constructive Element in Music: Theoretical and Music-Analytical Perspectives*, edited by Mark Delaere. Routledge.

Marhaug, L. (2013). "Lasse Marhaug." In *Noise in and as Music*, edited by Aaron Cassidy and Aaron Einbond. University of Huddersfield Press.

Meyer, L. B. (1956). *Emotion and Meaning in Music*. University of Chicago Press.

Russell, B. (2009). "What is Free? – A free noise manifesto." In *Left-handed blows: Writing on sound 1993–2009*.

Somaesthetics of *Bharatanāṭyam*: The Dancer as Yogi

Vinod Balakrishnan, Ganga V.S. , and Vrinda Ramanan

Vinod Balakrishnan, Professor, Department of Humanities and Social Sciences. National Institute of Technology Tiruchirappalli, ORCID: 0009-0002-9379-8586

Ganga V.S.,Research Scholar in Somaesthetics, Department of Humanities and Socical Sciences, National Institute of Technology, Tiruchirappalli, ORCID: 0000-0003-1279-8497

Vrinda Ramanan. Director. Bala Kala Vidhanam. Dancer, Mountaineer, Author

Abstract: *This interview contains insights into the journey of an artist as a practitioner, and a performer of the Indian classical dance Bharatanāṭyam. Discussing the philosophical, spiritual and somatic dimensions of the dance, the artist elaborates on the role of the performing soma as the medium of communication in the classical dance form, and the importance of practice in preparing the soma for the effective embodiment of emotions.*

Smt. Vrinda Ramanan is a Bharatanāṭyam Dancer, Mountaineer and Author. Shaped by a rich lineage of distinguished gurus, she also specialised in Nattuvangam and the Indian classical dance Kuchipudi. With over four decades of experience, she is currently the Artistic Director of Bala Kala Vidhanam, founded by her husband, Ramanan and herself. A trained mountaineer who has been trekking extensively in the Himalayas and the Western Ghats for the past 45 years, she regularly contributes articles to many leading newspapers and magazines, and has authored several books including Srirangam, Bhooloka Vaikuntam, Tirumala, Kaliyuga Vaikuntam, The Art and Architecture of the Srirangam Temple,The Mountains of our Destiny – The Indian Himalayas and Samayapuram- The Sacred Seat of Shakti. Her forthcoming books are The Evolution of Temple Architecture in Tamilnadu and The Western Ghats.

The following interview has been edited for continuity and clarity.

Keywords: *Somaesthetics, Bharatanatyam, Abhinaya, Mindfulness, Abhyasa, Performance.*

Introduction

Somaesthetics considers the body as the living, sentient soma. Performative somaesthetics analyses dance as an artform in which the body acts as the medium of expression for a vast range of emotions. Studying the dancer's body helps us understand how the cultivated and self-reflexive soma lives through the performance.

In *Bharatanāṭyam*, the performer's body or soma is the most important medium for communication. Through physical gestures, dialogue modulation, costume and makeup, as well as an emotionally immersed representation, the performing soma efficiently embodies the *bhāvas* of the performance so that the spectator can effectively relish the *rasa*. The performer's

soma undergoes years of preparation through constant practice and discipline to reach this stage. The artist's experience gives valuable insights into preparation, practice and performance of the soma in *Bharatanāṭyam*.

V. B. & V.S.: Smt. Vrinda, How would you describe your journey with *Bharatanāṭyam* as a practitioner and a performer?

Vrinda: I started dancing at the age of four. My mother identified my potential and upon my insistence, we went searching for teachers in Trichy. I found great joy in the process of learning. Just like any beginner, I started with the strong desire to perform onstage, to be appreciated and acknowledged and later understood that even when nobody was appreciating me, I felt happy inside because I enjoyed dancing onstage. When we love the art so much, we delight even in practice.

At first, I wasn't interested in the theory of dance, I only wanted to perform. My first *guru*, Sri Radhakrishnan of the Pandanainallur School of Dance, gave me a fantastic foundation, and my second *guru*, Bhaskar from *Kalāmaṇḍalam*[1], introduced me to the divinity in this art. He would make me stand in the *Naṭarāja*[2] pose and he would talk to me about the theory of dance and help me correct my stances and poses. That was when I discovered that there was another dimension to dance.

When you perform as a God, you identify with the God and you become that God inside of you. *Devo bhūtvā devaṁ yajet*. When you dance like *Viṣṇu*, you identify with *Viṣṇu* or you become *Viṣṇu*. Likewise, you become *Kṛṣṇa*, *Śiva*, or *Pārvatī*. It is the union of the devotee and the divine. In fact, after every performance, you are unable to sleep at night because you will feel a fire inside. In spite of being exhausted, you will not be able to close your eyes because of the heat generated inside the system caused by the number of emotions that you have created. The identification of the performer with the performance happens due to *sāttvika abhinaya*[3], one of the four types of *abhinaya*[4]. The other three are *āṅgika abhinaya*[5], *vācika abhinaya*[6], *āhārya abhinaya*[7] and *sāttvika abhinaya*.

1 Founded in 1930 by the Malayalam poet Vallathol Narayana Menon, the Kerala Kalāmaṇḍalam is a prestigious institution for the learning of traditional performing arts.

2 The iconographic representation of Śiva as the Lord of Dance performing the cosmic dance or the *tāṇḍavam*.

3 The performer's internalization of the feelings and temperament of the character for an ideal portrayal.

4 The Sanskrit word for the different types of histrionic representation.

5 The body language of the actors including the physical gestures and facial expressions.

6 The speech in a performance; in the context of *Bharatanāṭyam*, it could refer to the musical text of the performance.

7 The makeup, costume, the external stage settings and additional factors including the musical instruments, used in a performance.

Fig.1.1. Sahana Aanand: A *Bharatanāṭyam* dancer demonstrating the *āṅgika abhinaya*.

V. B. & V.S.: Can you tell us more about the *sāttvika abhinaya*? And how does the audience react to it?

Vrinda: *Sāttvika abhinaya* helps you to momentarily identify with the gods you present onstage. You become *Viṣṇu, Kṛṣṇa, Śiva,* or an *Asuraḥ* and come back to yourself, maintaining a sense of calmness inside. The audience also resonates with the emotions of the performer. The spectator feels the artist, their emotions and moods. When you return home agitated, happy, sad, or calm after watching a performance, the emotions experienced are triggered by the performer through the performance.

In the beginning, when you perform, you look for appreciation. After years of practice, you sense the insignificance of appreciation. People commending you is just part of an evolutionary process. Dance is a spiritual practice which comes from your teachers.

During practice, there will be four or five dancers and each would mirror the other. On occasion, my teacher, Smt. Indra Rajan would ask us to dance in front of the mirror, and

when we spend too much time looking in the mirror, she would reprimand us. Now I realise that she was indirectly telling us to maintain a balance.

V. B. & V.S.: As a dancer and performer, do you think *Bharatanāṭyam* is meant only for the stage?

Vrinda: After going on so many stages, I recognised that *Bharatanāṭyam* was not an art meant for just the stage. It was meant to be performed in a temple. The *Nāṭyaśāstra*[8] speaks of *Bharatanāṭyam* being brought to earth by the *apsarā*[9] *Urvaśī*[10]. Dance brings us closer to divinity. The learning progresses step by step, until you reach the sanctum sanctorum of the God. At the end of the *Bharatanāṭyam* performance, we have the concluding *tillānā*[11], which is the exuberant happiness at being with God embodied in a graceful and energetic dance. You also experience

8 The ancient text on dramaturgy and performing arts, attributed to sage Bharata.

9 Celestial maidens of heaven born out of the churning of the cosmic Ocean of Milk. They are celebrated as exceptional dancers in the court of Indra, the king of gods.

10 A celestial maiden born from the thigh of sage *Nārāyaṇa*, often regarded as the most prominent of *apsarās*.

11 The energetic finale of a *Bharatanāṭyam* performance.

the glory, the ecstasy, the happiness, the joy, the bliss that you get by dancing. By reaching that goal that you are working towards, we attain a spiritual height, and thus, with time, dance becomes a meditative practice. That's why we tell our students that all of us cannot become big performers. It's okay if they do not want to dance on stage. Instead, dance for the joy of dancing. *Bharatanāṭyam* is a discipline which lets you bloom into a beautiful and wholesome personality. It helps to improve physical fitness, health and posture. It also increases one's confidence and teaches you how to appreciate literature, fine arts and aesthetics.

V. B. & V.S.: I believe that the faculty for appreciating classical performances must be cultivated.

Vrinda: Exactly. My teacher, Smt. Ranganayaki Amma, used to encourage us to point out the merits of other performances. Whenever we failed to come up with a single word of compliment, she would get annoyed and remind us that the child had gone up on stage in front of ten thousand people. That in itself was a feat worth appreciating. She taught us humility, kindness and trained us to see the good in every performance. I try to impart the same lessons to my students. I tell them to be appreciative of others and to offer constructive criticism only when invited.

