

Appearing Choreography

Performing Perception

TERO HYTÖNEN



MASTER'S DEGREE PROGRAMME IN CHOREOGRAPHY

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ABSTRACT

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<p>In this written part of my thesis work I will trace how perception includes both political and existential aspects for me. I am interested in the wide spectrum of perception, and how this multiplicity is framed by different contexts and through conditioning. I like to think that perception is an action, it is something that we do, and from this stems the name for my artistic final work: <i>Performing Perception</i>. In this text, I try to find connections between my own experiences, theoretical writings and artistic practices.</p> <p>In the first section <i>Thinking outloud</i>, I will open up my own experiences, existing choreographic practices and artistic references which are setting the frame for the artistic final work. I relate my thinking to practices by Deborah Hay, Boris Charmatz and Esther Salomon. I will also share my other perception related artistic works created during my MA studies in the Master's Degree Programme in Choreography.</p> <p>In the next section, I will open up to theory. I will explore how perception can be seen both as a political and existential question. The political aspects I discuss alongside a text by George Lakoff, Mark Johnson and Erin Manning. The existential aspects I try to articulate together with Martin Heidegger and Edmund Husserl.</p> <p>In the last section <i>Performing perception – the performance</i> I go more into the details of the performance itself. As we were working with re-writing the perception, I will outline different practices and compositional tools that emerged from this process.</p>			
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INTRODUCTION

I feel that the journey until my Masters in choreography has been multifold and complex. There have been different phases during which my interest and passion have been directed to something really narrow and specific, until something new has started to spread my attention again. Now, thinking back, I can see two recurring themes that have been present throughout these changes, and I feel that these phases echo in all of my artistic decisions and interests today: first one is my interest towards perception and second is an interest in different types of theory. I will outline these interests on the following pages through different frames. But first, I want to give some insight on my artistic background in dance and how I came to do an MA in choreography.

The journey with art in general started in my teenage years with break dance. This dance form was my first self-motivated initiative to practice and develop my own thinking and moving in dance context. In break dance, there is a really specific movement vocabulary that stems from the streets of New York from the 1970s-1980s. The main objectives were to train the basic movement vocabulary, invent own movements on top of that, and form a tight crew to dance together with. The feeling of dancing together to a certain music, being part of a shared culture and developing oneself as a dancer were the main reasons I stuck with it. I was also interested in graffiti and visual arts in this cultural context, so I also started to draw in my spare time. This is where perception first came into my world. Through drawing. At the same time, in my teenage years, I was also introduced to philosophy and psychology classes in high school. I was fortunate to have a really influential and passionate teacher in these subjects. I remember writing essays about Rene Descartes' body-mind problem in *Cartesianism* (1700) and wondering about Martin Heidegger's thoughts about *Being and Time* (1927).

After high school I applied to study visual arts pedagogy in Aalto University. I guess the main reason was that I knew there would be theoretical studies and practical studies in equal amounts available to choose from. During these studies I got more interested in Martin Heidegger and also in the thoughts of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Ludwig Wittgenstein, Nelson Goodman. Art theory and art philosophy were the main subjects that I was interested in, though I also enjoyed drawing and painting studies a lot. In drawing it was important to see the lights and the shadows that made the object of study visible. This way of seeing was first difficult, and because of this difficulty I was consciously supervising my perception and asking myself: what am I seeing now? I called this an 'outside eye' experience.

Because of my studies, I moved to Helsinki in 2010, and at the same time my focus to break dance started to shift towards contemporary dance. I felt that my interest in movement was shifting towards more inward perspective and somatic practices. I had not seen really any contemporary dance pieces before I moved to Helsinki and my knowledge about the discourses was quite narrow. I started to investigate dance theory books, just by reference words like "dance theory", "dance philosophy" and "dance composition". I managed to find the following writers that I started to study: Timo Klemola, Jaana Parviainen, Margaret H' Doubler, Carroll Press, Judith Alter and Alma Hawkings.

Because of this growing interest in contemporary dance and theories surrounding it, I decided to write my masters thesis in Aalto university with a focus on the body: *Gaze towards the body – embodied gaze* (2014). In this writing I tried to articulate how the gaze is deeply embodied, processual and context related. During the time of this writing process I also applied to the Theatre Academy and started my degree studies in dance.

In the very beginning of these studies, I realized how outdated those sources were that I was able to find on my own. Some of these writers were representing really modernist notions of dance, and the contemporary

discourse had moved towards themes like new materialist theories, post-humanist theories and feminist theories. During this theoretical update I found myself being most attached to new materialism theories, I started to explore books by Diana Coole, Samantha Frost: *New Materialisms – ontology, agency and politics* (2010) and Jane Bennett: *Vibrant matter* (2009)

I quickly found out that the most influential practices for me would be the somatic practices. Raisa Vennamo introduced me to the Feldenkrais method and Soile Lahdenperä to the Alexander technique. These practices were the ones that really resonated with the idea of the 'outside eye' : me perceiving myself perceiving. It was somehow really similar to the experience I had when practicing seeing lights and shadows in drawing and painting. Also, Deborah Hay's perception practice was somehow related to similar experiences. I will elaborate these references more in the *How do I relate to choreography* – chapter.

Even though I got some theoretical updates during Bachelor studies in dance, I still felt that the studies were more concentrated towards dance practices than theory and composition. My interest in theory and context made me apply for the MA in choreography.

I decided to write rather extensively about how I entered dance and choreography because my thinking and artistic orientation have been in constant movement for a long time now: it encompasses multiple contexts, discourses and ways of creating. I hope that by addressing my artistic journey so far, it shows how I understand my artistic identity and artistic practice being built in these relations of different references, contexts.

In this written part of the master's thesis, I try to open up how my interest towards perception is the foundation of my artistic practice.

The artistic part of my thesis is a performance called *Performing Perception*. My aim is to carry these both; the written and the artistic part, inside this text, reflecting back and forth how they have been informing one another.

In this process my artistic practice is studio based in Kallio-Stage, working with a following working-group:

Choreography – Tero Hytönen

Scenography – Bea Tornberg

Lightning design – Teo Lanerva

Sound design – Stephen Webb

Cello - Otto Nuoranne

Costume design – Kati Mantere

Dancer / performer – Elisa Lejeune

Dancer / performer – Verna Nordlund

Dancer / performer – Suvi Kelloniemi

I will start this written part by a chapter called *Thinking outloud*. In this chapter I open up the experiences, choreographic practices and artistic references that are affecting my own artistic practice and the final MA work.

In the *Theoretical background* I will discuss some theory. I will explore how perception can be seen both as political and existential question and how this kind of double-meaning is present in *Performing Perception*.

In the chapter *Performing perception – the performance* I go more into the details of the performance itself.

In the last chapter *Afterthoughts*, I will conclude how the dialogue between artistic work and written work gave rise to this practice and what further themes it created.

THINKING OUTLOUD

Experiences drive my interest in art making. The most powerful experiences have been the ones that have changed my perception. I get interested in how these experiences are constructed, and I try to understand the mechanism behind them. Many times, these experiences do not translate easily into words. I have some preliminary ideas for the wording, and to help this I choose to read theory texts that deal with similar experiences. Maybe the wording that I´m looking for has already been claimed by another writer, and I could borrow that existing concept.

In this chapter I try to articulate these experiences and describe what exactly is interesting to me in them. Likewise, I will open up how I relate to theories and concepts mirroring these experiences. Following these articulations, I will explain my relation to choreography and how these experiences and theories are affecting my artistic practice.

Perceptual experiences

I will start by introducing the experiences that triggered my curiosity towards perception and that made me reflect how they are related to Art. So, I start by describing two experiences with an apple. I aim to describe these so that I could start to deal with themes that rise from these experiences.

Drawing an apple

When someone that has not been practicing perceiving in drawing and starts to draw an apple, they usually draw a ball with one leaf on top of it. This is not any real apple and at the same time it is every apple in the world. This is the mental image of an apple, not the apple that is in front of a perceiver. An apple

in drawing becomes visible because of the light that enables lights and shadows to form shapes, which again possess a texture, that again reflect different beams from the spectrum of light to show colors. This apple is also in space, it has a distance to my body and to all surrounding surfaces. It is also affected by time, it can rot, it is similarly being pulled by the gravity and so on. If the aim is to draw the apple, one must start to practice perceiving, and work with these emergent visual features that formulate this unique apple in this space and time right there. My experience is that once I start to focus on these visual features, I at the same time perceive and watch myself perceiving: I supervise my perception and my intention. I all the time ask: Am I working with the mental image or with this unique moment?

