

Ligetilines: Cogitations on Collaboration

I originally approached the theory of musical forces with the intention of directly transferring the forces identified as acting upon the music to the forces that the dancers would respond to with physical motion. As the hybridity fundamental to the concept of synaesthesia can attest, and as the choreographic process made me aware, the forces themselves are less significant than the interactions between them. The process of choreographing the Sonata and the new composition underlined the extent to which working with physical bodies is both bound by and reflects the hierarchical interactions of physical forces. The levels of hierarchical interaction between bodies within the dance space include: the relationship between the dancers, the kinds of movement that typify the dance, the paths of movement that define the spatial structure of the dance, the discreet motions within those trajectories, the specific intersections of sound and movement, and finally the coalescing agent of gesture.

Prior to the rehearsal period, several collaborative parameters had been set. Risk was a conscious choice and a creative decision, first invoked through the creation of the graphic score as the basis of music-dance correspondence, implicit in the participation of the cello in the dance, manifested in the complexity of the *Capriccio* choreography, and at the fore in the *Lines for Gage* structured improvisation. The choreographed *Capriccio* (in order of chronological development) utilises duet contact work, individual floor work, and task-derived gesture.¹ Gesture unifies the extremes and respective visual planes of floor work and contact work. The *Lines for Gage* dance improvisation also constitutes three parts that roughly align with the three sections of Dan's piece, each section corresponding in turn to one of three graphic score pages that Dan chose to interpret.² Where the choreography of the *Ligeti Solo Sonata* simulated risk, the improvisatory nature of this final part of the event presents actual risk. When one started to fall, the other was unprepared to catch. The choreographed *Lines for Gage* explores bodies seated in dialogue, then falling to the Earth, and finally climbing to the Heavens.

By exaggerating the differences between the two movements of the Sonata in their respective graphic representations, I was already testing the fluidity of the collaborative relationship. These differences previously discussed, between the visual representations of the *Dialogo* and *Capriccio*, called upon very different intuitive reactions and creative responses.

The process of choreographing for cello (here I refer to performer, instrument, and music played together) and two dancers afforded the opportunity to probe not only the relationship between cello and dance, but ultimately that between sound and sight. There is never complete reconciliation between cello and dance (reconciliation the ruling aesthetic, as seen earlier, of the Mark Morris choreography). Now the cello becomes a part of the dance, instead of its governing force. More than silence, it is the absence of movement that triggers this interaction, either from cellist to dancer or dancer to cellist. The relationships forged

¹ For the specific task devised by the choreographer, as well as the list of touch/physical sensations that I derived from the completed graphic score that helped her to refine the resulting gestures, see the list included in the project portfolio.

² These pages, and the sections of the piece to which they correspond, are (by order of appearance within the piece): *Capriccio* pg. 16-*Molto Lento*; *Dialogo* pg. 2-Without time, floating; *Capriccio* pg. 14-*con moto*.

allow the work to exist in the liminal space between realising the fundamental ideas already imbedded in the music, and 'mirroring' or pairing musical and physical movement. In the *Capriccio*, the circular arrangement of dancers around the cello makes visibly clear Cage's observation that 'The interesting thing about the ears is that you can hear things behind you.'³ In this case, the audience is hearing with their sight.⁴ Sound both mediates between the energies of two dancers at opposing attitudes, and is the medium through which the dance is literally 'seen'.

Choreographic vision prioritised creating a scheme for the final event over presenting self-contained movements or pieces. Even before the completion of the new composition, the choreographer was intent upon building this progression, which flows from the Ligeti *Dialogo* to *Capriccio*, and after the panel discussion, finishes with *Lines for Gage*. Here the hybrid model from the discussion of synaesthesia may conveniently be employed. The overall trajectory: solos—duet—structured improvisation, whether interspersed solos, duet climaxes linked by simultaneous motion, or structured three-part improvisation facilitated by prop; dancer relationships from coincidental—conflicting—interdependent; movement from walking and sliding—running and jumping—standing, falling, and climbing; paths of movement from linear—circular. In the *Dialogo*, the arc of movement mirrors along the diagonal tangent of sound created by the cello. Ephemeral melodies come and go as the dancers interchange in and out of the space. By contrast, in the *Capriccio*, the optical effect could be perceived as planetary, machine-like, or atomic. To use this last analogy, it is as though the dancers create an electron cloud of movement around the nucleus of the cello. The perpetual motion of the music (itself a result of inertia) constantly moves the dancers. Visually, too, while the cello alternately appears to generate motion, it also seems to hold the dancers in that motion. And while the dancers' paths of movement may appear random, they are, in fact, intricately interwoven. Just as the energy spent in playing each outburst is regained through the charged silence that follows it, the dancers' flurry of motion finds fresh impetus in the collisions between them both.