V. B. & V.S.: You have spoken about the performer as the spectator. What about the layman's experience as the spectator? How does the spectator go through these stages of appreciation?
Vrinda: The art of dance was created with the dual purpose of entertaining and educating the *pāmara makkaḷ*[12] or the common folk. The common man would be happy to see a *kāvaṭi*[13] or an *agni caṭṭi*[14] or nice folk dance on *Murukaṉ*. The spectator who knows the stories will be able to relate with the performance and narrate the stories to the succeeding generation. The enlightened ones or the sages, the seers who are seeing the dance, are able to become one with the divine. They do not see the performer or the performance; instead, they see God, his greatness, his *līlās*[15]. The dancer should be able to forge a deep connection with the audience or the *sahṛdaya*[16]. The spectator must be impressed with the aesthetic beauty in the performance and not with the physical beauty of the dancer. The beauty which brings us closer to the divine.

V. B. & V.S.: What are the philosophical dimensions of *Bharatanāṭyam*? Does the form of performance provide a world-view?

Vrinda: *Nāṭyaśāstra* speaks of quarrels between the *devas* and the *asuraḥs*. All of us have the conflict between the good and the evil within us. It is believed that the *Nāṭya Veda*[17] or the Fifth *Veda* was created by *Brahmā* when the gods beseeched him to create a proper line of entertainment, which would also provide us with a code of conduct to live our lives. The *Nāṭya Veda* is where you have music, dance, drama, and literature coming together. Bharata created the *Nāṭyaśāstra* and imparted its wisdom to his successors, who then propagated it. Dance, just like every other form of art, was meant to give people a code of conduct for living a good life.

All the classical arts of India move towards spiritual ecstasy and ultimately, finding the

12 The common people.

13 The ritualistic dance performed for appeasing Lord *Murukaṉ* as part of the *Taippūcam* festival in the Tamil month of *Tai*. The devotees dance with a *kāvaṭi*, a semi-circular structure made of wood and decorated with peacock feathers or flowers, on their shoulders.

14 Literally meaning 'Fire Pot', it is a temple ritual in Tamil Nadu where devotees dance with clay pots containing fire or burning coal.

15 The divine play. This philosophy views reality as a cosmic play or performance.

16 The empathetic or perceptive spectator.

17 The *Nāṭyaśāstra* is often described as the fifth veda or the *Nāṭya Veda*, a sacred text on dance.

truth within us. That's why, whenever we dance a *Thōduḍaiya Ceviyan*[18], or a *Tēvāram*[19], or a *Tiruppukaḻ*[20], we see the divinity in art. When the words are reiterated and the dance recreated repeatedly, it becomes one with you. The word becomes your own reality. It's not just about speaking the truth, but about living it and thus making it a part of one's life. You live the word, making the meaning of the word come alive in you.

For example, while practising the *saraḷi varisai*[21], the *jaṇtai variśai*[22], we sing what the poet has put into words. He has *"sa ri ga ma pa da ni sa, sa ni da pa ma ga ri sa. Uṇmai tēḍum uḷḷam kōvil, undan uḷḷē vāḻum teyvam"*. The notes are for the musician. The dancers perform by adding various actions and *mudrās* to the music. After repeating it systematically ten or twenty times, you get the music, the *tāḷam*[23] and the timing right, but you also start to embody the essence of the words, loosely translated as *the one whose heart searches for truth, becomes a temple, inside which, the God resides.* When the child dances to this thought for a hundred times, the message that one should live a truthful life is unconsciously internalised by the child.

V. B. & V.S.: How does the body communicate in a *Bharatanāṭyam* performance?

Vrinda: The entire body becomes an instrument of communication through *bhāvas*[24] and *mudrās*[25]. The whole body, including the face and the limbs, undergoes repeated rigorous practice and exercises, to effectively communicate with the spectator. A well trained body is an important vehicle essential for communication. Even the thoughts put into the body are part of it. One must be *sāttvik* or pure inside which brings balance to the performance.

18 The opening verse of the *Tēvāram* hymn composed by the Tamil child-poet *Tiruñāṉacampantar* which describes Lord *Śiva* as the one who wears a *Thōdu*, a type of

earring, on his ears.

19 A collection of Tamil hymns in praise of Lord Śiva composed by *Campantar, Appar,* and *Sundarar*. It forms the first seven volumes of the twelve-volume text *Tirumuṟai*, of Tamil Saivite tradition.

20 A collection of Tamil devotional poems composed by *Aruṇakirinātar* praising Lord *Muruga.*

21 The first set of lessons for beginners in Carnatic Music in which the basic notes *sa, ri, ga, ma, pa, da, ni* are practised in *Māyāmāḷavagauḷa rāgam.*

22 The second lesson in Carnatic Music following the *saraḷi varisai,* in which the notes are doubled or tripled.

23 Rhythm

24 The emotional states or moods expressed in dance.

25 Symbolic hand gestures which function as the diction of dance.

Fig.1.2. The *Bharatanāṭyam* dancer performing a *mudrā.*

V. B. & V.S.: From your words, it is clear that dance presents a special kind of instruction, where you do not listen to an instruction, nor is somebody instructed. It is about living the word which consists of a beautiful thought, and slowly letting that thought reshape your reality. But it is not just about hearing something and interpreting it. You are interpreting it through your body, by which, the meaning and the spirit of those sentences seep into every cell of your being, until you are able to feel the divinity that has descended on you.

Vrinda: Exactly. *Devo bhūtvā devaṁ yajet.* That's it. You become a god to show god or to live that part of god.

Dance and the sense of divinity you experience through it impart a great deal of discipline to the performer and makes them quite adaptable. Wherever they go, they are able to adjust themselves. And we receive rigorous training, even abstaining from having water at times.

Dance increases one's focus and helps children to progress in their studies. From a young age, they understand how to balance the hours between school and dance practice. If they could not complete their lessons before coming for training, they bring their textbooks here to study as time allows. Today's parents also might wish to keep their children inside their comfort zones, but such sheltering will not prepare them to face life's challenges. A beautiful sculpture emerges only when it is hammered.

V. B. & V.S.: Chiseled and hammered. You take off a few parts until it gets the right shape and symmetry.

Vrinda: True. Especially in the case of dance, you have to work at perfecting every *aḍavu*[26], every step diligently and persistently.

V. B. & V.S.: How does the dancer prepare for *Bharatanāṭyam*? How important is practice or *abhyāsa*[27]?

26 The fundamental unit of *Bharatanāṭyam* performance. In each *aḍavu*, various stances, leg movements, hand gestures, and postures are aligned to the rhythmic *Sollukaṭṭu* (syllable sequences or musical notes recited by the guru which guides the dancers' feet). It is of many types including *Taṭṭa aḍavu, Nāṭṭa aḍavu, Vīśāru aḍavu*, etc. Several *aḍavus* together form a *jati.*

27 The Sanskrit word for repeated and consistent practice.

Vrinda: The *abhyāsa* or *riyāz*[28] is a lifelong process. It is not like preparing for an exam for five years and then stopping altogether once you have written the exam. *abhyāsa* is for life. It is said that if you don't practise for one day, you will be aware of it. But if you don't practise for two days, your accompanying artist will notice it. And then on the third day, everybody else will know about your lack of practice. To be a performer, you must practise every day. But otherwise, it is also the joy of dancing. So when you find pleasure in that, it becomes significantly meditative.

It is an evolutionary process. Even going on stage is *abhyāsa* for a dancer. Every time she performs, whether it is on the stage, or in front of the teacher, or by herself, it is an *abhyāsa.* When you are dancing onstage, for the audience, it is a performance, but for you, it is an abhyāsa. The *abhyāsa* is part of a continuum where you try to do it better, and the spectator is only an instrument for your improvement. The teacher will teach you one *varṇam*[29] and we have to perform it on several stages before beginning the next one. When I asked my teacher to teach me a second *varṇam*, she told me to first perfect the one I was taught. I later found the truth in her words. Every time I performed it, I found a new aspect to express which I would have missed if I had started learning another *varṇam*. When I came back home after performing it on several stages, my teacher taught me the next one. That was *abhyāsa* or continuous strenuous practice which would test our limits and open up new possibilities for us.

V. B. & V.S.: Can you tell us about the physical demands of *Bharatanāṭyam* as far as the learner is concerned? If you can recall your days as a student and practitioner, how did you confront these difficult routines?

Vrinda: It was an arduous journey. But looking back at the initial struggle, it seems I've forgotten all that pain. It is indeed physically demanding. But I have children with asthmatic problems who come with dreams of dancing. They might find the initial classes challenging, and we would sit them down, rub their chests, rub their backs and make them come back to practice. I have seen them show great perseverance. When your body is exhausted, the mind would come up with excuses to rest. A *Bharatanāṭyam* practitioner masters resilience with time. I've seen children who have to perform their *Taṭṭa Aḍavu*[30] in *Araimaṇḍi*[31]. I know how difficult it is. Still, they keep their hands in position as they sit through the pain. I've seen kids who continue to practise with their eyes wet in strain. The parents, particularly the fathers, would request for their kids to rest upon seeing their aching feet. But the struggle is all part of the learning process. No pain, no gain in life.

V. B. & V.S.: How close is dance to yoga? Do you learn yoga to train the body for *Bharatanāṭyam*?

Vrinda: Yoga, music and dance all go together. Yoga strengthens the muscles, makes you more flexible, and helps with controlling your breath. It is especially useful for *Bharatanāṭyam practitioners*. *Haṭha Yoga*[32] can be practised to prepare the body for dance. I give different *prāṇāyāma*[33] exercises to my children everyday. The older students know the importance of breathing exercises before a performance. The younger students imitate the older students and practise along with them.