Dancing with an apple

Like in the drawing example, I try to observe what is the first impulse that emerges. First, I feel a tendency to grab an apple, to throw it up and down, move it around. Me manipulating an apple. Second, I start to notice different improvisatory practices rising that I have been using in dance improvisation scores. After this, I start to investigate new ways to relate and perceive the relation between me and the apple. I feel that there are endless ways to relate and all the time relations appear that inform me of some new way to perceive the apple. At the same time these appearing relations make me aware of the perception that they produce. Here is an example of this: I notice myself grasping the apple, I move it around to get a hold on it. I watch, smell, touch different parts of it. Then, I stop and decide to relate in some other way – I start to play with the distance between the apple and my body. While practicing perception I become aware of the difference between the perception of qualities and manipulation, and of the perception of spatio-temporal attention. Perceiving becomes reflective because it reveals the order of perception: it reveals what kind of perception comes first, what second, and so on.

How do I relate to theory

While reading texts, I find myself searching a mirror for these experiences. I recognize the moment while reading when it feels that the writer is describing similar phenomena and has formulated a concept around it. I can relate to this concept and by borrowing it I try to elaborate my language around my own experience.

Here is one example of such borrowing. I go back to dancing with an apple experience: before I learned how to perceive through drawing practices, I already had one way of perceiving. The perception I had was based on recognition. This recognizing perception is quick, and it jumps from object to object providing general information about my surroundings. It was, and it still is happening. So, it makes me wonder where did I 'get' it from?

While thinking about this I was reading a German philosopher Martin Heidegger's (1889-1976) thoughts from Professor Kirsi Monni's Dissertation *Olemisen poeettinen liike* (2004). Heidegger talks about a human that has been thrown in the midst of the world that is already given. This world is conditioning, or worlding one's Being-in-the-world. No individual is outside this worlding, and all Being is happening in being together and in surrounding relations. This kind of thinking about Being-in-the-world is not theoretical or rational, but existential (Monni, 75, 2004).

These concepts inspired me to think about the human that is conditioned from the very beginning. Because of Monni's text, I recognized the ongoing historicity in my experience which has been conditioning my perception to this point. I am affected by Heidegger's thoughts and borrow concepts from his work to describe my experience.

Heidegger's concept stems from the existential philosophy and it does not relate to choreography in a straight forward manner. Yet still, Heidegger's concept Being-in-the-world rises questions for me about conditioning and how this world conditions thoughts and bodies. Similar thoughts came up while reading writer, performance studies scholar and curator André Lepecki. He writes about conditioning in his book *Singularities* (2016). He argues that we are being conditioned all the time, everywhere we go, and that this conditioning draws its logic from neoliberal ideology, and it reaches all the way in to the fibres of our flesh. (Lepecki, 2016, 2) Lepecki understands this as political. These thoughts about the political and the logic of conditioning, made me think more deeply about political aspects of perceptual experiences in my artistic practices: drawing an apple and playing with an apple changed the way I perceived things, and while doing this they revealed the perception towards which this change occurred. There has been a conditioning embodied perception in me without me noticing it. Following Lepecki's thought, I think that the recognizing perception carries certain politics and ordering. I have been performing these politics through my perception.

The neoliberal ideology conditions certain kinds of subjectivities and certain ways of perceiving. I understand subjectivity as a constructed, non-stable system that is all the time changing. I also think the way we perceive is one aspect that constructs this subjectivity. Philosopher Erin Manning deals with similar concepts in her work *Minor Gesture* (2016). While reading the chapter *Choreographing the political*, I found a wording for this relation between subjects and perception, through her concepts of *neurotypical experience* and *neurodiversity* (Manning, 2016, 112).

I will work further with these themes in the *theoretical background* – chapter. This introduction was just to show a few important references and the way I relate between theories and my own experiences.

How do I relate to choreography

The experiences and writers outlined above are the current frame for my interest in choreography. I am interested in how perception could be choreographed. By this I mean what kind of practices already exist that enable me to choreograph perception, and what kind of perceptual choreography practices could I develop myself. As artistic references I feel that choreographers like Boris Charmatz, Deborah Hay and Esther Salomon have been dealing with similar themes.

The interest in perception in dance practices is by no means a new thing. Here is how Boris Charmatz has been working with it: *“Charmatz has been deconstructing prevailing cultural ideas of the visible body and questioning the customary perceptual behavior that the medium of dance brings about. Through strategies of “brouillage”, that is of physical limitation and obstruction of gaze, Charmatz has come to explore perception as a discursive site and spurred an awareness of the viewers mental activities.”* (Peeters 2014, 64.)

I like this idea of exploring perception as a discursive site. This site has many different perspectives to research in choreography: bodily thinking and thinking in words and concepts. Many of my artistic process during my studies have been dealing with this site and perception as a starting point.



Figure 1 - Surface 2017. Photo: Sanni Siira

First example of-how I worked choreographically with perception was my first choreographic solo work, *Surface* (2017). *Surface* was dealing with the broad topic of bodily perception of surfaces. I was working with silk canvas and a wooden table. Using these surfaces, I played with framing and cropping, hiding and revealing.

"Surface of the body, skin, curtains, stage and dance mat. Surfaces that are present in different relations to each other. Could surface itself perform, not as a static and mute, but meaningful and commenting circumstance. Hiding, revealing, vertical and horizontal. How to give the vertical space for surfaces while the body is left with the horizontal, struggling with gravity." (Diary 12 October 2017)



Figure 2 - *Lurking Anthropocene 2018*. Photo: Tero Hytönen

I continued working with the topic of perception while spending the summer 2018 in a residency in Stockholm. During this time, I produced a solo work called *Lurking Anthropocene* (2018). I was working in a very minimalist way. I was exploring how my own visual perception was constituting itself. I experimented with different practices where I exhausted my visual perception. By intensively staring in one spot without blinking I examined what I notice first, second, third, and so on. I asked continuously what is happening in my perception. The work was made in video format, giving a direct emphasis on framing. This framing and zooming in and out gave an additional perception motive.

“It opens its eyes – it sees clearly to center of its gaze, everything else around is more or less blurry.

It sees tones, colors, shapes, forms, light. Things moving, stopping, merging, passing through. It is occupying its attention with these blurry figures and it forgets what it was actually focusing its gaze to.” (Diary 6 June 2018)



Figure 3 - Variant Vista 2018. Photo: Sanna Käsmä

In the artistic collaboration ACO, we produced a work called *Variant vista* (2018). The artistic research question was 'What could the sensory and perceptive apparatus of posthuman subject be like?'. My interest was in perceptual chains and automatic schemas that exist in our bodies. These chains are created by intensive repetition, and they act as shortcuts in our everyday life: We know how to open the door, how to walk, how to sit down. We do not need any extra attention to perform these actions. This applies also to our gaze. We do not have to actively think how the world is being constituted through our visual sense. It just happens without us being aware of it until we start to deconstruct the phenomena and rebuilt the experience in reflective practices.

Reflective practice

I will now discuss my final MA work in more detail. My artistic practice for this final artistic part is influenced by choreographer Deborah Hay's (1941) practice, where she proposes to actively ask questions. In August 2017, I participated in a one-week workshop at TeaK that was hosted by Veera Nevanlinna, a dancer that collaborates closely with Deborah Hay. During this week we examined the practice of actively asking questions which Deborah has created. One of Hay's central question is: "*What if all my billion cells could sense each moment equally unique right now?*" What was inspiring for me in this question, and the general question practice, was that I recognized the experience being similar to the one I had when drawing. I became conscious of my movement habits, perceptual chains and automatic rhythms. Practicing perceiving this way one needs consciousness. Consciousness triggers reflection. This kind of reflective practice felt good because it revealed the order of perception and made it possible to research new ways of ordering. This inspired me to start to formulate my own scores for different ways of ordering perception in my final MA work.

For me, such reflective perception practice changes also the way I, as a spectator, perceive the performance. The emphasis is not only in the visual body moving. But there is a more refined, detailed exploration of how one's body is organizing the perception, as an active, ongoing process. Choreographer Esther Salomon examines similar questions in her work *Nvsbl*. "*Nvsbl evolves in process of drastically slow movement by which four female performers gravitate from four points at the outer edge (four corners) of the stage to the center, traversing 5.5 meters during a period of about 80 minutes.*" "...the mission was to alter the perceptibility of movement – from visibility to kinesthetic and proprioceptive sensibility" (Cvejic 2015, 87).

