What Happens in Performers' Minds?

Dancers' and Musicians' Inner Conversations

Inês Zinho Pinheiro and Lilja María Ásmundsdóttir

Inês Zinho Pinheiro

Inês completed the Professional Dancer Course (Dance Conservatory, Lisbon), and then danced as an apprentice at CINEVOX Junior Company. Subsequently, she did a B.A. in Ballet and Contemporary Dance (Rambert School, London). After graduating, she worked as a freelance dancer before completing her M.A. in Dance Philosophy and History (University of Roehampton, London).

As a freelance dancer, Inês has collaborated with various choreographers, musicians and artists and participated in several art installations/performances, dance films and international festivals. Currently, she is in Portugal, teaching at the Higher School of Dance (Polytechnic Institute, Lisbon), leading Ballet and Contemporary Dance classes, as well as creative/choreographic projects. She is also a PhD student in Performing Arts and the Moving Image at the Fine Arts Faculty (University of Lisbon).

Alongside the musician Albert E. Dean, she created an international project called 'Sonic Voyaging,' which invites musicians and dancers to build and perform improvisational structures. Since 2018, she has worked with the musician Lilja María Ásmundsdóttir.

Lilja María Ásmundsdóttir

Lilja María Ásmundsdóttir graduated with an M.A. in composition from City, University of London in 2018. She also holds a B.Mus. degree in piano performance from Iceland University of the Arts, where she studied with Peter Máté. As of 2019, Lilja María is pursuing her PhD in composition at City, University of London. Her supervisor is Claudia Molitor.

In her practice, she often employs collaborative methods, working with artists from various fields. Her works include performative installations and sound sculptures, including the audio-visual sculpture Hulda, which was nominated for the President's Student Innovation Award, and the sound sculpture Lurking Creature, which she developed in collaboration with the dancer Inês Zinho Pinheiro.

Some of the places Lilja María's works have been performed include the Dark Music Days Festival in Reykjavík, the Brunel Museum in London, Visiones Sonoras in Mexico, and Grand Theatre in Groningen.

Abstract

This article aims to describe and understand what performers think about during performances and rehearsals while searching for a common language between music and dance.

Departing from our own experiences as performers (a dancer and a musician), we ask the question what do we think about when we are dancing/playing? We assume that this awareness of what we think while performing is not obvious and decided to explore this by interviewing six dancers and six musicians about what we named performers' 'inner conversations.'

Within a phenomenological orientation, we developed a descriptive and interpretative study of a phenomenon (inner conversations) which gives itself to conscience, a pre-reflective consciousness. From the performers' accounts, we extrapolated four trends: 1. Variation in awareness of inner conversations; 2. Altered states of awareness; 3. Parasitic inner conversations; and 4. Overcoming internal difficulties and external constraints through inner conversations.

Looking at the dancers' and musicians' accounts together raised the question: How is the awareness of 'inner conversations' developed during performers' initial education and training?

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1. Introduction

What do performers think about during performances and rehearsals?

As artists in the disciplines of music and contemporary dance, we, the authors of this research, were lucky enough to explore this question having already created a piece together (*Lurking Creature,* London 2018, Reykjavik 2019) in which we shared a collaborative experience where movement would only occur with sound and sound would only exist through movement manipulation. The piece was created around a sound sculpture made out of metal fragments that can be added, taken away, and attached together in different ways. As the dancer interacts with the sculpture, the connection between the disciplines is enhanced through explorations of how the physical presence of the dancer is sensed through sounds and how the sounds are influenced by the varied movements of the dancer.

This and other experiences united us as artists/researchers and, along our search for a fusion of horizons[1] that come from each of our disciplines, we discovered the ways music and dance intertwine. This interaction appeared clearer when we found McMains and Thomas' article, 'Translating from Pitch to Plié: Music Theory for Dance Scholars and Close Movement Analysis for Music Scholars,' which finds a common language between music and dance. It encouraged us to deepen an exploration of ways to articulate our thought and practices, searching for how music and dance relate and interact.[2]

Throughout our research, we discovered a common problem: what do we think about when we are dancing or playing? Once we realised that we were both interested in understanding what happens in our minds, we decided to explore this by interviewing six dancers and six musicians about what we called the performers' 'inner conversations.'

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[1] 'The horizon is the range of vision that includes everything that can be seen from a particular vantage point.' Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (London & New York: Continuum, 2006), p. 301.

[2] Juliet McMains and Ben Thomas, 'Translating from Pitch to Plié: Music Theory for Dance Scholars and Close Movement Analysis for Music Scholars.' *Dance Chronicle* 36, no. 2 (2013): pp. 196-217.

This subject had unexpectedly emerged as a peripheral aspect of previous research one of us had done, which made us even more interested in further study.[3] These 'inner conversations' arose as an effect of serendipity, an occurrence that happens in unplanned ways where we encounter information that we find interesting.[4] Or, as Fine and Deegan put it, serendipity is 'the interactive outcome of unique and contingent "mixes" of insight coupled with chance.'[5]

More than half a century ago, Sheets-Johnstone suggested the following research question: 'What is a dancer conscious of while dancing?'[6] Our main question—'what do performers think about during performances and rehearsals?'—seems to embrace the one posed by Sheets-Johnstone. Nevertheless, we do not assume that the participants are conscious of what they think while dancing. On the contrary, and departing from our own experience as performers, we assume that this awareness of what we think while performing is not obvious at all; it is more like a vague impression that needs to become an object of deep and demanding consideration. Yet, we are aware that 'consciousness is part and parcel of the evolution of animate forms.'[7] Consequently, we recognise that knowing oneself is 'a consistent biological built-in,' allowing a 'kinetic corporeal consciousness.'[8,9]

Other studies concerning, for instance, dance imagery, do not relate fully to our research, even though they are somewhat relevant. Indeed, one can understand why this is the case by analysing the term's definition: '[T]he deliberate use of the senses to rehearse or envision a particular

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[3] Inês Pinheiro, 'A Phenomenological Approach to Performers' Self-awareness in Dance,' MA Thesis (University of Roehampton, 2019).

[4] Lennart Björneborn, 'Three Key Affordances for Serendipity: Toward a Framework Connecting Environmental and Personal Factors in Serendipitous Encounters,' *Journal of Documentation* 73, no. 5 (2017): pp. 1053-1081.