My teacher used to remind me to breathe properly. My teachers did not teach us yoga,

28 The Urdu word used for practice in Hindustani classical music.

29 The most important and central part of a *Bharatanāṭyam* performance, a *varṇam* combines Nṛtta (pure dance) and Nṛtya (expressive dance).

30 An *aḍavu* in *Bharatanāṭyam* in which the performer sits in the *Araimaṇḍi* position and alternates between tapping the left and right feet rhythmically on the ground.

31 Arai means 'half' and *maṇḍi* means 'to sit' and, together, it refers to the half-sitting posture in *Bharatanāṭyam.*

32 The type of Yoga practice which involves body postures and breathing techniques.

33 Controlled breathing techniques used in Yoga for the regulation of *prāṇa* or life force.

instead they would tell us to do particular exercises which would help with certain movements. For instance, they would make us do splits and breathing exercises.

V. B. & V.S.: How does a *Bharatanāṭyam* dancer master these splits? Can you elaborate on it?

Vrinda: Before we start dancing, we do a whole set of exercises for about 25 minutes. The warm up exercises help to relax the stiff leg muscles and prepare them for dance. With time and repeated preparation, even young children get used to it. Certain schools do not give this much emphasis to exercises or practice and their students are sent straight to the stage. Initially, the younger students might be discontent with the exercises and compare themselves with students from other dance schools who directly appear onstage without being subjected to tedious hours of exercises. Nevertheless, they continue doing it, partly because of the teacher's insistence, and partly because they see the older and more experienced students doing their splits, their *cakrāsanas*[34], and their *prāṇāyāmas* despite going onstage. They understand that in order to reach that state of expertise, they must do the exercises. There's no alternative. So they choose to go through it.

It's a tremendously difficult process. I try to make it more interesting by adding a little music to their exercises. I call it *Kṛṣṇa* Zumba or *Śiva* Zumba so that they will be more enthusiastic to participate.

V. B. & V.S.: How does a *Kṛṣṇa* Zumba or *Śiva* Zumba work?

Vrinda: I incorporate energetic and exciting Zumba movements with *bhajans*[35] to show the interactions between *Kṛṣṇa* and the *Gopikas*, or *Kṛṣṇa* playing his flute or eating butter. The students are free to improvise and do what they like. It is relaxing and they love it because they think they're dancing.

But when I was a student, there was nothing like improvisation. My teacher would say, "this is it, *ippaṭi tāṉ āṭaṇum* (this is how one must dance)". She was extremely strict with the process. Your smile can neither be excessively wide, nor too restrained. The expressions have to be limited. You have to identify those limits, which would only come with constant practice and years of experience.

Whereas now, you have to teach the children everything. It might be an effect of the contemporary education system where everything is spoon fed to them. I also volunteer at a village school where the students are slightly more responsive in comparison. The children from Ram Krishna Vidyalaya in Iyyampatti are incredibly excited to dance. Even when dancing on a hungry stomach, they never complain of leg pain. In the beginning, they did not have their postures right, but today I can see them all standing erect. They have also learnt to recite all the dance *ślokāḥs*[36].

V. B. & V.S.: So they learn it on their own. It's like a self-instructed way of improving. Being able to analyze themselves to understand how their bodies move and make the first move without waiting for the teacher to do it.

Vrinda: They are so engrossed in dance and once they grasp something, they will never forget it. They make an effort to remember. It's very, very, very sweet. I often share their videos in the dance school group to inspire my kids.

V. B. & V.S.: How would you compare today's learning process with the traditional *Gurū-Śiṣhya paramparā*[37]? You were trained in a *paramparā*, right?

34 Literally meaning the 'wheel pose', it is a Yoga posture for the strengthening of the limbs, spine and abdominal muscles in which the practitioner bends backwards to form a semi-circular arch.

35 Devotional songs.

36 Aphoristic Sanskrit verses.

37 The long tradition of transfer of knowledge from the guru or the mentor to the *śiṣhya*, or the disciple.

Vrinda: Yes, I was fortunate enough to be part of the *gurukula sampradāya*[38], of being able to stay with my *guru* and learn the art directly from her. I remember my *guru* waking me up at midnight to compose *tīrmāṉams*[39] she had newly composed. Those are the *tīrmāṉams* that I use even today.

V. B. & V.S.: It must be a way of paying tribute to your teacher.

Vrinda: So holistic is the *gurukula sampradāya*. When you are staying with the *guru*, there will be days when you will not be taught anything. You'll be sitting and the teacher will be dancing and you'll be tapping time for her. In those days, I used to be impatient to dance. Your *guru* will even ask you to prepare spinach for lunch. Nowadays, we cannot imagine any student doing it.

Today, the older students will instruct the younger ones to do *namaskāram*[40] for the teacher. So the *paramparā* is slowly fading. Before the COVID pandemic, we used to celebrate Mother's Day during *Navrātri*[41], when each kid would bring their mother, make her sit down and do *pāda pūjā*[42], like the Chinmaya mission. The Swamiji from Dayananda Ashram used to conduct it, and it was such a nice gesture.

I would encourage the fathers to plan surprise gifts for the mothers. Some of them might find it strange, others would think I'm overdoing it, but many of them will be happy. They would get gifts and make the child give it to the mother. The mothers are often overwhelmed with happiness. They say they've never felt so important in their lives.

Teaching *Bharatanāṭyam* is not just about teaching my students the classical art. It's about teaching them to lead better lives as better people. It's about improving oneself in several aspects of one's everyday life.

V. B. & V.S.: Just living everyday life.

Vrinda: You can't teach any art in isolation. As a teacher, you become involved in the students' lives. Occasionally, you even act as a liaison between the child and the parent. It's your duty to teach them as much as possible within the short period of time you get to spend with them. Earlier, there used to be moral education so that values will be inculcated in children from the school level. But that is not the case today.

When I take my children to dance performances, I happen to witness a kind of selfishness. Schools encourage us to compete with each other and the same sentiment can be seen reflected on stage, which is detrimental to the overall performance because dance is all about teamwork.

V. B. & V.S.: So how do you overcome this challenge?

Vrinda: I give them twenty minutes to prepare for a dance sequence and leave them alone so that they can work together. After the initial hesitation, one child will take the lead to communicate, and gradually, they will learn to cooperate and coordinate. Once they start working together, they forge lasting friendships, helping and supporting one another both onstage and offstage.

V. B. & V.S.: You've spoken about the spiritual, physical and moral aspects of *Bharatnatyam*. What are the somaesthetic aspects that you identify in *Bharatanāṭyam*, specifically on the connection between the body and the mind?

Vrinda: *Bharatanāṭyam* is the union of the body, mind and breath. The three have to be in consonance with each other, otherwise, you cannot perform well. When the breathing is at a

38 The ancient system of residential education in which the *śiṣhya* learns directly from the *guru* by staying at the *gurukula*, or the *guruś* residence.

39 The fast-paced and rhythmic composition of *jatis*, usually performed thrice as a concluding sequence.

40 The traditional Indian greeting of bowing the head with palms joined together, signifying "I bow to the divine in you".

41 Literally meaning 'nine nights', it is an Indian nine-day festival observed in honour of the Goddess Durgā.

42 The sacred ritual of washing someone else's feet, signifying respect, devotion and gratitude. It is done to honour parents, teachers or elders.

comfortable pace, the mind becomes calm and the relaxed body starts performing effortlessly. Everything shown onstage will be equally relaxed. The state of the mind reflected in the body decides the beauty of the performance. That is the *sāttvika bhāvam*, the steadfastness of your mind and breath, which helps to produce a good performance.

Fig.1.3. The *sāttvika abhinaya.*

V. B. & V.S.: Most dancers train under a number of learned *gurus* and go onstage to perform more or less the same routines. How can we tell the difference in their performances?

Vrinda: You can tell the difference very well. The difference lies in the way they perform. It's in the rendition of the *aḍavus*, in the different combinations of *tāḷam* or rhythm. All of it matters. When you put everything together, it's like good writing. How can we say one person is a better writer than the other? It's in the way each writer presents ideas. But it is true that having a really good teacher will certainly influence the outcome.

V. B. & V.S.: What does a great teacher do? Let us say for example, Padma Subramanyam, will you call her a good teacher?

Vrinda: Of course, she's a legend. I have seen her perform and I've always aspired to be like her.

V. B. & V.S.: But I must ask, her body is different from conventional physical expectations usually associated with dancers. She might be able to perform on stage, but will her body be agile enough to demonstrate the complicated steps to a child? How does the aging body affect instruction?

Vrinda: A dancer like Padma Subramanyam is still able to move so gracefully in spite of being in her eighties. But the kind of performance that Padma Subramanyam does is much different from what, say, for example, Hemamalini does. Padma Subramanyam or Chitra Visveswaran or Sudharani Raghupathy, are all still actively dancing on the stage. Today, I see several dance teachers whose bodies do not fit into the traditional expectations. They do not perform onstage, but they still train students. I do feel performers should take good care of their

bodies. They should build an awareness. We teach the child by precept, guiding them through demonstrations and examples. Since it is a performance art, mere instruction will not suffice to improve the child.