In my practice I work score based and the aim is to share this experience of reflective perception practice with others to further explore it. Together with the dancers we try to re-write the perceptual chains. Scoring relates choreography to conceptual art, artists like Bruce Nauman, Yoko Ono and Allan Kaprow who have been using instruction-based methods (Lepecki 2016, 13). I think that scores give space for interpretation. They provide a frame in which dancers have freedom to explore and reflect in their own terms. This space for interpretation is important because we all have our own conditioned bodily histories through and against which this re-writing process of perceptual chains can happen. In other words, one main intention for my artistic practice is to work with **multiplicity** rather than unity.

In order to describe the second intention in my practice, I will go back to describing the experience of dancing with an apple. When I was doing the reflective bodily practice with an apple, I was saying out loud what the perceptual orderings were that guided my relation to this apple. First impulse was to grab it and move it around. I inhibit this response and change to another way of being in relation. Now different improvisational practices emerge that I have been studying. After inhibiting these and also the next impulses I started to get closer of creating new orderings for perception. What this playful practice with an apple made visible was that there are multiple practices embodied. These practices are organized according to a perceptual order. For example, the improvisational practices have a certain effect, goal and values that guide the practice. What I mean by this is that no practice is completely free. In my work for example, I deal with practices that are score-based and these scores guide the perception of the person engaged in the practice. This is where the political perception comes in; it gives a certain frame for perception.

Political perception introduces different goals, values and restrictions to perception.

I think that the existing *neoliberal condition* (Lepecki, 2016, 2) and *neurotypical* (Manning, 2016, 112) perception are recognized, functional and effective ways of perceiving. “*The neurotypically oriented world we live in privileges consciousness as aligned to instrumentality over nonconscious, nonvolitional tendencies*” (Manning, 2016, 114). The emphasis in this kind of perception is on the effectiveness and automatization. I think that this kind of perception is excluding potentials, constantly trying to recognize and grasp meaning under already known equivalence. It is mainly perceiving in order to do something else. So, perception itself is then tool-like, and this, in my view, does not encourage for reflection, questioning or creating.

In my artistic practice, I would like to broaden and challenge this tool-like perception that *neoliberal condition* and *neurotypical* perception are suggesting. Given this, second important intention for me is to work with **reciprocity**. For bodies not only being affected by the space and others, but also actively affecting space and others. While practicing the score, choices are actively affecting the choices others make inside that score. While practicing the score, the performer’s perception is part of other performer’s perceptual space, so it is also a negotiation with power and listening - affecting and being affected.

Through my artistic practice in my MA work, I want to research how rewriting perceptual chains allows variation in multiplicity and reciprocity. These parameters, together with the format of performance, gave rise to questions of freedom and structure. How to choreograph multiplicity and reciprocity, in order for there to be enough structure for performers to lean onto, but also enough space for freedom and reacting?

My artistic supervisor Sanna Myllylahti said it nicely in one of our meetings: “*If you want to choreograph chaos, it doesn’t happen just by letting it all go. Many times the structure must be super clear to support chaos or freedom.*” (Diary, 10 September 2019)

This tension between structure and freedom was present throughout the process and it caused me to come up with and visualize different compositional tools, in order to achieve some balance between the two. I will write more about the compositional tools and notation in the chapter *Performing Perception – the performance*.



Figure 4 - Performing Perception 2019. Photo: Tero Hytönen

THEORETICAL FRAME: POLITICAL AND EXISTENTIAL PERCEPTION



Figure 5 Performing Perception 2019. Photo: Tero Hytönen

In this chapter, I am going to go deeper into the concept of perception, from two major viewpoints: Political aspects of perception and existential aspects of perception.

In the first section, *perception heading towards the political*, I open up the question about perceiving subject. How am I perceiving right now and why this way?

After this I introduce some more existential aspects of perception in the chapters called *Being and the not known yet – perception towards existence* and *Epokhé and inhibition*.

Perception heading towards the political

I think that perception as an emergent phenomenon is intertwined with the political aspect. I also think that dominant western ideologies are affecting our perception. Capitalism is one frame that is guiding the way we perceive the world, and while doing this, also deciding what is worth perceiving and what is not. I think that this conditioning is happening in the background of my conscious experience. If I do not question my perception, it just is what it is. Until I am introduced to new practices that reveal the difference to the previous way of perceiving.

This difference informs the 'outside eye' experience, which enables me to recognize these two distinct ways of perceiving. I am noticing how my perception is organizing itself and the distance to the 'perceiving event' gives space for critical thought and reflection. And I ask:
how and when does this conditioning start?

In order to find more stable and critical ground for these thoughts, the following references will be introduced in this chapter:

George Lakoff and Mark Johnson in their co-authored book: *Philosophy in the flesh: the embodied mind and its challenge to western thought* (1999) discuss how the roots for even the most abstract thinking structures are derived originally from the body and the flesh. I found there to be many intersections to my thoughts about how perception is built in relations.

Also a chapter called *Choreographing the Political* in a book *The Minor Gesture* (2016) by Erin Manning turned out to be important for finding words to the themes between perception and political aspect. In the chapter, Manning is presenting two concepts; *neurodiversity* and *neurotypical*

perception. These concepts worked as a starting point for our working group in the final artistic part of my MA. I write more about these starting points in practice in the chapter *Performing Perception – the performance*.

In addition to these two references, the writer, performance studies scholar and curator André Lepecki discusses in his book *Tanssitaide ja liikkeen politiikka* (2012) (Orig. *Exhausting dance* 2005) how the historicity, and ongoing stream of representations are also affecting perception. The concepts he talks about that resonated most with my thinking are: “*stopping this historicity to practice questioning*” and “*asking the Being itself*”. (Lepécki, 2012, 116). Following these notions, and as this first chapter is ending, I turn to Martin Heidegger in the next chapter: *Being and the not known yet – perception towards existence*.

Together with these writers I try to elaborate my thoughts in the following subheadings: **1. Emergence of perception**, **2. Perception is built on repetition** and **3. Rewriting perception in artistic process**.

1. Emergence of perception

When we are born, the world opens up around us as bodily perceived entity. We are dependent on our parents and incapable of independent actions. Our senses are entwined, and information is taken in as a holistic bodily effect. We taste, feel, smell and see as a simultaneous action when we encounter an object. An object that actually is not an object yet because there is no me, that or you. Subject object classification develops later as language steps into our lives. The world is full of these perceived things or entities and they are in relation to space time.

There is no me, you, this or that – only synesthetic perception in time and space. Lights, shapes, colors and forms start to repeat in this field of perception. They start to build schemas and incorporate meanings. Depth starts to emerge as we begin to recognize the concept of movement and stationary entities. Paths and journeys start to emerge as we recognize the concept of starting, moving and stopping. Through these also my own kinesthetic sphere starts to emerge, how far I can reach, how far I can see.

Different inputs such as above, behind, in front, closeness, farness, journey, start to build a first structural and behavioral models: When I'm scared, I'm held close, so - 'closeness is safe'. When I receive information it's almost always coming from above, so - 'knowledge is up'. These are the base for early thinking models that are later applied to more complex deductive chains. Different modes of thinking derive originally from these bodily schemas. (Lakoff & Johnson 1999, 50.)

Later on, after discovering voice and imitating others' language a representation of these phenomena starts to arise. We share common understanding of these representations and translations because we have an agreement to do so.

Language does not erase embodied knowledge and perception. They are just not as important in producing meaning. Yet gestures, ways of speaking, tone and own bodily state are still things that always affect the formation of meaning.

This is the phase where our basic level categories are formed. There are basic level categories for emotions, social concepts, actions and objects. Actions like grasping, jumping and running. Emotions like happiness and sadness. Social concepts like family and strangers. (Lakoff & Johnson 1999, 29.) In my opinion, these basic level categories described above are the ones that start to construct the basis for our perceptual apparatus.

“These teachings, which also tend to foreground the normatively rational over the emergently creative or intuitive, the individual over the relational, tune our existence toward a very simple notion of what a body can do. This, over time, convinces the child that singling out objects and subjects by categorizing experience is a necessary part of growing up” (Manning 2016, 114).

2. Perception is built on repetition

This base for our perception, fist schemas and social relations starts to repeat itself in our actions as our ‘everyday’ coping. We perceive other people’s behavior and learn through the perceiving. Based on our perception we decide what we want to pick up from someone else’s behavior. Perception itself cannot be pure or natural, it is always constructed in the relations that define what is beneficial, useful, good or bad. These values are being represented in perception.

According to Lepécki, representation itself has its own onto-historical power, which in the West has sealed subjectivity in these series of isomorphic similarities (Lepécki 2012, 113). We share more of this stream of historicity with some people, and less with others. I think this shared stream of historicity and representations are built similarly as the different social relations, automatic bodily-chains and habits. There is a shared environment and situation in the world that we engage as perceiving entities. We create relations all the time.