[5] G.A. Fine and J.G. Deegan, 'Three Principles of Serendipity: Insight, Chance, and Discovery in Qualitative Research,' *Qualitative Studies in Education* 9, no. 4 (1996): p 434.

[6] Maxine Sheets-Johnstone, 'Consciousness: A Natural History,' *Synthesis Philosophica* 44 (2007).

[7] Sheets-Johnstone 2007, p. 283.

[8] Sheets-Johnstone 2007, p. 299.

[9] Indeed, according to Sheet-Johnston, the phenomenological study of dance is a descriptive study of a phenomenon which gives itself to conscience, a pre-reflective consciousness. Moreover, dance is 'a particular kind of phenomenon, […] one which moves, one which is kinetic [demanding a study concerned] with an appearance, a phenomenon, which while moving remains a totality.' Maxine Sheets-Johnstone, *The Phenomenology of Dance* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1966), p. 13.

outcome mentally, in the absence of, or in combination with, overt physical movement.'[10] Instead, the conceptual expression we propose ('inner conversations') seemingly refers to a mental process that is neither fully conscious nor totally unconscious. It belongs to an area situated between these two states. Nevertheless, everything points to the potential use of dance imagery's practices to allow an awareness of 'inner conversations' that enhances performance instead of obstructing it.

We recognise how certain 'inner conversations' can be coloured by stress or nervousness. Several researchers have studied the effects of stress, as well as what happens inside performers' minds, and how that affects their practice. In the book, *The Inner Game of Music*, Barry Green applies Timothy Gallwey's exercises and techniques for athletes to the area of music. The exercises are meant to help reducing 'mental interferences that inhibit the full expression of human potential.'[11] They call it the 'Inner Game,' which refers to what is happening within performers and explores how to overcome different types of mental obstacles, such as nervousness, fear of failure and self-doubt.

Green and Gallwey defined the following two central concepts of their theory: 'Self 1 is our interference. It contains our concepts about how things should be, our judgements and associations. […] Self 2 is the vast reservoir of potential within each one of us. It contains our natural talents and abilities and is a virtually unlimited resource that we can tap and develop. Left to its own devices, it performs with gracefulness and ease.'[12] While the focus of the book is specifically to both learn to recognise and overcome mental obstacles, we have approached what we call 'inner conversations' in a broader manner to see the wide range of elements that might influence a performer's practice.

Therefore, we decided to perform a study that aimed to understand what performers think about during performances and rehearsals. We aim to understand both the participants' accounts of their

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[10] Lynnette Young Overby and Jan Dunn, 'The History and Research of Dance Imagery: Implications for Teachers.' *IADMS Bulletin for Teachers* 2 (2011): p. 9.
[11] Barry Green and Timothy Gallwey, *The Inner Game of Music* (London: Pan Books, 1987), p. 7.
[12] Green and Gallwey, p. 28.

inner experience and our own questions.[13] In other words, we try to be aware of the *hermeneutic situation* of our research.[14] Accordingly, the participants' answers guide us back to interrogating our own questions, their pertinence, and some meanings that they involuntarily and unconsciously have produced/aroused.[15]

We are aware that when we ask musicians and dancers about aspects of their performances, we are asking them to reflect on their lived experience, so we are limited to its 'significance from a distance [and] such a meaning is akin to a lifeless fact, a second-hand piece of information, devoid of felt, lived-through significance.'[16] Moreover, we are also aware that we have had access to the performers' accounts and not to their actual experience.[17] This means that we have not had access to the phenomena as they have been lived, but to what the interviewees accounted about their experience, i.e., discursive productions that are made in the occasion of an interview.[18]

Finally, the expression 'inner conversations' has a broad meaning in this paper. It may include a wide range of elements comprising also a variety of more or less diffuse and fuzzy thoughts that can come to a performer's mind. Some kinds of thoughts help performers to be focused on what they are actually doing, others are mind occurrences that potentially come along to hinder performance. Several researchers have also been concerned about contiguous and more specific aspects of what we name 'inner conversations.'

Such a conceptual expression deserves a short detour about the participants' subconscious slippage between the terms 'monologue' and 'dialogue' within the broader scope of 'inner conversations.' The participants described their 'monologue' as a conversation with an 'other,' ergo the reference

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[13] We have adopted a hermeneutic orientation in a Gadamerian sense, i.e., the theory or the art of the description and of the interpretation (cf. Gadamer 1995, p. 232).

[14] Gadamer 1995, p. 251.

[15] Simultaneously, we valued the possible effects of serendipity, i.e., sometimes, the participants' answers contained information that, instead of replying to our initial questions, answered other unpredicted questions about relevant dimensions that we had not previously considered.

[16] Sheets-Johnstone 1966, p. 4.

[17] Roger Säljö, 'Talk as Data and Practice—A Critical Look at Phenomenographic Inquiry and the Appeal to Experience.' *Higher Education Research & Development* 16, no. 2 (1997): pp. 173-190.

[18] Ibid.

to dialogue instead of monologue. Consequently, we decided to adopt the expression 'inner conversations,' which is inclusive, comprising the several terms chosen by the interviewees.

2. Methodology

2.1. The interview's context and challenges

We chose to conduct qualitative interviews in an attempt to understand some features of the performers' artistical experiences from their points-of-view so we could explore their accounts of their lived worlds. We conducted these interviews via Zoom during the first Covid-19 lockdown (2020), and recorded and transcribed them.

We were aware of the unavoidable 'asymmetrical power relation of the interview.'[19] That is to say, we were aware that 'the research interview is not a dominance-free dialogue between equal partners,'[20] and, consequently, that our research project and knowledge interest set the agenda and ruled the conversation. Thus, even though we have tried to ensure that the interviews were not a 'manipulative dialogue,' we know that, inescapably, they were 'instrumental dialogues.'[21] Furthermore, the fact that both authors are colleagues and friends of the interviewees did not create an interview situation that was free from the pitfalls inherent in the utilisation of this device as a means of gathering information.

2.2. Content analysis principles and procedures

The main principles of content analysis were inspired both by phenomenographic studies[22,23] and the hermeneutic tradition.[24] Additionally, the procedures we used drew on Laurence Bardin's insights. That is to say, that we followed a descriptive device and a thematic analysis of the

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[19] Steinar Kvale, 'Dominance Through Interviews and Dialogues.' *Qualitative Inquiry* 12, no.. 3 (2006): p. 483.