V. B. & V.S.: What kind of formation can the great teachers build in the student?

Vrinda: Like Adyar Lakshman, he was an excellent teacher. There are several ways of teaching. One of my teachers used to give me a portion and would expect me to reach a certain level of expertise. I would keep practising until she was satisfied with my performance.

Today, there are exceptional dancers like Vyjayanthi Mala. I once saw her dance in Chennai. It was so beautiful. Even at her age, she danced so gracefully, with precision and control. She was also trained in the *sampradāya.* I remember one of my teachers was teaching her at one point in time. He used to say that even when she had shooting till twelve or one at night, she would wake up precisely at 5 o'clock, bring him his coffee and promptly begin her practice in the morning.

My teacher, Indra Rajan, has also taught Jayalalitha, the former Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu. She used to say that Jayalalitha was a highly disciplined person who'll be ready for practice sessions at 4 o'clock in the morning. You must have that kind of dedication, devotion, and passion for the art in order to master it.

One of my teachers was a *Devadāsī*[43]. As dancers who have performed in numerous sacred temples and holy places, they were once considered to be so pure and respected that people would roll around on the sand where *Devdasis* have danced. Balasaraswati, and my teacher, Pudukottai Ranganayaki Amma are a few of the notable Bharatanāṭyam dancers from the *Devadāsī* community.

When I first started teaching children, I used to scold them. But now, I have evolved as a teacher. Now, instead of scolding the student, I would make her practise ten times, twenty times, or even a hundred times, until the hands start aching. I make the child repeat the steps until it becomes a part of her and she can do it without even thinking about it. Once she reaches that stage, it will stay with her for life.

I have students who make time to practise and perfect their steps despite being busy with their studies or jobs. Almost every week, they will make time to dance. When they are nervous about going onstage, they even train for extra hours. We have online classes at 9 o'clock in the night. When they are unable to come together in person, everyone will connect virtually from different places and rehearse together before stage programmes. That's the kind of dedication necessary to fulfil one's aspirations.

V. B. & V.S.: A dancer needs to understand the *sāhityam*[44] or the literature, its meaning, the emotions conveyed and transform the body into those emotions. How does the corrections from a teacher help the dancer to do that?

Vrinda: In a performance, time, tone, tune and text needs to be in harmony. As far as the *aḍavus* are concerned, it is taught to them methodically. With two days of class a week, it takes nearly three to four years to finish all the *aḍavus*. Once they finish their *aḍavus*, they develop a uniformity.

V. B. & V.S.: So, the *aḍavu* is the basic vocabulary of dance.

Vrinda: Yes, Afterwards, we combine different *aḍavu* to make it into small *tīrmāṉams*. Then we add sentences and words to it. That's how we teach them to communicate in the language of dance. We also teach them the *bhāvam*.

43 A female dancer part of the traditional *Devadāsī* system, which dedicated young girls to the temple as 'servants of God'. Well-versed in the sacred scriptures, literature, music, and dance, the *Devadāsīs* were highly revered in the society and even patronised by the kings. They were considered to be the custodians of several performance art forms including *Bharatanāṭyam*. But over the centuries, they were exploited and the practice came to be associated with prostitution.

44 The literature or the lyrics of the performance.

V. B. & V.S.: Are there only nine *bhāvas* or are there more?

Vrinda: They are everything. They are the life of a performance.

V. B. & V.S.: And the *bhāvas* develop into the *rasās*[45].

Vrinda: The nine *rasās*.

V. B. & V.S.: But additionally, aren't there other bhāvas that must be evoked to get to the final culmination of *rasa*?

Vrinda: To get the final one, you have to combine everything.

V. B. & V.S.: So, how can the nuances of the emotions and their embodiment be taught? Do you specifically instruct them or do they pick that up with experience? What exactly happens?

Vrinda: Actually, we do instruct them, we teach them the basics of expressing emotions through the body. For example, when you are sad, all your lines should be down. You should also feel that droop in your shoulders.

We tell them the basics of posture and body language that can be used to convey emotions. But the evocation of emotions should come from within and that can be done only with practice. They start by imitating the older students. Though most of them get it with time, a few are not able to do it at all, even after a lot of training.

V. B. & V.S.: What could be the reason for that?

Vrinda: It could be because they're not able to feel the *bhāvas*. Emotions come from real life experiences. We usually ask the dancers to associate the *bhāvas* with similar personal experiences and emotions that resonate within them. For example, if the dancer is married, we tell them to think of the way they felt upon meeting their spouse for the first time or the emotions you experienced upon looking at your baby. So, when a person is married, they are able to express *bhāvas* like *śṛṅgāra*[46] remarkably well.

We keep it simple for the little ones. They are given bhāvas to perform according to their age. I give them *bhakti*[47] when they're young. In it, they also get to know a bit of *duḥkhaṃ*[48], and a bit of *vātsalyam*[49]. But we only give the *śṛṅgāra rasa* to the older girls because it is unsuitable for the child.

V. B. & V.S.: So, you have to grow into the emotion in the first place. Normally, when will they be in a position to understand and perform these emotions?

Vrinda: At fifteen or sixteen years of age, they are able to catch the emotions.

V. B. & V.S.: And what about the music that accompanies the dance? Are the young dancers able to follow its *sāhityam* or the text?

Vrinda: We make them understand the text, write it, memorise it, and internalize it. It's a whole process.

45 In poetry or dramaturgy, *rasa* is the aesthetic emotion relished by the spectator during a performance.

46 The erotic rasa.

47 The rasa of devotion.

48 Sorrow.

49 The rasa of parental affection.

Fig.1.4. The orchestra presents the text of the performance accompanied by musical instruments.

V. B. & V.S.: You mentioned the seeking of the truth in *Bharatanāṭyam*. What is the truth that you are seeking?

Vrinda: *Bharatanāṭyam* leads you to the path of seeking the truth. A dancer is also a philosopher who has to read the epics, the Bhagavad Gita, the Upanishads. Immersive knowledge is necessary when you are doing a production. That subtle information adds to the richness of your performance. Understanding helps you embody the emotions better, enhancing the beauty of your performance, and bringing it closer to the divine.

Knowing the Upanishads helps you prepare for that chapter in our journey as dancers where we will have to step down from the stage, leaving it for the next generation.

V. B. & V.S.: What is the next stage of evolution?

Vrinda: It is the path towards self-realization attained by going into meditation, going into yourself, trying to leave behind everything. Do you know Chinmaya Swamiji?

V. B. & V.S.: I used to attend his Gita Gyan Egnan.

Vrinda: There was one Swamini who used to sing *bhajans* well. When Swamiji told another Swamini to lead the *bhajans*, this lady was really hurt because she was the one who was leading them even before becoming a *sannyāsinī*[50]. Swamiji then made her comprehend that in order to walk the path of self-realization, she has to leave behind everything and learn to sing without her tambur without the accompanying harmonium.

V. B. & V.S.: Oh, this is a great concept. So *Bharatanāṭyam* also takes you towards self-realization.

Vrinda: Eventually, we have to step down and let the students take the stage. It is not an easy change. Everyone will be smitten by the stage, not wanting to leave it behind. But you learn to let go of the stage and start to enjoy watching your students perform. Then you hand over your mantle to someone else and let them take care of the dance class. Once you've done your duty, you leave everything behind and go into your own meditation.

50 A female ascetic.

V. B. & V.S.: This is beautiful. Letting go of everything leads to the rediscovery of the self. It shows renunciation as a renewal of purpose. You've illustrated how *Bharatanāṭyam* takes you through different stages including the ardent learner, who meticulously and methodically prepares the body for dance; the refined performer, whose skilled movements on stage evokes the divine; the expert teacher, who imparts not only the aesthetic and embodied complexities of the classical art to the children, but also inculcates life values in them; and the wise renouncer, who, having fulfilled their duties as a student and teacher, gracefully leaves the stage in pursuit of self-actualization.

Articulating the Indiscernible

Quim Bigas Bassart and Rasmus Ölme

Quim Bigas Bassart, Associate Professor in Dance & Choreography, The Danish National School of Performing Arts, ORCID: 0009-0006-4396-5453

Rasmus Ölme, Professor and Head of the BFA in Dance and Choreography and the MFA in Choreography at The Danish National School of Performing Arts, ORCID: 0000-0001-6215-1558

Abstract: *After a career as a free-lance dancer, based in Brussels (BE), Rasmus moved back to Sweden and started a PhD in choreography at Stockholm University of the Arts (SE). Rasmus successfully defended the doctoral thesis From Model to Module in 2014 and in January 2015 he was appointed head of education at the Dance and Choreography program at the National Danish School of Performing Arts in Copenhagen. Subsequently 2019, he was appointed professor and acts today as head of program for the BFA in Dance and Choreography and the MFA in Choreography. Currently he is running the research project An Indiscernible Zone, funded by the Danish Ministry of Culture and recently premiered his latest work No Point (Det är ingen idé) at Dansens Hus, Stockholm. An Indiscernible Zone is a research project that attempts to collapse the separation between body and space, through dance experience. It is an exploration of the experiential zone where the borders of body and space become indiscernible. The project is the continuation of a previous pilot project called Utifrån Utåt (From outside and outwards). You can find documentation of it on DDSKS website where you will also find an initial conversation about An Indiscernible Zone in dialogue with Sven-Olov Wallenstein (moderated by Natalie Koerner).*

Keywords: *zone, terrain-vague and liminal space, haptic experience, non-differential approach, impressions and expressions of environment.*

This interview takes place as an interjection in the research project *An Indiscernible Zone*, funded by the Danish Ministry of Culture and hosted by The Danish National School of Performing Arts.