Sometimes these relations have been built in the same manner so we share the historicity and experience with others. For example, with the ‘wolf-children’, kids that have been risen by wolves, we share very little of this common stream of historicity or representations since the whole accumulation of

relations have been started on a totally different basis. We could not recognize our expected behavior in them, and the way they perceive things has been constructed by the 'wolf-politics'. By this I mean that different things matter for their coping, and this is conditioning their perception in different ways.

Our perception is not isomorphic by nature. Its diverse and adaptable. Erin Manning is writing about these themes in the chapter, *Choreographing the Political*, in her book *The Minor Gesture* (2016). In the chapter, Manning presents two concepts; *neurodiversity* and *neurotypical perception*. Both concepts relate to order of perception and to the multitude of possibilities inside this spectrum of perception. By neurotypical perception Manning means the perception that is first presumed by the surrounding society. This kind of perception is built on two main expectations: 1. Ablebodiness is taken for granted and 2. the goal is a self-sufficient decisive body, that can make a strong distinction between ones body and the world. (Manning, 2016, 112.) Based on Manning's pondering I wonder what kind of perception am I working with inside the reflective practices. Here is one of the examples from the text:

"Autistic Anne Corwin describes it as a slowness of chunking: the autistic's entry into an environment begins not with a perception of objects (chairs, tables) or of subjects (people) but with an edging into form, a tending of light and shadow and color" (Manning 2016, 112). In this description, I recognize, to a degree, my experiences with drawing, where I consciously tried to guide my own perception away from objects towards perception of forms, lights and shadows.

I think that with the perception that Anne Corwin described, it is probably very difficult to cope in a society made for neurotypical perception. Manning states that this kind of perception is dealing with *direct perception*, that is not focused to recognizing content or meaning. It is the sensory data that we actually perceive of the world before it gets wrapped in meaning and

understanding. Manning continues that neurotypicals are not usually aware of this kind of direct perception of experience. Except in extreme circumstances like under shock, exhaustion or perhaps in meditation. (Manning 2016, 112.)

These extreme circumstances described by Manning resonate with thoughts that I introduced in the *Reflective practice* – chapter:

Perhaps through the reflective practice based on perception it could be possible to get closer towards this kind of direct perceiving. Direct Perception exhausts the existing order for perception by inhibiting these impulses to be efficient when perceiving. Direct perception is also meditation-like because it requires active rigorous reflection during the practice. This reflective practice makes the different practices existing in one's perception visible. The practice is also actively creating new practices that are self-reflective. Self-reflection creates some kind of loop and produces “...*kind of new modes of existence call forth an articulation of the political that is not reducible to preexisting constituencies*” (Manning 2016, 123).

I am interested in the last part of this quote: the political that is not reducible to preexisting constituencies, but always changing and looking for a new way to construct the world and relations. Researching perception as reflective practice seems to be closely connected to the political perception because both are deeply processual. Asking myself how my perception is being conditioned through different processes leads me to the question how I am performing my perception and how this perception is performed out in the world. This is why I also think of performative perception. Performative perception brings in the self as one element that builds and guides my perception. And it changes the automatic way of perceiving active action. Alva Noë states it nicely: “*Seeing is nothing that happens in us. It is something we do*” (Unmüßig 2018, 50).

3. Rewriting perception in artistic process

Understanding subjectivity as a constructed non-stable system that operates in relations opens up a possibility for stopping and changing. Maybe I can choose how to 're-write' myself in different situations? For example, my writing would not be possible without André Lepecki's book *Tanssitaide ja liikkeen politiikka* (2012) and things that now will be rewritten through my subjectivity. Neither would my kinesthetic understanding about stopping and asking the same without my experiences with Deborah Hay's actively asking question practice. There is always someone thinking through me, seeing through me and moving through me.

The way we perceive things is connected to existing concepts and ideas. Habits, patterns and conventions are ways to act more effectively in situations so that we do not have to always start all over again. For example, we know how to use a chair, we have done it many times, and even though we would use a chair that we have never seen before we still know how to use it. Because we know the concept of chair (Lakoff & Johnson 1999, 28). Similarly, we know how to perceive depth, we do not have to actively build this phenomenon, it is structured in us as a lived experience. Many times, we really do not experience things, we just recognize a previous experience in them.

The concept of chair, or the concept of depth reduces the amount of reflection needed to fulfill the action. A concept is designed to speed up the process, make it more automatic and at the same time more unconscious. It has many beneficial aspects in everyday coping of course but, it also leaves something out. This something that is being left out is the thing that I am interested in. I found this description of high-level control in motor schemas quite interesting in articulating this 'something'.

“Getting into a state of readiness
The initial state
The starting process
The main process (either instantaneous or prolonged)
An option to stop
An option to resume
An option to iterate or continue the main process
A check to see if goal has been met
The finishing process
The final state”

(Srini Narayanan (B2, 19971, b) in Lakoff & Johnson, 1999, 41).

Few years back I was working as a dancer in Jenni-Elina Von Bagh’s work called *Posthuman* (2016). This description above reminds me of the experience of performing in the piece. I recognize the amount of choices that are present all the time. Just inside one choice there are many options how to proceed, and the performance space is filled with other choices to grasp into. Was the choice a space between set, performers and audience? Was it the rhythms of my movement choices? Was it the pauses? Being aware that all my choices are going to contribute to the overall composition, to the space, to choices of other performer and so on. This was one of the main questions while working as a dancer (borrowed from Deborah Hay): how could my billion cells sense each moment equally unique now, now, now?

I recall that the experience in the moment of asking questions on stage was exhausting though liberating. There were so many possibilities to choose from that deciding what to follow was sometimes exhausting. However, asking questions gave a sense of freedom and agency inside the composition. I noticed that things that help me to reformulate my subjectivity were related to different practices of perception. By perceiving the world differently, one automatically produces different kind of subjectivity. It was also a question of

continuity. How many times did subjectivity and relationality change during a performance. It was a state of constant trembling between different subjectivities and meaning registers. For me the experience of performing in this piece was connected to these different modes of perception that I am currently interested in.

For example, if I only concentrate to 'off spaces' – spaces between static entities, I would be constructing my field of perception differently, I would also be focusing my gaze and positioning my body in different manner. I have found similarities between these bodily practices used in Jenni-Elina Von Bagh's work and different drawing practices; the same thing happens when we try to draw something we perceive; the first impulse is to start drawing the mental image of the thing we are trying to capture. This is the automatic pattern that is starting to emerge, they are symbols of reality, reduced versions of it. In order to grasp a more elaborate structure of things, we need to practice perception. Practices of perception require stopping the automatic patterns from emerging and asking again in different ways how I actually perceive.

According to Lepécki, " *this kind transformable subjectivity is dealing with the question of Being itself*" (Lepécki 2012, 116). When stopping, asking, thinking how I perceive, the act of practicing perceiving seems to come to a point when actually asking the Being itself – how I exist.

Being and the not known yet – perception towards existence

Asking the Being itself is another big discussion to which Martin Heidegger has been contributing in his writings. He talks about a human that has been

thrown in the midst of the world that is already given. This world is conditioning, or worlding one's Being-in-the-world. (Monni 2004, 75). According to Heidegger, it is important to be able to think about human existence outside the traditional categorial thinking. All these categories are being formed in the midst of the world, and human can never be 'outside' of it. (Luoto 2002, 74; Monni 2004, 100.)

Every human has the choice to remember its foundation that is Being. Forgetting can lead a human to live as a so-called everyday being, that is not one's Being in particular (Monni 2004, 108). Not one's Being as existence. In this case, when one tries to deliberately ignore Being, attention is shifted to an already revealed world; a world that is known. The question of Being is not tackled and then the struggle with the not yet known is left out. In other words, one condition for Being is to not yet know. However, according to Heidegger, there is this double direction within Being: while Dasein is existing it is also in-sisting. And in in-sisting Being is prone to cling on to already revealed world (Monni 2004, 109.)

Shifting the attention to my final artistic work, *Performing Perception* might give more concrete stance to the question of Being. As a choreographer I used the above mentioned thoughts on Being in order to work the questioning and stopping the already known in an existential manner. Reading on Being allowed me to find words to initiate the stopping, the cumulative side of perception and bringing it back to a here and now, to the flesh. How am I performing my perception right now and how much am I existing and in-sisting?

According to Heidegger all perception is affected by certain attunement (Monni 2004, 102). This attunement is the scope through which the world can open up to us and be perceived. And the perception of the world is happening in the world and through relations itself.