[20] Ibid.

[21] Ibid.

[22] We adapted the phenomenographic procedure, an empirical research tradition initially designed to answer questions about teaching and learning. This kind of research intends to recognise the variation of people's experiences, interpretations, understandings and conceptualisations of certain phenomenon or aspects of reality.

[23] Ference Marton and Win Yan Pong, 'On the Unit of Description in Phenomenography,' *Higher Education Research & Development* 24, no. 4 (2007): pp. 335-348; and Säljö 1997.

[24] Gadamer 1995.

information collected, aiming to access the accounts' meanings, grouped in indicators that allow the emergence of knowledge relevant to the theme in study.[25]

Throughout the whole analytical process, the two of us shared an outcome space[26] where we could agree concerning the principles and the procedures employed, the semantic trends we could make emerge from participants' accounts, and the interpretations we constructed. This sketched outcome space we made led us to build a wider outcome space which includes the participants' ways of experiencing and awareness of the phenomenon ('inner conversations'). We made a choice among 'an infinity of analysis' directions' and we also avoided the 'arborescent' characteristics of content analysis which would not be fruitful or attainable.[27]

Considering the meaning of the interviewees' accounts the most relevant feature, the analysis unity should necessarily include either a single term, a phrase, or even a set of sentences. This means that our units of analysis have a 'variable geometry.' With this in mind, we started a thematic analysis, organising the trends *a posteriori* instead of being previously constituted.

We interpreted the participants' accounts in the scope of a hermeneutic cycle, considering the meaning of each interview transcript as a whole. This global meaning is increased and completed with the meaning gathered from excerpts of those transcripts.[28]

So, in a more systematised manner, some of the answers' meanings started emerging. We conducted a pre-analysis because as we appropriated the meaning of the respondents' statements, we simultaneously started a first 'vertical' reading of each respondents' discourse, i.e., we read individually each interview transcript from beginning to end. Subsequently, we did 'horizontal' readings of the interviews' transcripts; that is, we put in parallel the answers given by each

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[25] Laurence Bardin, *L' Analyse de Contenu* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2006), p. 70.

[26] The outcome space delimits a theoretical map of the authors' collective consciousness, presenting and explaining the structure of the phenomenon, based exclusively on our perceptions on how we experience it (cf. Marton & Booth, 1997).

[27] Bardin 2006, p. 80.

[28] See Kvale 1996.

interviewee.[29] This phase, which we have called pre-analysis, had, as its main purpose, a very broad examination that would allow an identification of the answers' general content.

The crossing of these two types of reading ('vertical' and 'horizontal') enabled the framing of an analysis device in which we grouped in major themes or trends of the statements with similar meanings that were made by each interviewee. We must point out again that we searched for these themes or trends within two groups of professional performers: musicians and dancers. This means that we tried to find common aspects or trends inside both the musicians' and the dancers' answers.

Along the phenomenographic analysis' process, four major trends emerged: a) variation in awareness of inner conversations; b) altered states of awareness, which include trance, state of grace, mystic experience, altered time; c) parasitic inner conversations, comprising undesirable intruding inner conversations, distracting thoughts, self-hypercritical speech, choreographer's demands; d) overcoming internal difficulties and external constraints through inner conversations, including the ways the interviewed performers deal with such difficulties and constraints.

3. Trends in Dancers' and Musicians' accounts

3.1. Variation in awareness of inner conversations

The participants expressed being aware of their 'inner conversations.' However, their level of awareness and the nature of the 'inner conversations' differ depending on the context—whether they are rehearsing, performing or improvising. In this section, for practical reasons, we will firstly analyse musicians' accounts before moving on to examine the dancers'.

Among the musicians, Erla made some succinct comments, which seems to reveal that she had not thought much about this issue previously. Indeed, she manifested her surprise as follows: 'that's actually a big question.' On the contrary, throughout the interview, another musician (Mikael), declared he had already thought intensively about this subject. He described two types of awareness ('boxes,' in his own words): 'one is the awareness of how I move, and of my breath,

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[29] Marton and Yan Pong 2007.

but then there's also [my] inner dialogue.' We were surprised by his word choice (inner dialogue), since we had not mentioned it. This is in line with what we understood from the beginning of the interview, i.e., that the interviewee was familiar with the concept in study. Later, we understood that he had read and practiced ways of being aware of his 'inner conversations.'

Indeed, on several occasions, Mikael further stressed this awareness: 'I was at a rehearsal, and [then I thought] I feel like I'm more aware of my inner dialogue, what I'm telling myself, and then, of the movement. Fiona, also a musician, declared that all these [inner] conversations can be really weird.' This consideration regarding her 'inner conversations' as oddities is probably due to the lack of opportunities to speak about such conversations.

A fourth musician (Merel) expressed a significant difference between her 'inner conversations' while rehearsing and performing. She added that while rehearsing, her 'inner conversations' seem to be more analytical, more reflective, and she explained how her thoughts can be related to different aspects of her singing, such as pronunciation, singing technique, or the idea behind the text, which she called the 'subtext.' During performances, her 'inner conversations' are more connected to expression and to what the piece means to her: 'I try to think of what I'm singing and the idea behind it.'

A fifth musician, Erna, started by discussing her 'inner conversations' in a broad manner. Firstly, she claimed she is 'very self-conscious when [she] play[s] piano. There's also a small voice judging everything I'm doing (Self 1).' Secondly, she declared that: 'then there are great moments where I don't even think, I don't have a voice in my head having a dialogue in a language, not in a spoken language, but just hearing the music and where it wants to go next.' Her statement evokes ideas by Green and Gallwey (1987) of Self 1 (our interference, judgements and associations) and Self 2 (our natural talents and abilities). This last account could be interpreted as her Self 2 performing with ease. She explained that she prefers the 'musical' 'inner conversations,' saying: 'it should be like [that] all the time if I didn't have all the self-consciousness and self-deprecating thoughts.' As with Merel, Erna's 'inner conversations' seem to be more analytical in rehearsal: 'I often need to separate myself from the music and analyse what I need to make my hands do.' She

then compared it to performing: 'there's no time for that and you have to go with a flow.' This statement seems to indicate that her 'inner conversations' are less present during performances.