Rasmus Ölme, in this research project, continues his interest to put into practice the in-betweens, the liminality, of theory-practice and body-place. For *An Indiscernible Zone,* Rasmus proposes a group of practitioners (Ida Elisabeth Larsen, Sophia Mage and Quim Bigas Bassart) to meet and practice together in the Opera Park in Copenhagen. Rasmus calls this group "The Swarm" as a continuation of a previous group that was created in Sweden and that supported Rasmus's PhD process, as well as the later research project "Movement Material" [1]. In "Suspension" (2018) Rasmus writes "The name, Svärmen, came out of discussions around what collective working and thinking can mean. To form a swarm meant to create a group mind that could produce forms of knowledge different from the individual. In the same way, I wanted to make

1 The members of the Swedish edition were the dancers/choreographers Linda Adami, Dan Johansson, Tilman O'Donnell, Ellen Söderhult and Rasmus Ölme.

use of this group apparatus to be able to harvest more thoughts, reflections, ideas, and insights than I thought I could do on my own.".

The current edition of the group met on different occasions in March and April 2025. A large part of the gatherings was to collectively do the score later presented in this interview. The score became the ground to reflect together from the experience of performing it, as well as addressing questions to the way we do it and attend to it. The research phase was also followed by the research collaborator and architect Rasmus Strange Thue Tobiasen, who shares a common interest with Ölme around the notion of *terrain vague.*

In the following text, Quim Bigas Bassart interviews Rasmus Ölme. The interview takes place right after practicing the score together and functions as a shared space to drift in and speculate around some ideas of the research.

These are the instructions of the score:

Find a place where to mediate your experience of that place, through dance. Depart from the idea that "the smallest unit of action is letting something affect you" (Timothy Morton). Using your body as a felt-sense measurement tool, your impressions from the experienced environment are expressed back to the environment. Impressions become expressions as a form of blending into the place. Reminders:

- *Camouflage by overidentification with your surroundings.*
- *The physical sensation of your body is spatial.*
- *Your experience of space is physical.*

6th of August, 2025, before practicing.

R: Are we practicing in the park as we have done before or shall we go somewhere else?

Q: How important is the location for this investigation? There was something nice about going to the park, but it also felt as if any place could work.

R: Absolutely.

Q: So, how would you like to do it today?

R: The investigation is not about the site. The investigation is in the physical experience of the relationship between the body and the site. So, it could be any site, and I believe we discovered that in our previous sessions. The research is not trying to say anything about the park, but to say something about the relationship between you and the site. Your physical experience of how body and place meet.

In the pilot version of this project, we looked for liminal spaces to practice in. Spaces that lack definition. But there's something about when you're in an obvious functional space, for example your kitchen or something like that. Then the relationship to that function becomes so strong that it is hard to NOT be functioning in relation to it. Therefore, it was helpful to be in more vague places.

Q: I remember you were talking about the notion of "making strange". The capacity to change your relation to something. I also remember you gesturing as if you were a DJ looking for the right pitch or right mix. I wonder if that pitching can happen anywhere, as long as you feel that you can pitch? Because for you, it might be that the kitchen is not the right place, because of the connotations that it has for you, but for someone else, it might be feasible.

R: Well, of course, one way of working with it is to try to challenge the concept of that place. I was thinking now, when we're talking, what if we do a session here?

R and Q: Here.

Q: Yes.

R: In the office.[2] We close the door for a while and practice for about 20 minutes or so. To see if we can manage to make the office space strange.

Q: I experienced this investigation as if there is no score, yet there is a score. Would you like to remind me of the starting point?

R: I will be paraphrasing the actual written score, but it is about turning your body into a haptic measuring instrument. However, the notion of haptic became a bit too conceptual or philosophical somehow, and we changed it to *felt sense*, as the immediate physical response that your body has to being in a place.[3] So you are somehow monitoring your physical sensation of that zone where the body and the space meet.

Resuming the interview, after practicing the score

(left) Rasmus Ölme, aureola drawing. Picture: Quim Bigas. (right) Quim Bigas, aureola drawing. Picture: Quim Bigas

Q: So, we moved in the office. In our usual office. And then we did the drawings. How do you call them?

R: We called one of them aureola, relating to the light that is usually seen around iconic figures. But I mean, we could also just call it "the zone" because, in this frame, we speak about the indiscernible zone. An area that is both space and body. Similar to the aureola, it has to do with the body, but it's around the body somehow. But maybe just for clarity, we can just call it

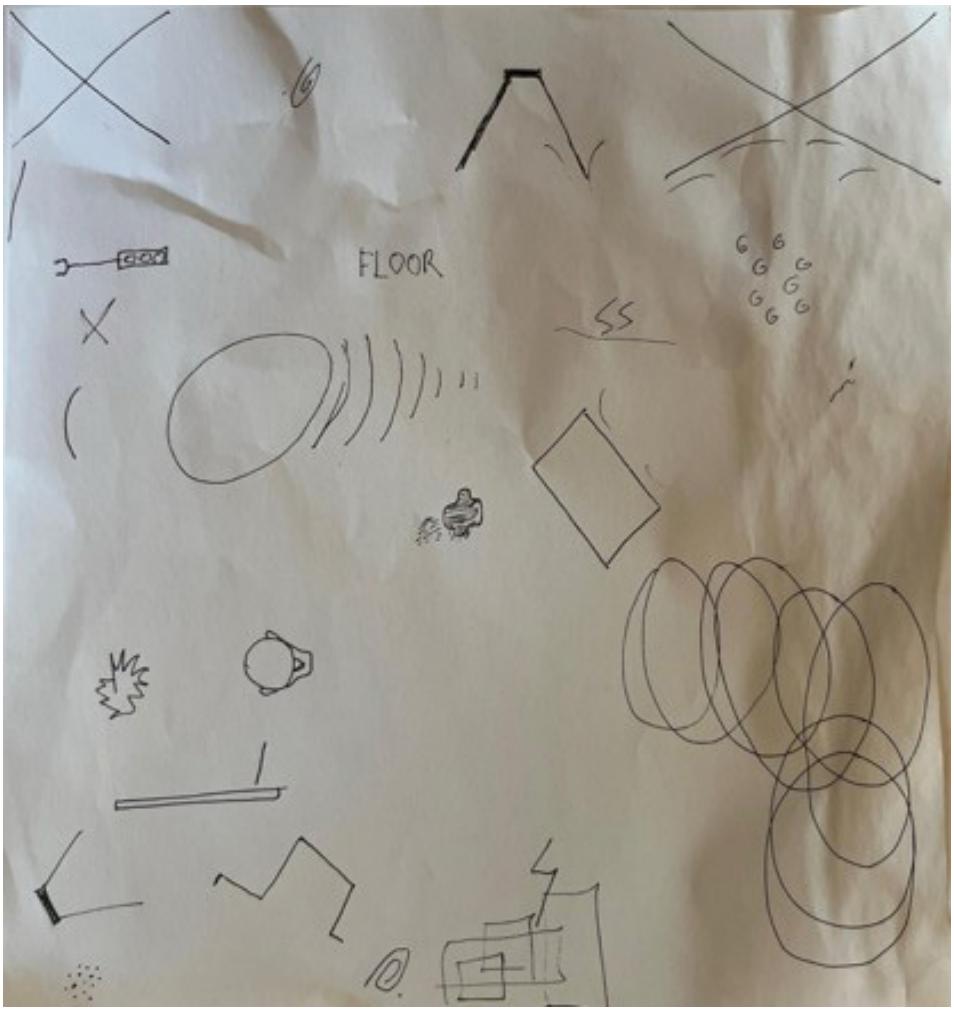
2 The Danish National School of Performing Arts, Per Knutzons Vej 5, Copenhagen

3 For more information about this term: Gendlin, E. T. (1962). *Experiencing and the creation of meaning: A philosophical and psychological approach to the subjective*. Free Press.

zone. The other one we call archeological drawing which is the one that maps the memory of where different experiences took place.

Q: Zone. When we talk about this, I recognize that this practice is not busy with definitions. It is not about defining what a zone is or to make it discernible, but to stay in it. I think you also refer to "the threshold" between things: between what you managed to say, but also what is left behind in experience, as well at what stays as felt sense.

R: This threshold, it was something that Sven Olov Wallenstein, a philosopher that I collaborated with in the pilot project, talked about.[4] The way things make sense before they get articulated. That was the threshold. I believe he said," right under the threshold of articulation". When something gets articulated, it gets defined. So, it is to see what it is like to be in the process where things are being defined, but never quite fall into definition.



Archeological drawing by Rasmus Ölme and Quim Bigas. Picture: Quim Bigas

Q: Today when I was practicing, I again remembered that approach to "making strange", but I was also, at times, thinking about what recognition and desire does to me. You might find yourself in a possibility of something but, on the way there, you find yourself somewhere else.

4 https://www.sh.se/english/sodertorn-university/contact/researchers/sven-olov-wallenstein

How do you experience that? How do we, how do you, articulate the research in relation to that idea of recognition, while still staying connected to "making strange"?