In this sense one is always limited to reflect the Being itself, since the base for reflection is existential. Reflection takes place with certain attunement, and certain perception. But by changing the attunement one could re-write the scope through which the world can open up to us to be perceived. And by doing this also perception changes.

This is how I understand Heidegger's term attunement, as rewriting perception, as active bodily practice.

This is relating also how I understand André Lepecki's quote: "*this kind transformable subjectivity is dealing with the question of Being itself*" (Lepécki, 2012, 116). When stopping, asking, thinking how I perceive, the act of practicing perceiving seems to come to a point when I am actually inquiring into-Being itself – how I exist. Transformable subjectivity to me is actively changing this attunement, actively rewriting the perception and this way creating different ways to organize the perception. Through this difference between each attunement, each rewritten perception might open alternatives through which to think about the question of Being itself.

Epoché & inhibition

Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) was the founder of phenomenology and he used the term epoché to open up the topic of perception and experience of the world. Epoché means a condition that enables one to attend to the world in a new way, by being aware and interested how the world presents itself for us in our experience. (Noë, 2007, 8.) Me being aware of how the world presents itself – this immediately presents, to me, notions like ‘outside eye’, introspection and reflection. It is a dialectic relationship that can start to open up questions like how the perception is being constructed in my experience and what are the mechanisms that are conditioning my perception to work as such.

About the same time with Husserl’s epoché, there was a somatic and educational method being invented called the Alexander Technique. This technique was invented by orator Frederic Mathias Alexander in 1890s. The aim is that the practitioner becomes more aware of what kind of habits and mechanisms exist in his or her body. The Alexander Technique is based on terms like ‘letting go’ and ‘stopping’, and the skill of stopping is called inhibition. Because of inhibiting the automatic ways of doing, I can open up new potentialities and there is a possibility for choice. Inhibiting the experience, entails disrupting the perceptual continuity that has been constituted between me and the world. This disruption produces a momentary in-betweenness, where I perceive myself perceiving.

I think that both Husserl and Alexander were dealing with same kind of reflection and dialogue with oneself.

The aim is to experience the phenomena without any preconceived idea or conventions. The task is a paradox in itself, we cannot deny the existence of these conventions, they are an integral part of our being. As I outlined before

when talking about how perception and subjectivity is always constructed. But by stripping down the experience and becoming aware of how much is already happening all the time we can get a hint why we are perceiving the way we do.

Critique of phenomenology and the danger of solipsism

Phenomenology studies phenomena as they appear to us. It concentrates on asking questions like: What is this appearing? What is phenomenon? (Parviainen 2006, 43).

French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty – in his book *La structure du comportement* (1942) argues that it is important to step out of ‘everyday experience’, and to concentrate to this experience itself, so that one could become aware of the thinking that it produces (Parviainen 2006, 43).

Both of these descriptions on phenomenology resonate with the reflective perceptual practice in my current artistic practice in the following ways: firstly, it is about asking and working with how something is appearing in my own experience and, secondly, while doing this it is making visible something that was not before questioned because of its everyday automatic nature.

Still especially in its early adaptations, phenomenology and introspection were concerned with perception as visual experience. Philosophers and artists were testing different perception practices to find out how seeing was constituted to them. They found out the following leading principles: recession, line perspective, known size of object, location in field, air perspective, the play of light and shadow, and movement parallax. (Salminen, Melgin 1991, 136.) This kind of experimenting was similar to Plato’s cave

methapore; the perceiving individual is somehow trapped, and all sensory data is just a reflection of some transcendental space.

Later Gibson proposed that the perceiver and the perceived cannot be separated. Perceiver is a bodily being that is always in relation to space and time and the act of seeing is happening in an unstoppable feedback loop. (Salminen, Melgin, 1991, 153.) I feel that this is a good direction towards the holistic bodily perceiving subject, but it still does not take in consideration maybe the most important part: how all perceiving is embodied.

For Merleau-Ponty phenomenology leads thinking in two directions at the same time: towards the phenomenon and at the same time towards the perceiving subject self-reflection. (Parviainen 2006, 45.)

Phenomenology reveals perceiving, then, to be a condition whose nature depends essentially on the presence and involvement of the world encountered. If there were no object, or no situation, then there could be no contact with or involvement with them, which is just to say that there could be no perceptual experience. (Noë 2007, 8.)

Still there is an individual or even solipsist side on this, when there is always this one subject that is perceiving itself perceiving. Against this Merleau-Ponty insists that the multitude of perspectives is an integral part of Being. It is not only my visions and acts, but rather my visions and acts in the intersection with those of the others. (Allefed, 12, 2008.)

However, I want to keep some distance from phenomenology. I do not want to promote the individual, subject centered solipsist nature of the introspection practices. In the reflective practice the key ambitions are **multiplicity** and **reciprocity**, so that the research for rewriting perception could be done in dialogue with other sensing, questioning and working bodies.

Still, I feel that the reflective perceptual practices that emerged in the process of *Performing Perception* touch the same themes in stopping, practicing perceiving and active listening as these previously introduced concepts. I will open up these themes in the next chapter where I talk about the artistic work: *Performing Perception – the performance*

PERFORMING PERCEPTION – THE PERFORMANCE



Figure 6 Performing Perception 2019. Photo: Tero Hytönen

Performing Perception was a choreographic performance that took place in Kallio Stage Theatre space. It was my artistic thesis work made for three performers. It was formed around practices that re-write perception.

The description of the work in the event page was following:

This performance deals with perception from two perspectives: perception as an experienced phenomenon and the performative side of perception. The working group is tracing how to use perception as a leading question in forming a compositional work.

And in the program it was like this:

*“Welcome,
Thank you for bringing your perception,
Let it*

Thanks. “

Choreography – Tero Hytönen

Scenography – Bea Tornberg

Lightning design – Teo Lanerva

Sound design – Stephen Webb

Cello - Otto Nuoranne

Costumes – Kati Mantere

Dancer / performer – Elisa Lejeune

Dancer / performer – Verna Nordlund

Dancer / performer – Suvi Kelloniemi

We have worked together with this working group before. I find there are many advantages to having our common background since we have been sharing similar questions in our previous process. In a good way, it feels like a continuation of the same questions, and it gives us possibility to dig deeper in these themes. In our previous process with work called *Variant Vista* (2018) we were working with the following question: “*What could the perceptual apparatus of posthuman subject be like?*”. The theme was reaching towards future, dreaming of how the human subject would change and re-organize itself. Shared practices were dealing with this re-organization of perceptual chains, and I felt that we were just scratching the surface.

Now we continued working with a theme of Performing Perception that was inspired by of the following borrowed concepts:

In Heidegger's *Being-in-the-world* I recognize the ongoing historicity and cumulative aspect of perception. Also, I see the concept of attunement to being close to actually rewriting the order of perception practice.

In Husserl's *Epoché* I recognize the impossible but delightful task of perceiving without any preconceived idea of how the world opens up to and in our perception.

In Lepecki's *neoliberal conditioning* I recognize the current aspects of our lived time being represented and performed inside our perception.

In Manning's concepts *neurodiverse and neurotypical*, I recognize the multitude of potentials of how perception could be organized.

All of these borrowed concepts comprise something that I also want to promote in my artistic practice. It is a reflective practice inside which the order of perception is researched and performed. In other words, it is about being conscious that perception is not just happening, but it is something that we do, and it actively does something.

From borrowed concepts to practices

I found that sharing these borrowed concepts and thoughts about performing perception was a good way to start the work.

So we started this process with joint reading material. First, we discussed Erin Manning's book *Minor gesture* (2016), and especially the chapter *choreographing the political*. The task was to read the chosen text and reflect on it in two ways: *Firstly, Reflecting own experience – write small paraphrase what resonated in the text. Secodnly, Material suggestion – produce small material proposal that represents these thoughts for you.* (Diary, 10 August 2019)

In the rehearsal space we shared these two reflections and the following themes came up in this sharing:

Stephen Webb:

"I got interested in this chinking of perception and experience, that was described in the Manning's text." (Diary 25. August 2019) Stephen had been dealing with perception in his previous sound composition, and this served as a demo-material. The sound material was dealing with spoken language that falls into pieces. Material played around with tonalities and gestures of voice, oscillating between the fragmented and narrative structures.

Bea Tornberg:

"I was thinking about the relationship with the audience. How to encourage people in saddle ways towards neurodiverse way of perceiving?" (Diary 30 August 2019) Bea got interested in the relations between audience and the performance. She was interested in the same theme also last fall: we used heightened audience platform, from which the audience could observe the performance also beneath them, widening the range of usual perception in performance. Bea was also thinking about how much the audience knows, before they enter into the performance space? And how do we inform them in the program about these themes?