Bertie, also a musician, compared the different 'inner conversations' that take place during rehearsals and then during performances. He described some of these conversations that go on in his head during rehearsals: 'there's a lot of dialogue in my head because I'm always discussing with myself. […] I'm kind of going through in my head: What's the step forward?' He expressed the feeling that the 'inner conversations' during live performances are very different 'because life is very sparse, it comes and goes.'

Bertie also explained how the 'inner conversations' change depending on which music genre he is playing: 'For instance, with the more experimental guitar music and improvising there is almost no inner conversation, because that kind of music is so instinctual.' Subsequently, he explained how the 'inner conversations' change when he is playing—for example, in indie bands: 'our music was quite strict. So, there was a bit more of an internal conversation happening with those bands. I was enjoying myself, but I was trying to remember what's next.' Therefore, his 'inner conversations' seem to not only depend on the type of setting he is playing, but also on the type of music, what that specific genre requires of him and if he experiences the music as something more instinctual or more pre-determined.

Among the dancers, Ana started describing her awareness of thinking while dancing more generally, and then compared her experience between rehearsing, improvising and performing: 'I think quite visually in terms of what's going on internally. I will visualise the different flows of energy and of weight, placement and weight transfer that is going on through the body.' She expressed being aware of the variation of her 'inner conversations' in those situations: 'There's more internal conversation when I'm rehearsing or improvising, that's not for performance.' Moreover, while performing, Ana's 'inner conversations' become quieter and delayed: 'When I'm performing, I'm trying to trust… Still in the moment, but not maybe examining it so. I'm trying to stay on threads of performance, and then I reflect afterwards.' This seems to indicate that her 'inner conversations' are rather discreet during performances and then an analytical process takes place

as a retrospective reflexion 'inner conversation,' but during rehearsals and while improvising, her 'inner conversations' take place simultaneously with her dancing.

Fraser, another dancer, explained how his 'inner conversations' have always been 'loud' while dancing and they seem to be 'louder' when performing than during rehearsals: 'I struggle to be present when I'm dancing, because I'm having dialogues about what I'm doing, how I'm doing it, remembering what I'm doing, conversations in my head about what is happening around me.' Another dancer, Hannes, is also affected by his surroundings. He underlined the factors that affect how his 'inner conversations' change during performances, depending on several aspects of his everyday life: 'My inner stress levels… if I have a good week… or a good day… then it was less chatter, so the more stable I was, emotionally and physically, the less chatter I got.'

3.2. Altered states of awareness (trance, state of grace, mystic experience, altered time)

In this section, we present the dancers' and musicians' accounts together as it seemed at times that their expressions of such altered states intertwined seamlessly.

Erla (a musician) reported that she frequently experiences an expansion of time: 'I always feel like I am taking too long. People say to me, that was so short, it was only a minute, but I felt 20 minutes.' This way of experiencing performance reminds us of Diane Leduc's conception of the state of grace in dance: 'this magic state where we can lose momentarily all notion of time.'[30] Erla does not seem to recognise her capacity to attain the state of grace, considering certain aspects that belong to the state of grace, such as loosing notion of time, as weaknesses, so she adds: 'I need to work on that.' In fact, Erla's 'altered sense of time' is one of the frequently reported characteristics of 'the intense experiential involvement of flow.'[31]

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[30] Diane Leduc, 'La Description Phénoménologique au Service de l'Authenticité en Danse,' *Recherches Qualitatives* 25, no, 1 (2005): p. 9.

[31] Mihlay Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow and the Foundations of Positive Psychology: The Collected Works of Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi* (Dordrecht, Heidelberg, New York and London: Springer, 2014), p. 230.

In contrast, Fraser (a dancer) explained how he is 'usually very aware of time.' Then he continued to explain how occasionally he felt as if time 'washed through' him and his awareness of it was lost. He described how that was a positive and structuring experience for him, since his awareness of external things was far quieter and even freeing: 'it felt like a whirlwind, everything happening.' Such an experience apparently depended on the specific setting organisation: 'even though it was prepared, though it was sort of rehearsed and structured, the organisation of the space was such that we just had to be quite responsive in the moment to things changing.' Since he had to be receptive to change and respond to it, he felt there was a feeling of being present: 'that experience made my awareness of time completely change.'

Deepening her thoughts about her changing awareness levels of time while performing, Ana (a dancer) declared: 'it feels very clear… right in front of me.' She tries to stay on 'the thread of the time… But that's only in bursts of small moments [that] I become aware of it, then, I don't notice time.'

Astrid (a dancer) underlined her states of awareness in three different contexts (dancing, performing, and improvising), saying: 'when I dance, perform, or improvise, I manage to go into a sort of meditative state.' Deepening these considerations, she added: 'I lose self-judgement on stage. The talking to myself becomes much more like a dream state, a bit like being on drugs. You make a lot of associations and it becomes much more artistic, you see things… on stage the world becomes very surreal and you see lights in a certain way, or you look at things very intensely.' In a contiguous vein, Camille Buttingsrud refers to 'dancers' experiences of being: in a trance and yet hyper-aware,' suggesting that 'transcendence is the pursued and preferred state of self-consciousness while working on stage.'[32]

Astrid's words seem to also be in line with Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi's description of 'flow': 'Flow denotes the holistic sensation present when we act with total involvement.'[33] More specifically, 'the clearest sign of flow is the experience of merging action and awareness. A person in flow does

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[32] Camille Buttingsrud, 'A Phenomenological Appreciation of Dancers' Embodied Self-Consciousness.' In 12th international NOFOD Conference Reykjavik, Iceland – 28th-31st of May 2015.

[33] Csikszentmihalyi 2014, p. 136.

not operate with a dualistic perspective: one is very aware of one's actions, but not of the awareness itself,'[34] which coincides with Astrid's description of her loss of self-judgement, and simultaneously, a feeling of surrealism.