R: There are a couple of things that come to mind when you say this. One thing is a text from Timothy Morton. You used this, "you might find yourself". Morton took that example, in a text, from a Talking Heads song.[5] Morton is writing the text from a hotel room in Oslo, I think.[6] And when they write "you may find yourself", they are annoyed by how the Word document wants to police their language into definitions rather than staying in vagueness. And in relation to estrangement, Morton is jet lagged when writing that text and mentions how jet lag reveals how strange of a thing time is. It's not that jet lag makes time strange. It makes you see that time is really strange.

I have an example of estrangement from the session we just did here in the office, where I had an encounter with an extension cord and found myself blurring or undefining it. I was doing something with the extension cord that does not relate to its function of being an extension cord. I was not using it in its function, but just experiencing it as a thing. A bit like you can see small kids do when they don't know what things are, but they still engage with them. Or, you know, this YouTube clip from Mel Baggs, that reflects on their experience of autism and about being in dialogue with all the aspects of one's surrounding.[7] This is how I understand estrangement. To not allow things to fall into their own definition, or at least not to be limited to their definition. You can affirm the definition and recognize an extension cord as such, but that is just a conceptual recognition, because then when I'm handling it, it also just becomes a thing.

Q: I guess it connects back to the felt sense. I recall that, when we are practicing, we are also creating a state of being with.[8] In a way, it's like within the practice. You are with and within it. The zoning can be a place in between that does not deny that things are what they are. But at the same time, it brings the sensorial experience, or the felt sense of the thing, and it carries that relation into the event.

R: Yeah. I mean, something can be something, and it can feel like something else. Like the extension cord is an extension cord, but it can also feel like many things while I am handling it.

Q: Making it a thing. It is like I am relating with my body, with where I am, with that allowance that we create by being in correlation, but also like in some sort of thinginess. I guess that also relates to that moment when I sense that I'm doing something concrete, that I recognize myself and I have the need to make it "a thing".[9] To make it more, well, "thingy". Amorphous or strange. It connects to the experience of recognizing yourself or finding a desire that is like, "ah, I want to hit that". And yet, on the way, you meet yourself somewhere else, through the sensorial.

R: Mm, I wanted to pick up on that when you said this thing about you might have a definition of something that makes you want to do something with it, like the cup asks you to pick it up, you know? Then you're still in the function of the cup, which I think you should allow yourself to do, because if not, you stay in some kind of resistance to the process all the time, which is really difficult. So, I think you need to go with that, but then open it up somehow to say like, "okay, yes, I pick up the cup as a cup, but once I'm with the cup, it's not a cup". It goes beyond that and that's maybe the thinginess. Same goes for the body, like, "yes, it's my body",

5 Talking Heads. (1980). *Once in a lifetime* [Song]. On *Remain in light*. Sire Records.

6 Morton, T. (2021). *All art is ecological.* Penguin Books.

7 Baggs, A. (2007, January 14). *In my language* [Video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JnylM1hI2jc

8 For furthering this idea, check: Nancy, J.-L. (2000). Being singular plural (R. D. Richardson & A. E. O'Byrne, Trans.). Stanford University Press. (Original work published 1996). For a more than-human approach to this idea, check: Haraway, D. J. (2016). *Staying with the trouble: Making kin in the Chthulucene*. Duke University Press.

9 Steyerl, H. (2010). A thing like you and me. *e-flux journal*, (15). https://www.e-flux.com/journal/15/61298/a-thing-like-you-and-me/

but I also try to turn it into something else. There's a thinginess with the body as well. So, both the thinginess of the things that you engage with and the space itself, but also the thinginess of our own body. And there's this "zone". To turn the body into a zone is also to turn it into a thing because there is an effort to un-identify it. To make it strange and indiscernible.

Q: Something that supported me in the practice were your thoughts on impression and expression. Could you share something about it?

R: I think it was um... Again, it came from something from Timothy Morton, but it was a talk that I heard online and I haven't been able to find a proper quote afterwards. It was something like "the minimal level of activity is allowing yourself to be affected". Before, you said something about allowing yourself to be a bit more amorphous, it's like you're allowing yourself to be affected by things. Which means that you are not a stable entity that is interacting with things, but you're letting them change you, no? You are allowing yourself to be affected.[10]

Before we started today, I said something about the body as a felt sense instrument, and its output is movement. So, if we then say, since we were working with dance, that expression in our case is movement then I allow myself to be affected at that minimum level, and then I can play around with the level of expression, which is movement. So, it's almost like a volume button that I can dial up or down, but with movement instead of sound. I perceive something, and then turn my perception into an action so that it's not just only input, but input that becomes output. Impression that becomes expression.

This also relates to my inspiration from camouflage in this project. Roger Caillois, a French thinker, spoke about camouflage as a kind of over-identification with your surroundings.[11] In camouflage, it is as if you reflect the environment back onto itself, so you start to look like it. In our practice, the body blends with the place. Allowing yourself to be affected by the place you're in as a way to blend with it, to become part of it, the being with - like you said - is, as well, a way of reflecting the space back onto itself. Same goes for the impression/expression, in the sense that whatever comes in as impressions is reflected back out as expression. I'm turning myself into a kind of reflection of the place.

Q: On a conceptual level, it is almost as if, at the end of the day, there's no difference between what I think, what I do, and how I'm being done. I guess there's also something around dismantling certain binaries. For instance, theory and practice, body and mind, inside and outside.

R: And also loosening up these definitions. Our thinking mind works a lot through binaries. So, when you're trying to loosen up definitions, binaries come along somehow. Thinking back to the volume dial I mentioned, it is the difference between a dimmer and a switch. The switch is binary. It's on or off, not in between. The dimmer has all the nuances of in-between. So, it's never one or the other, it's always in between minimum and maximum and wherever on the scale you are, you're always in that in relation to the binary, but never in any of them.

Q: Now that you mention the dimmer, I remember a term that I think I've heard you talking about before, which is tuning. This idea of putting yourself in a frequency.

R: Yeah, it is a frequency that you're picking up on. There's this psychological term called "affect attunement".[12] It's used in developmental psychology. Small kids teach themselves to attune their affects, by reading other people. You know this typical scene with a toddler that falls over and then they look at their parents to see if they hurt themselves or not. Like to know if it

10 Although correct quote is missing and, in relation to allowing yourself to be affected, we refer to: Morton, T. (2018). *Being ecological.* The MIT Press.

11 Caillois, R. (1938). Mimétisme et psychasthénie légendaire. In *Le mythe et l'homme*. Gallimard.

12 Stern, D. N. (1985). *The interpersonal world of the infant: A view from psychoanalysis and developmental psychology.* Basic Books.

was a problem or not. Of course, they feel something. There's immediate feedback in their knee when they hit it, but whether that's a thing or not, they tune through the reaction of others.

Q: Looking at the table where we are now, I would like to hear a bit about these drawings. They, in a way, become grounds of reflection or grounds of trying to filter, or furthering and continuing the thought of the practice. I would like to hear a bit more about how you relate to them. What do they do to you?

R: I think about the drawings a lot. I mean, on the one hand, it's a way to create documentation. It was also a way for Rasmus (Strange Thue Tobiasen) and myself to find a common medium to talk through. As an architect, Rasmus draws a lot and I also had a bit of a relationship to drawing from making scores.[13]

The drawings are reflections that we do after the fact. In that sense, they are interpreted by ourselves. We're turning our memory of the experience into something. They function more as a reflection tool than as an artwork, but it's also interesting that they are there. They stay, but they're not there to really explain anything. It's not like it is an explanation to what happened, even if there of course is a relationship to what happened, they also become something on their own. A kind of artistic byproduct rather than end product. It is not like we created the practice in order to produce the drawings.

Q: How do you navigate the drawing? Is the drawing part of this practice, or is it more like a way of bringing up some sensation of the practice.

R: I think that there is an aspect of the drawing that still is an application of the practice as well. Because there's something about the experience of doing the drawing.

Q: Exactly.

R: Now, the tactile experience of doing it, that's where I feel like the practice is continuing while drawing and not just like a reflection of it.

Q: Yeah, you also mentioned a very nice word when we work previously together, a French word in connection to the word tapping.

R : Yeah, this "Tâter le terrain". Like a feeling your way, and checking something out before engaging with it.

Q: Exactly. Which I think it could relate to the way I go back to it. There is a slight sensation of Tâter my own experience of it. Tatatata.

R: I think this deliberate vagueness is very important. Now I said vagueness, but through the course of the project we have moved away from that word and replaced it with indiscernibility. In the practice, I'm not trying to discern, but to indiscern. So also, when making the drawing, it's not that I'm defining things in the drawing through the drawing, but also allowing the drawing to be indiscernible.