Teo Lanerva:

“Staring things like a painter. Even though nothing is changing in what you are seeing, your experience of it might still change.” (Diary 30 August 2019)

This served as a starting point for lighting design. Teo was interested in durational aspects of lightning.

Suvi Kelloniemi:

“For me the text was dealing with really bodily themes. It made me think of how to understand through body and not always with language and analysis.” (Diary 20 August 2019) Suvi was thinking how much the understanding is related to analytical thinking and existing language systems and syntaxes. And maybe sometimes this kind of understanding is more valued in our society.

Verna Nordlund:

“The text made me think about an experience where I recall my body reacting to music with changing temperatures.” (Diary 20 August 2019)

Verna’s thoughts made me think about the amodal sensing (Suom. Amodaalinen havaitseminen) (Parviainen, 2006, 129). Which means transitions between these different perception modalities. Synesthetic experience is also used to describe this kind of example.

Elisa Lejeune:

“Naming things – I see the curtains, I see this, this, this. This is already a neurotypical response? How could we play with describing, naming, and voice in general?” (Diary 20 August 2019) Recognition, subject and object relations were the things of which Elisa got interested in the text. Elisa also

proposed a first practice to start with: “*Deconstructing game – how to deconstruct an object, so that one could see many possibilities in it? How to describe an object without ever saying what it actually is?*”

The first two weeks we were in the rehearsal space 522 in the Theatre Academy. We started to work with different demos each day and the starting point for these demos was in the discussions inspired by the text.

We all had agreed on that it is beneficial to work with the performance material at the same time in all disciplines. This meant that there would always be light, sound, spatial and choreographic attributes present. I found that this way of working was fruitful for the perception theme that we were engaging in.

Practices

The practices that we came up with in this artistic process, were a result of the following re-writing process.

The re-writing process has many phases: First, we start with an already existing concept that we can borrow as an inspiration for a score. In this case, we started by borrowing concepts from Erin Manning: *neurotypical and neurodiverse*. The formulation of scores usually consists of some kind of notation, that we together work out. It can be drawn, written or otherwise notated. After formulating the starting score, we start the bodily research with dancers. Usually 20-40 minutes of bodily research recorded with a video camera. After the bodily research, we first reflect together how it affected our perception, how it felt to research this score while doing it, and what thoughts and feelings came up. Also, we talk about what was difficult and what was left out while doing the score. Next, we watch the video and reflect what we see.

How does it correlate with the reflections in the discussions and what does it communicate?

This is the whole first 'iteration cycle': writing the score, bodily research, reflecting the experience verbally, reviewing the video material, discussing meanings and finally rewriting the score collectively based on these observations and starting the cycle again.

After a few cycles, the core of the practice starts to become more clear and by writing it down and giving it a name, it becomes a concrete thing that we can discuss, choreograph and develop. Here are some of the practices that we came up in this process:

PRACTICE 1:

Describing the object – the qualities, not functions (Diary, 20 August 2019)

In this practice, we were affected by the text's notion of qualities. In the many examples of neurodiversity, the perceivers were more drawn to qualities rather than functions. We started to experiment with this kind perception by describing out loud different qualities and associations of known objects like a ball or rope. The rest of the working group had their eyes closed just listening to this description and imagining different potential objects that emerged from these qualities. In the end, we shared the imagined objects one by one. Finally, the object described was revealed. It was interesting to compare the objects that emerged from the description to the actual object.

PRACTICE 2:

Dislocated gaze – seeing without objects (Diary, 20 August 2019)

In this practice we started to work with gaze that was deconstructing the analyzing and recognizing type of gaze that is leading many of our actions in everyday behavior. The aim was to keep the gaze open and active, while at the

same time not functioning in this analyzing and recognizing manner. It is about keeping the gaze open and showing attunement, while leaving space for bodily sensing to communicate.

PRACTICE 3:

Describing body as an object – the qualities, not functions (Diary, 21 August 2019)

Following the line of thought from the first practice with objects, our second practice was similar but with body as an object. Describing the body at hand focusing on qualities and associations led to diverse outcomes. Associations were more related to nature and landscape due to the lively nature of the material at hand.

Doing these practices on stage gave rise to an interesting ‘searching and asking’ – quality in the body. By this I mean that the performers attunement and bodily tonus were really precise while in the state of figuring something out. This tension between precision and finding something out had something similar to dislocated gaze practice.

PRACTICE 4:

Working with phantom limb – not fully integrated body (Diary 22 August 2019)

In the phantom limb practice the starting point was in one neurodiverse example from Manning’s text. In the example, it was described how the neurodiverse experience of ones body can be extremely divergent. Individuals might not be conscious where ones own hand is, without actually seeing it. When we started to reflect on this, we found that the dancers body is trained to be extremely integrated and conscious. So, it did not feel right to just ignore

the impulses that the body was sending, but to imagine a whole new limb that was not totally integrated to the body.

The placement, size and quality of this imagined limb could change any time, and the aim was that this limb could lead the overall movement of the body. In a way it is like dancing with an inner partner, that can affect and surprise in many ways while practicing.

PRACTICE 5:

Describing the movement with voice (Diary, 25 August 2019)

This practice was initially part of Stephen's sound score, which we were recording in the Sibelius Academy's studio. The score was to describe other bodies moving using only tones and non-verbal sounds. We elaborated the score further so that it could be done as a solo practice: while doing the practice 2, add this non-verbal description score on top of that score, so that you are moving and describing your own movement in non-verbal ways.

PRACTICE 6:

Stopping – recalibrating the perception and refraining automation (Diary, 20 August 2019)

This practice works as a compositional tool for performers inside the performance. By stopping and recalibrating they are actively building the composition, affecting others and being affected by other bodies. Compositional choices open up for the performers to make: taking space, providing space, acting, reacting and forming trios, duets and solos.

About composition

The aim for working together with the piece was the same principles that were written inside the artistic practice: multiplicity and reciprocity. To embrace

this aim we were continuously discussing with all the designers how the written bodily score could be in reciprocal relation with sound and lighting design.

In the first meeting, Stephen said that:

“I have seen many performances where the sound design is a continuous soundscape that transforms throughout the performance regardless of the events happening on stage. I try to get away from this kind of working, I’m more interested in co-composition with all the elements inside the performance, and in reciprocity between them.” (Diary 5 August 2019)

Here are a couple of examples how I see that the reciprocity produced new practices:

We started the demos in a rehearsal space with practice 1. “Describing the object”. In the choreographic standpoint I was interested in the gestural and perceptual qualities of this description process. Stephen decided to record this sound material and use it as a starting point for one of the sound demos. Playing this recording over speakers produced another temporal space inside the performance space, and it gave him the idea to record it in a professional studio at the Sibelius Academy. While in the recording studio, Stephen was guiding the dancers and started to steer the sound material towards babbles, moans, groans and other non-verbal outputs. In the recording studio, we also came up with the idea that two performers would describe the movement of the third performer with these sound gestures. The initial point was to produce sound material, but it ended up as a new practice that we started to elaborate in the actual performance space. This exploration produced the practice 5 “Describing the body with voice”.

With light designer Teo we started to think what light does for the perception of audience and performers. Light works as a foundational element in

perception, and we found that there are few tones that make the viewer more conscious of his or her own perception and sensing of the light. This kind of light, (many times blue hue) erases some parts of the depth vision, altering the experience of the space perceived. This kind of environment, that is lacking depth and detail, is losing its definitive characters that we usually recognize while perceiving. Usually, when a space is in normal lighting, we consciously know what the spatial dimensions are and how the objects and subjects are set inside these dimensions. This kind of normal lighting is also designed to show details which enable recognition. So, against this we started to work with blue light. This spatial setting already guided the possibilities on how to perceive the performers. This informed choreographic choices so that the practice 2 “dislocated gaze” should be introduced before this blue light, since facial characteristics would not show in the blue light.



Figure 7 Performing Perception 2019. Photo: Tero Hytönen

Compositional tools and notation

While starting to compose the practices that we found in the process, it became clear that, in order to keep the material clear and communicative, the scores for individual dancers should be as structured as possible. Inside this set structure, the actual exploration of the practices could be set free.

Here are some compositional tools and notations that I found useful in this process to deal with this tension between freedom and structure.