Moreover, Astrid stated that 'just the fact of moving changes your state of mind, and that starts to deafen what's already going on inside your head.' This too partially aligns with the experience of 'flow' as Csikszentmihalyi conceived it: 'flow is a subjective state that people report when they are completely involved in something to the point of forgetting time, fatigue, and everything else but the activity itself.'[35]

Rob (a dancer) opened a deep query of what he considers to be 'therapeutic things happening while dancing, which he called a very personal dialogue.' This evokes Linda Gold's research, where altered experiences 'were often experienced as transformative or a realisation of self-potential.'[36] In a similar vein, Rob underlined the self-explorative role of dancing somewhat in line with the hermeneutical way of thinking by expressing: 'you're diving into yourself and it's a search of understanding yourself better, there's so much depth, inwards introspection and searching that I enjoy.' Indeed, Buttingsrud states that 'artists from different fields seem to share this experience: Bodily and affective work has the capacity to lead to insights and knowledge,'[37] which somewhat relates to the self-explorative and introspection that Rob stated experiencing while dancing. This query described by Rob includes two internal experiences that Buttingsrud conceives as occurring simultaneously: *embodied absorption* and *reflective awareness*.[38]

3.3. Parasitic inner conversations (undesirable intruding inner conversations, distracting thoughts, self-hypercritical speech, choreographer's demands)

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[34] Csikszentmihalyi 2014, p. 138.

[35] Csikszentmihalyi 2014, p. 230.

[36] Gold, Linda, 'Altered Experience in Dance/Dancing: Investigation into the Nature of Altered Experience in Dancing and Pedagogical Support.' PhD Thesis (Theatre Academy, Performing Arts Research Centre. Helsinki: Prima Oy, 2013), p. 9.

[37] Buttingsrud, Camille, 'Embodied Reflection,' in *Proceedings of a Body of Knowledge - Embodied Cognition and the Arts conference. CTSA UCI 8th - 10th of December 2015* (2016), p. 2.

[38] Buttingsrud 2016, p. 3.

As we did when we looked at the trends of participants' accounts ('Variation in awareness of inner conversations'), this section firstly analyses musicians' and secondly dancers' statements concerning what we have called 'parasite inner conversations.' By this, we mean some unwanted interfering 'inner conversations,' such as diverting thoughts, self-overcritical speech and choreographer's demands.

Fiona (a musician) stated that her thoughts while playing flute vary significantly, depending on several circumstances, such as her degree of preparation. Within such thoughts, she underlined some undesirable intruding 'inner conversations' which hindered her achievement level: 'sometimes I'm in great focus, and then there's just the music in my head, [while] sometimes I think about my groceries.' In those situations, she resists such a tendency: 'no, I just think about the music.'

Merel (a musician) explained how she tries to focus on the idea behind the piece, what she wants to communicate to the audience, but then there are other 'inner conversations' that find their way and take over: 'there are a lot of other thoughts like, maybe I look stupid or, look, this person in the front row doesn't look very interested. Or I could think: it's going good tonight, or I don't feel good.' These distracting thoughts hinder concentration, but she tries to reduce them as much as she can.

Bertie (a musician) described certain 'inner conversations' that sound similar to Merel's additional thoughts, where he goes from being very conscious of the performance to being distracted by the crowd: 'you look at someone in the eye and for a split second, you're like, I hope they like it.' He explained how moments of doubts find their way into the live performance, which is something he does not experience while rehearsing: 'there are moments of real silence in my live sets and sometimes I'm worried. There are moments of doubt, as well, which I don't really have when I rehearse.'

Astrid (a dancer) thoroughly described the complex moods that colour her 'inner conversations,' which are characterised by her self-hypercritical speech that seems to be heavily focused on her

personal challenges. This is something she is perfectly aware of: 'sometimes [I am] 60% dealing with my own issues and 40% a creative process.' This is especially noticeable when she recalls her experiences while working and creating with various choreographers as opposed to working by herself: 'within a dance studio, there is a hierarchy… if it's not in a collective situation, or you're not creating for yourself, you're [in] a situation where you go into a creative space, but there's someone sitting on a chair, watching you, and your creativity, and your dancing is for the pleasure of one person' (the choreographer). Noticing how her fellow dancers worry about pleasing the choreographer, Astrid added: 'I realised that there may be worry in pleasing someone so that they'll be hired again.' These statements evoke Leduc's observations: 'Captured between the choreographer and the piece, the choreographic interpretation is difficult to grasp. It is learned while doing it, intuitively and according to the choreographer's exigencies.'[39]

Millacu (a dancer) described her experience when performing a choreographed piece: 'it's more challenging to do it, because it's very strict, I learned how to manage it, but I think some anxiety comes out.' Such a differentiation, 'the respect of the rules of the piece, transforms Millacu's experience, so it becomes more aesthetic [imposed], rather than internal, [and] I feel more pressured.' Millacu feels stressed when dancing with stricter rules, maybe because she is supposed to achieve certain goals, shapes, and movements. She feels freer when improvising, perhaps since she shares her internal process, rather than a specific result. Millacu shared how she experiences performance, considering it a context that contains inherently unwelcome constraints: 'I think it's slightly different because you allow yourself, and the choreographer allows the fact that there is never a fixed finished performance [or] product, but I feel there is more pressure to get close to a finished product.' These considerations seem to express one central dichotomy of performance: process versus product, which is felt as a threat to performers.

As an example, Hannes' (a dancer) 'inner conversations' differ between a rehearsal and a performance context. He mentioned a production where he was very aware of the audience and how that affected him: 'for me, it was probably showing something real of my fear.' That experience was very different from when he rehearsed: 'I felt safe, knowing my craft as a dancer,

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[39] Leduc 2005, p. 17.

trying to use all my tools, and then in performance, I felt almost numb, my tools were not accessible anymore because I was so worried about what people thought about me.' Subsequently, he identified how his 'inner conversations' changed depending on the audience: 'the less people that I knew were in the audience, the less chatter.'

3.4. Overcoming internal difficulties and external constraints through inner conversations

In this section, as we have done with participants' accounts analysed in the second trend ('Altered states of awareness'), we present both performers' accounts together. This is because dancers' and musicians' statements seem to focus on continuous and complementary aspects of such threats concerning the ways they try to overcome difficulties and constraints. By this we mean that we are referring to the internal difficulties and external constraints dancers and musicians overcome through inner conversations. We noticed that these ways of overcoming those difficulties were all connected, so we decided to present them in the same way.