R: There may be one thing to add before we finish. There was one thing that was happening today in practice that I wanted to share, that might have something to do with what I just said now. I don't know what to call it. "Thinking" doesn't feel like the right word. Thinking could also be a little bit like thinking about something else, and this is more like a sharpness of awareness to what's happening. I'm monitoring my awareness quite a lot. So, on one hand, and this is like a paradox in the practice, I want to let myself go. You know, to see what happens. At the same time, I don't want it to become whatever. I do not make up my mind about what is going to happen, yet at the same time, I want to stay with this specific practice. If not, I could also start doing lots of other things. Although the practice aims at indiscernibility, it is something very

13 Rasmus Strange Thue Tobiasen, architect and collaborator in this research project. Tobiasen, R. S. T. (2023). *URO: Strange commonplace exercise.* Paper presented at CA²RE, Aarhus, Denmark. https://aarhus.ca2re.eu/submissions/s-t-tobiasen-uro?s=s

specific. There's some kind of, what do you call it - acuity! A cognitive sharpness that is not thinking that I found very interesting. Although I struggle to define it, I notice when I lose it. I notice when I fall out of the practice and I know how to put myself back on track.

Q: There is something about this cognitive accuracy that you mention that is quite clear when we practice this. Sometimes when I'm in the practice, and I've done it much less than you, there is something concrete. The task of bringing it into the *felt sense* is so specific. I need to be in tune with that sensing. I cannot get out of it. In a way, it demands a sensitive movement also to be in tune with that. I remember from one of our conversations that you, while practicing, found yourself wanting to do a handstand. If you put your cognitive self into experience in order to be in tune with what affects you, you might not end up doing the handstand. And it doesn't matter if you do it or not. What is important is that this form of cognitive experience is still taking place all the time. I think that's the challenge. There's something that falls into place. Here and here and here. There are many different textures to be experienced within the practice. That in a way, they have a lot of value because they open like a scope or like a sense of modulation. Like the dimmer.

Maybe one last thing about this awareness of the social that we have talked about some times before. The awareness of, for instance, knowing that all these objects belong to an office. And the fact that I have no interest whatsoever in destroying any of it.

R: It is not about going against the usual uses of the office.

Q: There's an acceptance.

R: I remember I talked about that in relation to another work. There is this idea coming from Aikido and its relation to change: "Align to divert".[14] It's like, you align with things in order to make them go somewhere else. I think I recognize what you were saying now. Like you're accepting a situation, but you're also trying to see...

Q: How you go together somewhere else.

R: Yeah, exactly.

Q: How do we encounter together somewhere else.

Interview #2: 14th of August 2025

After our first interview, we decided to meet again. We finished the conversation with the need to talk more about dancing and the role of dancing on relation to this specific research. We met again in the same office.

Q: Maybe we can go directly to talk about dance and dancing and then we'll see where it goes.

I feel that I can do this practice because dancing has given me an availability to it. Dance has given me tools to do this. In that sense, dance is not just a technique, but also a tool to remain in, or with, complexity. The ability to navigate sensation and awareness.

R: Yes. There is something that is taken for granted when I do this work and I choose to place it within choreography. On one hand, it has to do with just my own…I don't know, I have to call it identity or background. It's the lens through which I work. I don't need to question whether this is dance or not. Because it feels that, if I'm doing it, it's dance because that's what I do. Some skills that relate to dance are not necessarily dance skills. I'm sure I was using some of those dance skills when we were doing our office session here, you know? There are some moments where I'm physically also doing things that someone without the dance training would maybe

14 In The book of five rings (1645) by Miyamoto Mushashi, there is a reference to the notion of *uke nagashi*–style movements (to receive and let flow past) rather than meeting force with force. Musashi, M. (2002). The book of five rings (W. Scott Wilson, Trans.). Shambhala. (Original work published 1645)

not do. It wouldn't come to them as an option. So, there's something that has to do with the trained body, like what just appears as an option. When I look at the space and, you know, blend myself into that space, possibilities come to me. Those possibilities come to me also because I have those physical possibilities to put my legs somewhere or whatever. If that didn't exist within my body, I wouldn't feel the call to do it. Just like I don't feel the call to fly. And then I thought about that sometimes when I watch, for instance, parkour, it's interesting to see how they see the space. Because they see what they can do there. They see things I don't because they are not options to me. So, when my body meets that site, I'm not like "oh, I wish I could do this or that", because I don't even see it. I'm sure that there's some of that, some dance skills in that sense, that enable me to see the possibilities of the space in a certain way. But, then, there's this other side of dancing, and we brought it up the other day, I think. The scene from *American Beauty* with this plastic bag that is flying around. In that scene, the off voice in the movie says something as if that plastic bag is dancing with him or asking him to dance with it.[15] So he uses dance as a kind of a metaphor because, of course, the plastic bag isn't dancing. Like, it is not thinking to itself "now I'm gonna dance". But there's something in our perception that relates that event with the plastic bag to dance, and he also, in that same scene, uses the metaphor of a child asking him to play with him. So, there's something about playfulness and dance. I can relate that to what happened when we were doing our session here in the office the other day. There is physicality, and there is some sort of spatial awareness and then there is that: playfulness.

In the morning classes I was teaching this week, I started to share a current thought of mine that dance is relational. So, that you're always dancing with something. Of course, you have it in social dancing, dancing together with other people. Dancing on your own is different, you know? But even when you're dancing on your own, it's like you're dancing with something. You're dancing with the music maybe or you could be dancing with an idea. So, you have some kind of task that you're working on. And then to think that doing that task is not necessarily dance but that it could also be a way of relating to the task. I'm not just doing a dance task but I'm also dancing with the task. A bit like the relation to this plastic bag, asking him to play with it. There is something that's happening between the two. We're relating to each other and we're moving in relation to each other. So, we're dancing *with*. So, if my intention, when I get something like a score for an improvisation, it's not just that the score itself is an explanation to how the dance should be done, but that dance is also my relation to the score. I'm dancing with the score and not just performing the score as a dance.

Sometimes in class, I use this cue where I tell the participants to consider what they're doing dancing. So even if they're just figuring out a sensation in their shoulder or something, or a more analytical movement research, like experiencing your tailbone or whatever, to also remember that it's dance that we're doing. And when I give that cue, something always happens in the space. I can see that people, when they remind themselves to consider what they do as dancing, change what they do. Or maybe even more, how they do what they do. There is something about that lightness or playfulness that comes in. And of course, you could say that it's a cliche of dancing or a prejudice about what dance should be, but at the same time, like those are the concepts that we have. I'm not telling them how to dance. But more saying, consider, remember to consider, that what you're doing is dancing. Bringing that concept in it does something. It lightens up.

Q: There are two distinctions that you made that I go back to. One is the dimmer as a degree that you can explore. Then, there is the way the score, like this "I am always dancing with something", brings me back to this dismantling of the inside and the outside. I usually like

15 "(...) and this bag was just dancing with me. Like a little kid begging me to play with it. For fifteen minutes. That's the day I realized that there was this entire life behind things (...)." Mendes, S. (Director). (1999). *American Beauty* [Film]. DreamWorks Pictures.

to refer to this idea of being some sort of medium or channel. That I mediate between my own experience, the possibilities of my body, the space and the conditions that are already in place. I also go back to your invitation to think that the feeling of space is already in my body and I am the space at the same time.

Parallel to that, I was also thinking about dancing and skills and its connection to experience, awareness or alike. Alva Noë comes to mind.[16] I feel that as a dancer, I am used to changing my perspective to be with other angles. Even in my verticality, I'm always in the potential of another perspective or another relation. As someone that comes from dance, I sense myself in a state of readiness where I am ready to change perspective and to change my relation with where I am. And I think that's also something that dance, as a skill, carries, like that possibility of three dimensionality.

R: I just came to think that maybe it's also important to differentiate a little bit when we say dance. Because there is also a lot of dance that is not working at all with this change of perspective. It's this contemporary dance not as a dance style, but as a relationship to the art form. To me, contemporary, in that sense, is something that has gone through the modern and the postmodern movements in art. And I think one thing that happened, especially in postmodernism, was the question of the art form itself.[17] And not just dance, but all art forms. A sort of collapse. If it's not learning how to paint anymore, what's the skill of the painter? There, I think some of those skills that you mention about awareness of one's own position, capacity to change position, the decision making and the grounds from which I make my decisions… That kind of awareness to the practicing of the art form has to do with it, for me, with a contemporary approach.

I talked yesterday to the BA students in dance and choreography and I was asking them: what is a good dancer? What are the skills that you need to develop to become a good dancer? And then I was saying to them that, a lot of times, I can watch a dance performance and have a feeling that they're not dancing, because I don't see that kind of relationship that I was trying to explain: the relationality and the playfulness and some kind of "being in the feedback of your own experience while you're doing it" that I think a contemporary performer does. It's like you are in dialogue with what's happening while it's happening. This mediation that you mentioned of that experience, it's not just the mediation of the choreography. It's the mediation of this particular situation with me in front of you.

Q: When I think about the manifestation of the practice, and the fact that we've done it for half an hour, I think of the importance of time and frames. We need the time to shift, to be and embrace that change of atmosphere. Through doing it, there is this moment of letting go or losing track of conscience in the sense that neither you, nor I can trace what we did.

R: And that's a part of it. That's also why we have these archaeological drawings we do and that are based on the fact that we don't remember everything we do in the practice. Some things are gone. We are also deliberately trying to put ourselves in the mind state where we're not making decisions and where we are supposed to lose ourselves a little bit.