“Performing perception composition 1.2

o=Describing the body

A=Stopping (dislocated gaze -showing perception)

B=Phantom limb

B1-fast

B2-mid

B3-slow

C=Perception practice

C1-fast

C2-mid

C3-slow

D=Dropped perception (uniform duration)

Starting

o – (darkness) only sound

A Elisa

A+B1 (Slow introduction by Elisa) – A+ B2 (Suvi joining to duet the same motif – added spatial route)

A – Elisa & Suvi

C1 (Verna introducing fast perception practice)

A – B1 - C1 Verna repeating the order (Spatial route and transfers set)

Suvi joining in from the fourth stop

A – B3 -C3 – D Suvi repeating the order (Spatial route and transfers set)

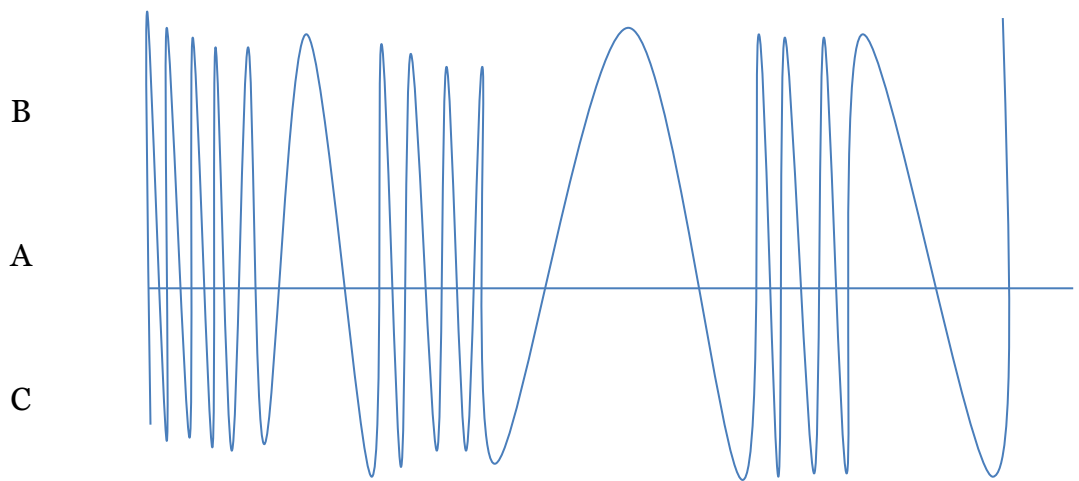
Elisa joining in from the second stop

A – B2 – C2 – D Elisa repeating the order (Spatial route and transfers set)

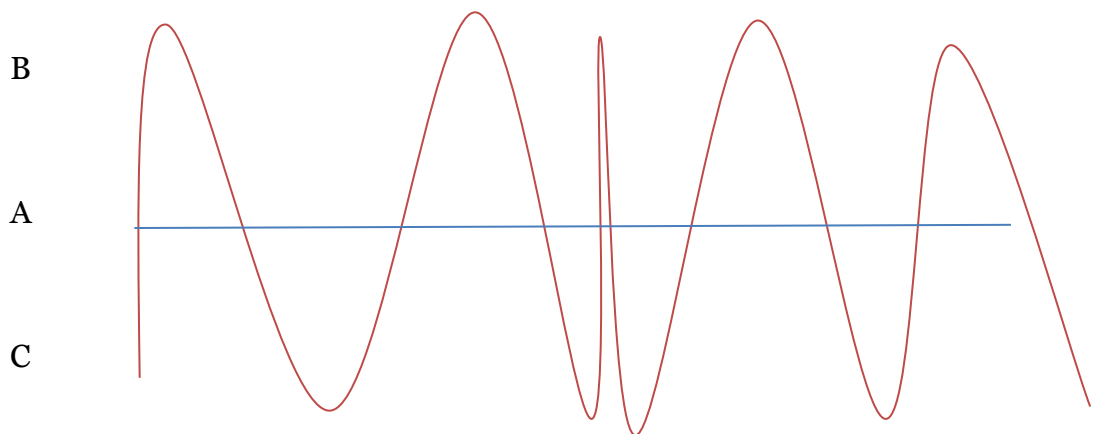
A-B-C-D All three dancers repeating the order (Spatial route and transfers set)” (Diary 11 September 2019)

Individual performers score excerpts (Diary 11 September 2019):

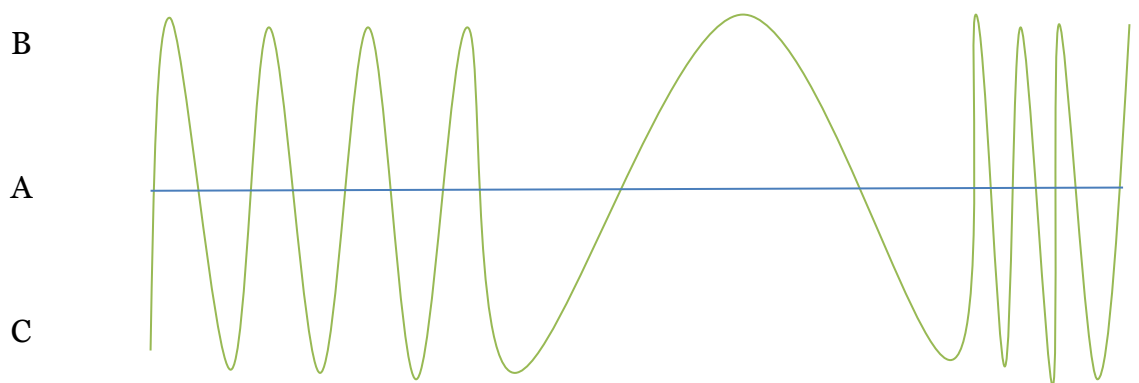
Verna A – B1 – C1



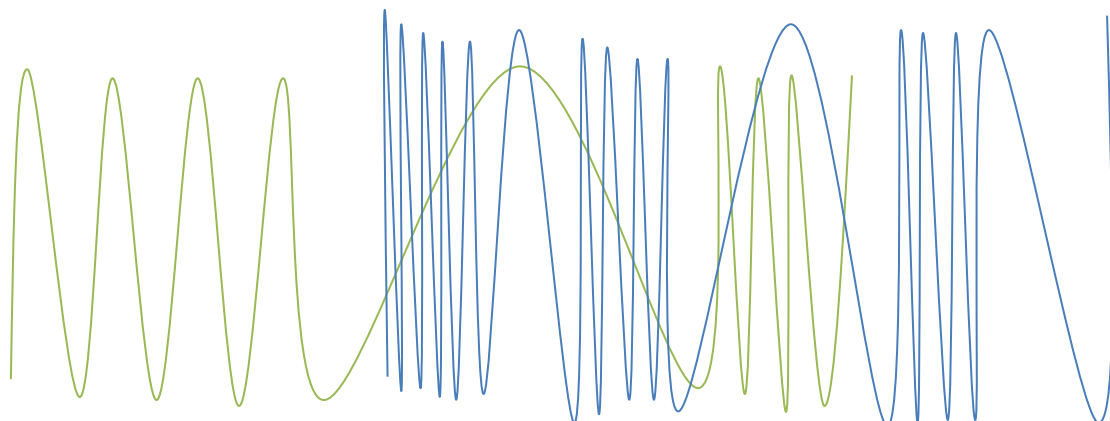
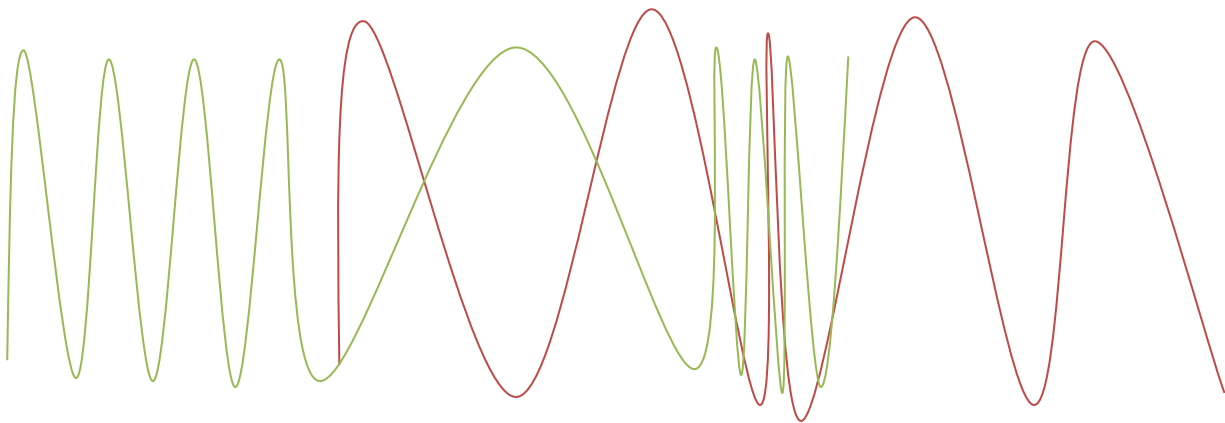
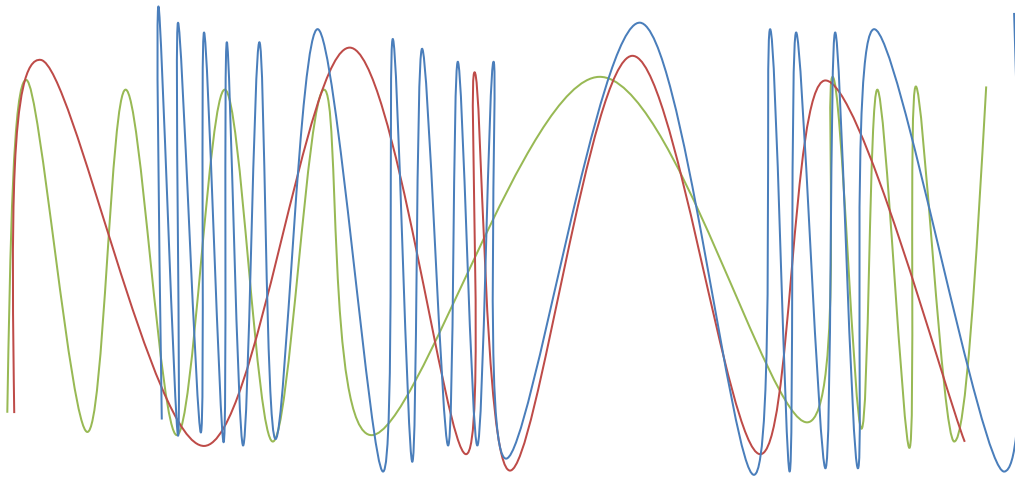
Suvi A – B3 -C3