The duet—comprised of *two male* dancers—presented its own resistances, the challenge of which further spurred choreographic development. Finding the 'soft edge' when meeting the floor was counterbalanced by contact work that utilised pivoting and colliding. This dichotomy between the soft edge and contact work is of course more deep-seated, extending beyond the choreographic lexicon to the respective approaches of the dancers themselves. One proved fluid and flexible, the other articulate and strong. This observation may remind listeners (and readers) of the archetypal distinction evident in the music of the Sonata. *Dialogo* : Apollonian : : *Capriccio* : Dionysian.

That this dynamic duet was motivated by risk becomes apparent in the complex and choreographically rich *Capriccio*. It was here at the end of the work that the visceral feeling of the music decisively determined the process of working backward, for both painting and choreography. The literal images that I began sketching (that correspond to points in the score at which the musical forces are readily observable) found expression in the direct

³ 'Chance Conversations: An Interview with Merce Cunningham and John Cage', YouTube: accessed 23 March 2015.

⁴ See the section 'Hybridity of Synaesthesia'.

contact between dancers. The predominance of contact lift work in the choreography, in turn, reflects the highly physical nature of gestures at the cello.

The recycling and exchanging of movement motifs early became another prevailing characteristic of this choreographic process. In the *Capriccio*, the process of choreography creation parallels the generation of musical material. Identical movements are reordered and reconfigured for different contexts, just as the musical melody is reborn through various textures. Simply, movement : context : : music : texture. Largely due to this reusing and trading of physical movements, the essence of the work is visible in every moment; ideas are evenly distributed throughout. Structural integrity evident in the dance reflects the complex inner workings of the Sonata. This integrity is exemplified by the *tremolo* passage of the *Capriccio*.

The choreographer referred to this subsection as 'underground,' an interpretation explained by the appearance of the passage within the graphic score. Clouds of colour move through a 'tunnel' of primary colours. But the movement of the dancers in this passage implies more than this everyday allusion would suggest. It is instead a primal re-enactment. Two bodies grapple apelike with the floor; when a body falls, we see how it reacts to what it meets.

Here the evocation of the primal belies the complex implications of the composite audio-visual affect. While moving on the semi-circle, one dancer moves on straight-line paths; the other traces the path of an arc. This specific dichotomy highlights the differences between episodic materials that alternate throughout the whole of the *Capriccio*. These differences are made explicit in the graphic score through the use of curt lines abruptly met on the one hand, and smooth contours that move fluidly across the page on the other. Furthermore, the discreet motions of the dancers within these paths demonstrate movement within a trajectory, similar to the activity of watercolour in each of the nebulous shapes that together show the direction of the music. The movements themselves do not reflect the shape of the melody. Rather, it is the structure and its component parts of interest here: a melody repeated and then answered, reflected by three physical tropes within their respective trajectories. In addition, two dancers moving around the cello could form a three-part exchange that is, in fact, proposed by the music. Finally, what is temporally sequential in the music—presentation of a melody and its near-inverse response—becomes spatially simultaneous in the visual counterpoint between the two dancers. The whole and its parts are presented in a moment.

Specific intersections of sound and movement imbedded in the performance provide further creative rationale for experiencing music and dance together. At poignant moments, sound and motion join to suspend the perception of time.⁵ The tri-tone outburst and its resolution in the *Capriccio* reprise of the *Dialogo* achieve this effect. In a handstand freeze framing the bass eruption, the legs of the dancer straighten as the melody resolves at the zenith of the dissonant arpeggiated chord. The continuation of the dance requires the resolution of the music, making visible the mutual dependence between movement and sound.

⁵ The fact that this particular effect alters the perception of time differentiates it from the 'mirroring' of sound and movement, whereby movement reinforces the listener's established sense of time in the music.

It was the personal nature of the dancers' gestures that enabled their integration as one of the last 'layers' of the choreographic process. Learned away from the dance, these gestures were the only element of the choreography exclusively created by the dancers. The dance now became their domain. The personal import of gesture is matched only by its creative function. The fact that gesture synthesises elements of the entire choreographic scheme proves Fernyhough's assertion that 'Notation expresses the ideology of its own process of creation.'⁶ Just as performative gestures at the cello inspired specific images of the graphic score, so these visual gestures motivated the movement tasks and their emotive results.

⁶ Brian Fernyhough, *Brian Fernyhough, Collected Writings*, edited by James Boros and Richard Toop, (Amsterdam: Harword Academic Publishers, 1995), quoted in Zubin Kanga 'Not Music Yet: Graphic Notation as a Catalyst for Collaborative Metamorphosis', *Eras*, 16/1 (2014), 37-58.