Q: Exactly. I think it is interesting going back to reinforce this idea of the contemporary. The form of contemporary dance that we practice. There is something about losing sense of position that is very different in relation to other lineages of dance where the position is all that matters. Where you need to be in the right position. You need to take the right position. And in this

16 Noë, A. (2004). Action in perception. MIT Press.

17 For context: Goldberg, R. (2011). *Performance art: From futurism to the present* (3rd ed.). Thames & Hudson. And (more dance-focused): Banes, S. (1987). *Terpsichore in sneakers: Post-modern dance*. Wesleyan University Press.

score, it's almost like we use the space as a way of losing track.

R: Yeah, and that's also part of this making it strange, no? Back to Timothy Morton's words, it's more like noticing how strange things are. So, it's not that you need to make them strange. It's more reminding yourself of the fact that they're really strange. Like things are really strange, but you forget about it through habit. And when you move outside your habit, it's like all this strangeness of things, for example the strangeness of this office, appears because you're not anymore habitually using it just like an office. It's not that we are making it weird, it was weird already before. Its weirdness is revealed through relating to it from a different perspective.

Q: At some point, we even had the joke, with one of our colleagues after talking about the practice in the office, that by doing this practice here we cleansed the space a little bit.

R: There is something cleansing in the sense of... I love this expression in Danish: "at ryste posen", have you heard that? To shake the bag. It's like if you have sweets in a bag and you're going to see a little bit of what's in it by shaking it. In that sense, I think this way of revealing the strangeness of things is a bit like shaking things up. Loosening up the concepts a bit. The things that are there become different, and so do we. The space becomes different for you because you've had those experiences there. It's like when you have a party or something in your apartment, and afterwards, the place is a bit different. It's not just your home anymore.

Q: This also makes me think, again, about Alva Noë and how our experience of things affects the way we are with them. I don't need to go around this table to know that it is a table, because my cognitive self has already had a similar experience of being around a table like this. At the same time, now I can say that I've been around it. And that I've been under, I felt each side… the resistance of the legs… I've heard the way it sounds when it's dragged. In a way, it is a noun, it's been used as a table. At the same time, the possibility that this could be something else... has been reawakened or shaken up.

R: I think this is the indiscernibility. You're making things a little bit more indiscernible. As if you unplug the conceptual. I think that's what you're saying when you say that when the table becomes only the table. Like, it's not the thing anymore that can be different things, not the material, not the form, color or texture. It's just the table. A table. But then when you engage with it, all of a sudden, it appears as a thing that is not just the object of use and its function. It opens up to experience in a different way. This could be the role of art, no? To open up things to experience. And there is that thing you said about positionality, maybe, you know, like the shift of relationship.

Q: I go back to how this kind of practices and procedures have been tried to be translated into words. And also, these distinctions between saying that you are sitting on a chair, saying that you are chairing or that you are being chaired.[18]

R: There is a very nice lecture online that I saw with Timothy Morton, that we mentioned a few times already. There's a typical critique to anthropomorphization, and how it turns the world into an extension of the human. But Morton says that, obviously, we anthropomorphize. It is the only thing we can do. Everything we touch becomes anthropomorphized. But it works both ways. So, when you're being chaired, the chair is also being humaned. I'm now anthropomorphizing this mug as I grab it, but the mug is also…

Q: …mugging you!

Q: Speaking of anthropomorphizing. I feel this space, that we share here and where we did the practice for half an hour, is very anthropomorphized already. I think most of the things here

18 Deleuze, G. (1990). *The logic of sense* (M. Lester, Trans.). Columbia University Press. (Original work published 1969).

are created in relation to certain movements and functions of the body.

R: Yeah, and that's why these spaces are an extension of us, no?

Q: At the same time, we go the other way around as well.

R: We also become the spaces that we are in.

Q: The score is not site specific.

R: No.

Q: But yet the space is doing the score at the same time as I am the space. What seems clear to me is that the indiscernibility that I inhabit here is only possible because I am here. The score is the same and the premises are the same but the way that gets mediated through my body, maybe the way it becomes an expression, will change.

Usually, I propose an approach to "being moved by the space and move with the space". The strangeness comes already from not staying in an action-reaction relationship. But comes from acknowledging the tendencies and where I already am. So, that I remain in it and with it.

R: I think what you're describing is what I was trying to say before around making things strange. Like, you don't need to make it strange. It is already strange. So, it's more about noticing how strange it is. When you're just connecting to this felt sense and you unplug a little bit the conceptual understanding. For instance, you create space between letters to create a word. Then the word becomes a sound. W does not mean anything. It's like, aaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaj. So the same thing with the chair I'm sitting on. It is not any more a function, but it's an experience. And when I start going to that experience, and let that guide me, things start to happen. When I open that door, that perceptual door to my own experience, things happen.

Q: I'm also thinking about the role of performance around these frames. Most practitioners have been in places where we've been in a sensorial approach and we've been asked to "experience yourself sitting on the chair". And then a certain performing sometimes comes with it. I feel that there's a bit of an assumption, and maybe that is a misjudgment of mine on the way we perform experience. We are always in experience. I am already sitting in a chair.

R: Yeah, but maybe there's something about this impression expression. You are doing it, but when you're perceiving and you start to have other impressions, you also start to express them differently, no? Like if you're expressing your impressions, when you're opening up to that experience, you are getting impressions. And if it's not just about you getting impressions, but also expressing them, then performance shows up.

Then there's also another side of performance which is this awareness of an external eye. Whether there is an audience or not. Or with the camera like we did the other day, as we filmed our session. I became very aware of where the camera was. So, I'm performing for the camera in that sense because I'm organizing the space in relation to my awareness of whether I'm in the frame or not. There's performing happening in relation to that, and if you're doing it with an audience, then there's also the experience of there being an audience which also gives you impressions. So, there is not just you experiencing the chair, but also the awareness of someone watching you experiencing the chair. That is also an impression that needs to be expressed. So, in that sense, the audience is also the chair, or, I mean, you're being audienced and you are performing them. They are audiencing you and you are performing them. That angle or aspect of the activity also needs to be recognized.

We had it with this previous research project, called *Movement Material*, where we had a score that we were practicing.[19] Just like the score we have now, it wasn't for an audience. But

19 https://ddsks.dk/da/projekter/movement-material

then we had people watching and we needed to deal with that. And something is turned on. Like for us, for example, here in the office space the other day, there was no audience, but the cameras were there. And then we were there for each other, as well, so there's an awareness that I'm performing it a bit for you. Even though you're not watching me as a spectator, I'm aware of your presence and that you might see me. That level is present. Anyway, so with this project *Movement Material*, when we had to deal with really performing it, doing the practice in front of, you know, 50 people, some questions came up: Do we need to change anything? Do we have to compose? Should we make some agreement? Should there be cues? Then we said, "no, the audience is a condition", just like it's different for us to be performing or practicing outdoors or in the studio. So, it becomes part of the experience, rather than saying, "I now need to perform my experience for the audience", I'm trying to still only experience the thing that I'm supposed to be exploring in my research, but I'm doing it in the condition of being watched. I'm performing it for them and they become a part of the experience that it's also being performed.

Q: In a way, in this kind of practice, as more different conditions appear the more you need to take them in.

R: Yeah. It would have been very different if we practiced here in pitch dark. And it would also have been very different if it was 4 in the morning, or, if you know, our mothers were here. It's all these conditions that affect what it is and an audience member, an audience, is not different from that. The audience will also do something to the space that I'm experiencing.

Q: I was happy to hear you speak about this impression because, in a way, I think my comment comes a bit from a bit of a judgment on the way we perform experience. Specifically, in somatic practices. But at the same time, now, listening to you, I'm also just like, "ah, but that's the way people think this becomes an impression". Which is not any different from me, that I don't want it to be like that. You know? At the end, we are dealing with the same. We're trying to attend to experience and to the felt sense and work with that in order to mediate some sort of expression.

R: And of course, there are conventions, no? About what it looks like. I had a colleague that was also commenting on this when talking about BMC.[20] He mentioned something about how it's strange that whether you are experiencing and working on the vestibular system in your ear or if you're exploring some gland, kind of looks the same. I don't see the thing that you're experiencing, I see you experiencing. And that, certainly, can fall into a convention.

Q: When we were together, I appreciated not having to care directly about you. I feel that we built trust by sharing the experience.

R: There's something about *The Swarm*, I mean, the fact that I use that word for our working group. I used it already during the PhD when I formed the research group for that work.[21] It came about from discussing different names of animal gatherings. In English there's quite a lot of them: like flock, herd, pack of wolves, or school of fish. We ended up choosing the swarm because there's movement in it and it has something amorphous about it? Like it's not established or...

Q: It's also a buzz.

R: Yeah, exactly.

Q: The space in between each individual in the swarm.

R: Yeah, it's a vibration. Something about that way of being together that fit. We are together, but it's also everyone for themselves in their little buzz next to each other. I'm both with you and

20 https://www.bodymindcentering.com/about/

21 Ölme, R. (2014). From model to module: A move towards generative choreography (Doctoral dissertation). KTH Royal Institute of Technology. https://urn.kb.se/resolve?urn=urn:nbn:se:kth:diva-145355

not. We don't talk with each other, or have direct eye contact but we move together. There is something specific about that way of being with each other. Maybe it is that being *with*. Like we are *with* each other more than together.

RELATE (Research Laboratory for Art and Technology), Aalborg University
Rendsburggade 14, 9000 Denmark

ISSN: 2246-8498