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# LEARNING HOW TO LISTEN TO DANCE - A PHENOMENOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF INCLUSIVE METHODOLOGIES



BERGONZONI, CAROLINA  
ARTS EDUCATION DEPARTMENT  
SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY  
BURNABY, BRITISH COLUMBIA  
CANADA

Carolina Bergonzoni  
Arts Education Department  
Simon Fraser University  
Burnaby, British Columbia  
Canada

## **Learning How to Listen to Dance – A Phenomenological Analysis of Inclusive Methodologies**

### **Synopsis:**

In this article, I will analyze my experience as a dancer involved in the collaborative inclusive performance project Translation. This project is based on questions of accessibility, inclusion and the potential of the dancing body to move us. By building on Merleau-Ponty's notion of incorporation, I will argue for the possibility of incorporating other people in our phenomenal field.

## *Learning How to Listen to Dance – A Phenomenological Analysis of Incorporation*

### **Bio:**

Carolina Bergonzoni is privileged to be a dance artist and scholar based on the unceded Coast Salish territories of the Musqueam, Squamish and Tsleil-Waututh First Nations. She holds a BA and an MA in Philosophy (University of Bologna, Italy), an MA in Comparative Media Arts (Simon Fraser University, Vancouver, Canada) and she is currently a PhD student in Arts Education at Simon Fraser University. Her research interests include dance, disability, phenomenology, Arts-Based Research, and Dance Education. Her academic work has been published in Italian and Canadian journals. Since 2011, she has been working toward building communities of movers and thinkers. She works with the integrated dance company All Bodies Dance Project. Carolina continues to perform, create, and spread her love for movement as an independent dance artist.

### **Abstract:**

In this paper, I will analyse my experience as a non-disabled dancer and company member involved in the collaborative performance project, *Translations*. *Translations* is a four-phase collaborative performance project between Vancouver's All Bodies Dance Project and VocalEye with support from the Canada Council for the Arts - New Chapter Initiative. The project investigates inclusion, and asks questions of utmost importance and relevance to the accessibility of Dance Education and Canadian performing arts. In the process, we explore the aesthetics of accessibility, build on difference as an artistic tool, and conceive inclusion as the source of creativity. Some of the questions that guide the process are as follow: How can we access dance through multiple senses? What is the best way to describe the abstract language of dance?

For over a year, I have been involved in *Translations* as an artist, researcher, and educator. This experience has been a constant process of inquiry in movement guided by an embodied arts-based research approach. My approach is influenced by phenomenology, the lived experience of my dancing body, and Sarah Pink's definition of

sensory ethnography. Pink believes that all experiences are multisensory and she questions vision and its connotation as a dominant and objectifying sense. Disabled artists and scholars Lindsay Eales and Danielle Peers write: “Arts-Based Research offers us exciting opportunities to think through our moving bodies, and through the emotions that move us. It offers us opportunities to think, feel, and mobilize our knowledges differently” (2016, 56). This article was therefore written from the experience of my body in the dance studio.

*Translations* brings together disabled and non-disabled dancers alongside a team of audio describers from VocalEye and artistic consultants from the blind community. Together we explore different tools to shift dance from the dominant visual sense towards other ways of sensing and perceiving dance. In the first and second phases, which took place in December 2017 and June 2018, the team met daily over the course of two weeks at The Dance Centre in Vancouver, Canada. In the final phases, which are currently in progress, we are investigating how to facilitate a whole body experience of a dance work. The work will culminate with two shows (September and December 2018) at the Roundhouse Arts and Community Centre, and at The Dance Centre, in Vancouver.

In the first phases of *Translations*, we looked at the possibility to translate a work of dance into physical touch and verbal description. In this article, I will only consider the third phase, in which we asked how we might guide audience members and host space through a sensorial experience of the work. New questions arise, namely, how does the dance sound? How can movement extend possibilities and challenge expectations of the dancers’ bodies? I will use *Translations* as an entering point to elaborate on the possibility of incorporating other people into our phenomenal field (Merleau-Ponty 1945;

Bredlau 2017).

In order to proceed, I must briefly reflect on Merleau-Ponty's definition of 'norm', his ableistic philosophy, and my decision to build on his theory while discussing accessibility and inclusivity in dance.

On the one hand, it is undoubtedly that Merleau-Ponty's philosophy privileges sight and vision over other senses (Wieseler 2016). As Wieseler points out, Merleau-Ponty's definition of 'normal' only takes into account the experience of a "non-disabled heterosexual white male" (Wieseler 2016, 150) and "privilege[s] able-bodied people by centering their needs and experiences" (Wieseler 2016, 150).

On the other hand, Merleau-Ponty's work opens up the possibility for a less ocularcentric approach, but he did not follow through. In *Phenomenology of Perception*, he writes: "Each sense organ interrogates the object in its own way" (Merleau-Ponty 1945, 232); specifically, he believes that vision does not "merely add new details to the knowledge of the tree", but rather it is "a new mode of presentation and of a new type of synthesis that transfigures the object" (Merleau-Ponty 1945, 233). For these reasons, social sciences, sensory ethnography, and visual anthropology have expanded on these insights to move towards a multisensory approach (Csordas 1990; Ingold 2000; MacDougall 1998).

In this paper, I will build upon the idea that each sense gives us a new understanding and opens up new ways of knowing to show, through the example of *Translations*, how we can incorporate other people into our perceptual field.

## ***Reference***

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