Fraser (a dancer) struggles to be present while dancing and experiencing negative 'inner conversations' affects his rehearsal process: 'When I have rehearsed things in the past, I almost anticipate the fact that when I'm performing these conversations will be happening. I strategise in rehearsal, how the conversations that I have are so distracting in performance, also inhibiting.' This seems to indicate that he found ways of rehearsing how his 'inner conversations' will be during performances. He shared how he experiences his 'inner conversations' as somewhat limiting: 'the noise that it creates for me is quite trapping. Then, being conscious of that, to then free or liberate myself into a presence.' When he is able to experience being in the moment, the constraining 'inner conversations' seem to quiet down: 'something on my mind very presently about working on the consciousness that I have of my own internal dialogues and to try and acknowledge them, become aware of them, in order to realise that I can put them to one side and I'm not defined by them. My identity is not contingent on them. I can just be.'

This psychological work that Fraser described is reminiscent of certain experiences from butoh and yogic practices.[40] In the case of butoh, 'the idea of "no-mind" suggests a loss of self-consciousness and merging of action and awareness,'[41] while in yogic meditation, it relates to *Samadhi*, which is 'considered the highest level of consciousness.'[42] When Fraser arrives at these occasions, he described them as follows: 'I've had moments where dancing has been just being and that's joyful.' It seems that, once Fraser overcomes these internal difficulties, he reaches what Douse names as 'moments of clarity; where the self emerges stronger and the individual experiences this authentic way of being,'[43] attaining a state of 'flow.'[44] This way of experiencing the world also evokes what Heidegger called 'the Being of Dasein in its possibilities of authenticity and totality.'[45]

Rob (a dancer) commented on what he feels during performances, an experience he generally considers as 'rigid and hardening,' but which can also be energising and innovating experiences: 'I do also appreciate what the performance day can bring, because sometimes you feel again charged with a higher energy. I feel like I'm charged with adrenaline.' Rob's choice of words is reminiscent of what José Gil says about energy: '[I]n dance, the event, regardless of whether we are referring to a narrative or to an abstract dance, refers to transformations of the regime of energy flow.'[46]

Continuing his comments concerning the constraints and difficulties he must deal with, Rob compared two contexts (rehearsal and performance) by questioning the change between what he thinks and feels in either: 'I was thinking about this shift between rehearsal and performance because I feel when we're rehearsing, and we are researching ideas... You hoped that there is an openness in the space to try and fail and it often feels like the work is a very expansive thing.'

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[40] Louise Douse, 'Moving Experience: An Investigation of Embodied Knowledge and Technology for Reading Flow in Improvisation,' PhD Thesis (University of Bedfordshire, 2013).

[41] Douse 2013, p. 104.

[42] Ibid.

[43] Douse 2013, p. 104.

[44] Csikszentmihalyi 2014.

[45] Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1962), p. 276.

[46] Gil, José, 'Paradoxical Body,' *The Drama Review* 50, no. 4 (2006): p. 27.

Rob has been led to reduce the scope of his 'inner conversations' by the choreographer he is currently working with. This choreographer's type of work made him realise that he needed to reduce the scope of his 'inner conversations' in order to be ready to perform this type of choreographic work. It was the work the choreographer created that guided him and not the choreographer himself. He further expressed the need of checking how he deals with his 'inner conversations' before performing and ultimately what this will bring into the performance, since he is aware of the significative impact of his state of mind in this particular type of work.

So, before a performance he even asks himself: 'what is already inside of me that I'm going into this performance with? I think it's a listening more than thinking about some clear thing and say, what are my tendencies?' Rob's choice of the word *listening* brings to mind Jean-Luc Nancy's ideas of what this concept means: 'to listen is to be straining toward a possible meaning.'[47] Rob observe*s* what is already within him to move towards understanding how 'what is already inside' [him] can be utilised in performance.

Bertie's accounts of improvising bring to mind similar ideas. Instead of having structured thoughts, his playing becomes more intuitive, or, in his own words, *instinctual*. Surprisingly, he becomes more 'conscious of listening,' even if this seems contradictory. Additionally, Rob extended those pre-performance reflections by observing other dancers he will be on stage with: 'are people jumping and they have high energy or are some other people more chilled and just trying to find your place within that?' This seems to be an expression of the difficulty he experiences to balance his own 'inner conversations' and a partial dissolution with the collective of dancers. His words remind Camille Buttingsrud's reflexions on the problematic Rob has exposed: 'Through the work on stage further understandings of the dance piece's content, or understandings of the other, of their interactions, of life situations mirrored in the performance's sequences, might reveal itself to the dancer.'[48]

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[47] Jean-Luc Nancy, *Listening*, translated by Charlotte Mandell (New York: Fordham University Press, 2007), p. 6.
[48] Buttingsrud 2015, p. 1.

Erna (a musician) described how these constraining 'inner conversations' became quieter if she managed to stay in the moment. She also explained the circumstances under which this experience of consciousness was most likely to happen: 'I feel like it most often happens when I perform but also, I feel like I have to know the piece well in order to have that happen.' The live performance setting seems to draw out her ability to stay in the moment and trust in the music she is making. Again, this seems to connect to Green's and Gallwey's ideas of Self 1 and 2 (two concepts we previously described): 'When we trust Self 2 to take over control from Self 1, we are not giving away our trust blindly: we are letting go to years of listening to music and practising the physical movements involved in playing.'[49]

Hannes (a dancer) described some difficulties he experiences while dancing that arise from his perception about his own authenticity: 'being true to the moment […] if I'm using everything, every vessel in my body to display what I'm trying to [portray]… am I true to myself or am I going around the corner?' He also explained how he always tries to find something to overcome these difficulties: 'if I might do a different character or whatever it might be, or if the character traits that I'm dancing or portraying are not close to my own, I try to find some resemblance or something that I can connect to.'

Fiona (a musician) shared her feelings about performing in a stressful situation where she played with another musician for the first time, highlighting how she overcame this obstacle: 'I couldn't think about anything, but I got into a survival mode and when I'm in this mode, I can only think about the music [and] I have very hard times to think about relaxation and posture.' Unexpectedly, Fiona added: 'in a new situation, my focus is usually a lot better, in the sense that there are no other thoughts than making music, playing the right notes, being together with others.' These statements are puzzling since Fiona seems both more focussed and less in control of her 'inner conversations' in new situations. Perhaps these twofold feelings described by Fiona are contiguous with what happens when one experiences 'flow,' an experience Csikszentmihalyi elaborates on: '[W]e typically experience a sense of control—or, more precisely, a lack of anxiety about losing control that is typical of many situations in normal life.'[50]

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[49] Green's and Gallwey 1987, p. 98.
[50] Csikszentmihalyi 2014, p. 231.