Elisa A – B2 – C2



The practices were producing different kinds of textures and patterns in the performance space. In composition I was thinking how to set these patterns in relation to each other, and this led to the above introduced individual diagrams for the performers. These diagrams indicate the rate of change, frequency and duration inside the individual scores. By layering these diagrams in different ways, it was possible to find counterpoints, parallels and accumulations.



About dramaturgy

The first week when we were in Kallio Stage we started to think about the overall dramaturgy of this piece. We were discussing how we wish to present this theme to the audience and what kind of structure could support this aim. We were interested in two different sides of this perception theme:

1. Performing perception

The aim was to use the practices found in the process as a material for the performance.

2. Audience as perceivers

Second aim was to enable audience to become aware of their own perceiving during the performance.

We started to discuss how these two could be present in the same performance and what kind of transition there could be between them.

Four 'scenes' were established to help us define which part of the performance we were talking about, though in the performance, the transitions were always overlapping each other. Before introducing the scenes, below is a short description of the performance space and costumes:

The space was horizontally wide, and the audience was sitting by one of the long sides in two rows. Chairs on the first row were on the floor, the second row was stilted in the height of 20 centimeters. The floor was light grey, and all cracks and scuff marks were highlighted by light grey play dough. This made the floor resemble a miniature landscape with mountains, riverbeds and valleys.

Performers' costumes were made from similar textures, but with individual colors: yellow, salmon red and lavender. These colors were also present in the lighting design. Otherwise the space was empty and minimalistic. Towards the

end of the performance, the space was filled with thick smoke, blending in with the lights.

Scene 1. 'The emergence of perception'

The piece begins when audience enters the dark space and finds their seats while a sound recording is playing over the speakers. The material for this recording is from the practice 1 & 3 where the performers are describing objects and bodies, only using associations and concentrating on material qualities.

"It feels like a fresh and soft grass in the beginning of May"

"There is a steep hill, and then something round that fits in your hand like a tennis ball"

"On the upside of my palm its smooth and dry, and on the downside its sticky and electric"

The recording goes on for a while, and then yellow light starts to slowly come up, revealing a body sitting on the floor and staring at one spot actualizing the practice 2 'dislocated gaze'. Slowly the performer is starting to introduce the practice 4 'phantom limb', touching the surfaces of the space. From the background another performer is starting to proceed upright towards the sitting performer also doing the practice 2 and 4 while moving really slowly, drifting through the space. The light is slowly shifting towards salmon red forming a gradient in the space. The first 'scene' ends to sound building up and cutting out and bodies exiting the space.

Scene 2. 'Perception orchestra'

Third performer enters the empty space with the 'fast-paced phantom limb' practice. She moves rapidly across the space making stops, introducing the practice 6 "Stopping". Her attention is travelling across all surfaces of the space, making relations to 'mini-mountains' on the stage. After a while, one of the performers is drifting back to the space joining into 'slow-paced phantom limb' practice and together they find three simultaneous stops. Finally, a third performer enters the space initiating a trio that starts to play with the same set of scores while finding simultaneous and separate stops, forming duets, solos and trios in the space. Towards the end of the trio, they all start to narrow their focus down to the details on the floor. They make their way to the back of the space, while starting to show glimpses of the third scene with the phantom limb variation.

Scene 3. 'Perceptual landscape'

This scene is introducing the smoke element to the space. While the smoke is entering, all performers are working with a variation of the phantom limb score where the limb is making its way out through the stomach, bronchial tube and mouth. They are working with the limb in place, while smoke is moving rapidly, forming clouds and creating gradient in three colors: lavender, yellow and salmon red. Eventually performers start to produce sounds of breath and gasps, that start to mix with sounds coming from the speakers leading to final scene.

Scene 4. 'Amodal orchestra'

After the smoke has arrived, the colored gradient lights start to shift to blue hue, which makes the performers almost invisible. Performers continue working with the phantom limb that is coming out of their mouths, but now the limb is starting to move the performers in the blue foggy space. One by one, sounds are starting to fill the space, and performers are moving beyond

the performance space carried by the phantom limb into the staircases and through the space.

Performers appear and disappear inside the blue smoke, forming silhouettes and figures. Then the same sound is starting to travel over the speakers and the sound material starts to get more fragmented, causing a final sound buildup ending in slowly fading echos of gasps and breaths. Also the bodies fade away inside the thicker smoke, leaving only a blue foggy landscape.

Performance ends in this empty blue foggy landscape. Audience lights rise on top of this, and performers emerge from the smoke to thank the audience.

AFTERTHOUGHTS

In the beginning of this text, I was looking for words to express the experiences I had with perception. I now feel that together with this written part and artistic part I have found this word-couple, *Performing perception*.

When somebody asks me what I am working with, I can now start by sharing this concept of *Performing Perception*. I can start to explicate how this concept has both political and existential dimensions for me, and I can share the references with whom I discuss these themes. I can give concrete examples of my own experiences related to perception, and how I see political and existential dimensions being present in these experiences.

It has given me clarity in defining the artistic question with the working group. Together we have been developing practices that are inspired by the shared theoretical references. While developing these practices, I feel that we have been further working with the materiality of perception, that is not only conceptual but bodily researched and experienced.

It has been interesting to follow how delicate changes in consciousness affect perception. If the perception practices start to become 'just a movement score' to be performed it feels like the lived experience is left out. I am really interested in this lived experience and I feel that we managed to work with that to some extent.

Working with these practices was really demanding for the performers, since this tension between lived experience and 'just doing the movement score' was always present. The challenge was to boldly trust the exploration and temporality it produced. I think that this challenge stems from the tendency of our perception to always find the most effective and automatic ways for perceiving. So that the actual experience of perceiving itself would not take the

focus in consciousness, but rather the content perceived. This tendency is just caused by another practice that has been conditioning our perception to be more tool-like, and this does not, as I wrote earlier, encourage reflection, questioning or creating. Perception like this is already serving certain kinds of politics, that are guiding away from the lived experience towards the already known.

In this artistic process we have been actively trying to work against these kinds of politics by inhibiting these impulses. Staying in the state of 'not-yet-known' and in the lived experience of perceiving requires a lot of work.

Staging these practices has guided my attention to questions like: what does performing of these practices do? To answer this question I need more time to reflect and some distance to the process. Maybe after a year I can try to see the work with fresh eyes and revisit these questions.

Overall, I feel that I am just in the beginning of something, but I have more trust in things that I do not yet have a wording for.

I open my eyes, is see clear to the center of my gaze, in the periphery it's blurred.

Clear – blurred

First, I see light and shadow, biggest contrast.

Appearing – disappearing

Then, I see forms, shapes, colors, things.

Forming – unforming

Then, I recognize – and recall.

Recognition – recalling

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