Astrid (a dancer) succeeds in mediating and found a balance between what she wants to create and what she thinks the choreographer expects from her: 'you're trying to psychoanalyse the person in front of you and create material that pleases both, that you can achieve, that you like, but within their world.' In the same vein, she described this kind of thinking process as 'a very cerebral experience.' To interpret the choreography, Astrid feels the need to understand the choreographers somewhat intuitively: 'I literally have to analyse them, and dance according to their cues. While I'm dancing [I] even respond to the way they are reacting to me… You have all these thoughts.'

Millacu (a dancer) distinguished her 'inner conversations' according to 'the sort of piece' she is dancing, depending on if it is 'choreographed and structured, or improvised.' She further developed this point with a metaphor, which seems to belong to her 'inner conversations' to connect her ideas to her movements while improvising: 'I have a structure, a storyline, or some kind of stones, where I can go. But, between stones I have other things that I can find in the way. It's not something specific that I think about, I just go from theme to theme, and then see what pops up in the middle, and how the two stones connect together.'

So, Millacu leaves gaps within her improvisation structure, utilising them to allow deeper unknown moments, in which she may find a guiding path between structured parts. These kinds of self-organising 'inner conversations' seem to be in consonance with the reported experiences by dancers Buttingsrud interviewed: 'they are—through their bodily selves—thematically transforming or reproducing something received or grasped from their second-nature, from other pre-reflective experiences, or even from conceptual ideas.'[51]

4. Conclusions

Departing from our initial question—'what do performers think about when dancing or playing?'—we embarked on an adventure where we focussed on trying to understand the accounts of six dancers and six musicians when asked about their 'inner conversations.' We assumed that being aware of these 'inner conversations' is not obvious, nor a process that is fully conscious or

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[51] Buttingsrud 2015, p. 2.

unconscious. In this concluding section, we will firstly stick to the participants' accounts, presenting the central resulting considerations. Moreover, we reorganised such considerations in trends following the same order we presented the analysis of these same accounts.

Regarding 'Variation in awareness of inner conversations' (trend 1), it was noticeable how the participants' level of awareness of their 'inner conversations' varied depending on their previous experiences and opportunities. While Erla apparently had not thought much about this type of experience and Fiona considered her 'inner conversations' as oddities (which reveals the lack of opportunities to discuss and think about these experiences), Mikael had frequently and exhaustively reflected on the topic. These significant variations in the awareness of inner conversations led us to consider and underline one of the aims of this article, i.e., to bring this subject into the conversation happening within dancers and musicians. For instance, we noticed how the interviews we led developed an awareness about this topic within participants who had never reflected about it before, and we hope that this awareness could continue being awaken and developed within other performers who might read this article.

Furthermore, it became apparent that the participants' variation of 'inner conversations' depends on their work context—whether it's a rehearsal or performance. Overall, Merel, Erna, Bertie and Ana shared that in rehearsals, their 'inner conversations' are more conscious, reflective and analytical. However, in performances, they become more connected to expression, and thus, more artistic, i.e., guided by an aesthetic criterion.

In contrast, Fraser had opposite experiences to all other participants, declaring that his own 'inner conversations' become *louder* when performing than in rehearsals: fighting to be present in the moment, despite his awareness of his past, present and future 'inner conversations.' Expanding on these kinds of variations, Hannes clearly highlighted the factors that affect how his 'inner conversations' change during performances: his 'inner stress levels,' and how 'stable' he is 'emotionally and physically.' These variations and factors elucidated ways by which dancers and musicians may eventually become more aware of and even more able to guide their 'inner conversations' in different contexts.

Summing up, most participants declared having more conscious, reflective and analytical 'inner conversations' in rehearsals, and less present, frequent and constant ones in performances.

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Regarding the participants' accounts reorganised as 'Altered states of awareness' (trend 2), we gathered different reports about performers' experience of time and several transcendental episodes. Erla elaborated on her experience of temporal expansion, describing how she loses perception of time during performances and how she should work to improve her awareness of time.

Astrid underlined other altered states she experiences while dancing, such as attaining a 'meditative state' and a loss of 'self-judgement,' as well as an increasing feeling of artistry, specifically while being on stage. Buttingsrud described this type of altered states often reported by dancers as experiences 'of a radical focus within the self—within the embodied self.'[52]

For his part, Rob made statements which brought to surface what seems to be a sub-theme (benefits of dance and music) we found in this second trend. These altered states reported by some participants (Rob, Fraser and Astrid) seem to converge into those beneficial experiences that performers may go through, especially when performing.

Overall, the participants' accounts of altered states of awareness show a diverse range of experiences. In relation to their experience of time, some of the participants described how they can become highly aware of time, others explained how they lose their perception of it, and some discussed how it can vary between performances. Some participants described other altered states, such as attaining a meditative state, a feeling of surrealism, and therapeutic self-exploration.

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[52] Buttingsrud 2016, p. 9.

In respect to participants' accounts rearranged as 'Parasite inner conversations' (trend 3), we also followed a similar organisational structure, mixing both dancers' and musicians' accounts if they expressed comparable experiences.

Fiona clarified that her 'inner conversations' vary depending on her degree of preparation and may become hindering. Similarly, Merel experiences 'inner conversations' that distract her while performing, which do not occur in rehearsals, since these 'inner conversations' are linked to the presence of an audience. Likewise, Bertie described situations where he gets distracted by the crowd, which does not happen during rehearsals. These distracting 'inner conversations' occur in performances, and in Hannes' case, they also depend on who is part of the audience, and if he knows them or not. Millacu stated that when performing a choreographed piece, her 'inner conversations' become stressful. She also shared that the moment of performance usually comes with a certain rigidity.

To conclude, we found that most of the participants' parasitic 'inner conversations' (trend 3) were more present during performances than in the context of rehearsals. This seems to be mainly connected to how the participants become distracted by audiences.

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Concerning the last section, 'Overcoming internal difficulties and external constraints through inner conversations' (trend 4), we maintained the same structure, presenting dancers' and musicians' accounts together.

Rob's insights on how he usually finds himself more rigid in performances were followed by his comments regarding performances as occasions that may bring him some extra energy and excitement. Thus, he seems to take advantage of some difficulties he encounters.

In the same vein, while describing his limiting 'inner conversations,' Fraser stated that these seem to fade away once he is able to 'just be,' allowing himself to reach lucid moments. Hannes also expressed his struggle and eagerness to '[be] true to the moment.' Both participants underlined the somewhat paradoxical injunction consisting in saying to ourselves to express our authentic being. These accounts evoked what Douse calls 'moments of clarity.'[53] and to experience a state of being that Heidegger calls one's own 'authenticity and totality,'[54] as we previously pointed out. In a similar manner, Erna affirmed that she manages to control her 'inner conversations,' making them calmer once she stays in the moment.

We found that most of the participants are working on or have developed their own way of overcoming internal difficulties and external constraints (trend 4). For many, the hindering 'inner conversations' seem to fade away if they manage to find ways of staying in the moment. Factors that contribute to quieting distracting thoughts differ between the participants, but some mentioned include being well prepared, finding an authentic expression, and reducing the scope of 'inner conversations' to focus more on observing what is happening within rather than having structured thoughts.

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As we approached the final draft of this paper, we identified the main similarities and divergences between the accounts reported by dancers and musicians. We pondered what we would universally take from this study.

Firstly, we noted how, overall, dancers did not mention that they listen with full attention to music while dancing. Dancers seem to utilise music: a) to keep their awareness of time and tempo (Fraser, Ana, Astrid); b) to create a vulnerable atmosphere when not present in dance (Hannes); c) to relate to emotion (Millacu); and d) as a research tool (Millacu). Astrid became an exception once she revealed that she attentively listens to music so she can incorporate it while dancing: 'it helps if you start to hear the music […] to get you into the mood of it.' In what concerns musicians, we

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[53] Douse 2013, p. 104.
[54] Heidegger 1962, p. 276.

found that they accounted to achieving moments where, while playing, they listen and think solely about music.

Secondly, we observed that, universally, musicians seem to use their body awareness to help with their playing: a) to work on technically difficult passages (Merel); b) to transfer the story within the music to the audience (Merel); c) to make links between what they think, what they feel and the quality of the sound (Mikael, Fiona); d) to tackle nervousness (Bertie). In more detail, Mikael elaborated on how his thoughts, what he feels, and the quality of the sound he produces while playing the guitar might be linked: 'when you're tense in the body, it's because you're uncomfortable about something in your mind, and that's maybe what's really blocking the sound getting across.' It seems that his body awareness can alert him to these thoughts and help him to dissolve the block that is affecting the sound.

Merel also described how she consciously uses certain movements during rehearsals to establish a deeper connection with her body. As Welch and Sundberg point out, singers rely on their 'proprioception (from muscle receptors) and auditory feedback'[55] to feel what their voice is doing. Since the sound source (vocal folds) cannot be physically seen, having something tangible to focus on specific techniques, such as gestures, seems to help Merel visualise what she wants to achieve with her voice. Unsurprisingly, in relation to the interviews with dancers, we noted that they described their body awareness in more detail, for example by discussing their physical state (Hannes), different types of altered states of awareness (Fraser, Astrid, Rob), and how the space affects them (Fraser).

Thirdly, we noted that the interviews with musicians seem to reflect that their 'inner conversations' are, in most cases, connected to their emotional and mental state, as well as their awareness of sound quality. Dancers (Hannes, Fraser) described 'inner conversations' connected to their emotional and mental state, adding that they also connect such conversations to their physical state, their movements and spatial awareness. In short, we are led to think that the 'inner conversations'

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[55] Graham Welch and Johan Sundberg, 'Solo Voice,' in Parncutt, R. & McPherson, G. (eds.) *The Science and Psychology of Music Performance* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 265.

of Bertie, Merel, Mikael and Erna have certain commonalities with, for example, Hannes' and Fraser's 'inner conversations' because they also describe 'inner conversations' connected to mental state.

Fourth, as we previously noted, the way Rob used the word 'listening' made us bring together some aspects that we think musicians and dancers might have in common when improvising. Seeing that music and dance are very social activities, the performers also stretch their listening outwards, as well as turning inward. We consider the concept of 'listening' to mean involving '*at the same time* outside and inside, to be open *from* without and *from* within, hence from one to the other and from one in the other.'[56] For instance, Rob observes the other dancers and Bertie becomes more conscious of the bass line. Sam Belinfante's observation seems to be especially relevant: 'To be listening is to open up a space inside you as well as beyond and in front of you. It is a space that is constantly spreading and expanding.'[57] Through listening, performers strain towards an understanding of finding their place within performance, within social interactions and what they are bringing with them. We conclude that, from interviewees' point-of-view, listening is not based on having structured thoughts but to be receptive and attuned to what is already there. Here, we want to underline a significant feature common to both dancers and musicians.

Fifth, since, in their performance practices, both dancers and musicians deal with mental endurance, time, and space, possibilities arise to draw links between ideas within one of the disciplines and transfer them to the other one. For example, when Erla described her experience of expansion of time, we could draw a link between her experience and Leduc's conception of the 'state of grace' in dance.[58] In that way, the disciplines can draw inspiration from one another. They may also see similar experiences from a new perspective and, in turn, this might help to articulate certain 'inner conversations' they are less aware of.

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[56] Nancy 2007, p. 14.

[57] Belinfante, Sam, 'Listening,' in Belinfante, S. & Kohlmaier, J. (eds.) *The Listening Reader*. (London: Cours de Poétique, 2016), p. 13.

[58] Leduc 2005.

One of our main purposes was to improve the articulation of our thought and practice while discovering links between the two areas. We hope our reflections and findings might encourage for further collaborations between dancers and musicians. In other words, we hope this article may clarify ways by which dancers and musicians can eventually become more aware of their 'inner conversations.'

Ultimately, this study has brought up a set of main questions that need further research: How is the awareness of 'inner conversations' developed during performers' initial education and training? Is this done systematically? According to the authors' own experience, as well as some sparse comments from several participants (Astrid, Bertie, Erla, Fiona, Ana, and Rob), these subjects have not been valued in music and dance schools. We discovered that the apparent lack of such a concern in musicians' and dancers' education suggests further studies in order to clarify the awareness those performers have in relation to this gap in their artistic studies. For instance, what might have been the interviewed performers' experiences regarding these issues when they were students? How did they deal with these issues during their academic and artistic education even without specific training?

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