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## Exploring Musical Togetherness: An embodied approach to relational interpretation in Maurizio Pisati's *Sette Duo*

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### Abstract

This article presents artistic research that explores the complex interpersonal dynamics in duo performance by adopting an embodied and enactive framework. The aim is an enhanced understanding of musical togetherness. In understanding duo performance as enactment of (musical) relationship, a consideration of the bodily dimension of musical interplay is essential. Experimental duo encounters with unfamiliar partners were centred around the *Sette Duo* for guitar and seven different instruments by Maurizio Pisati. In these case studies, artistic and interpersonal experiments were conducted that led to considerable changes in perception of intersubjective musical phenomena and informed the development of a relational interpretation.

### Introduction

What is it that fascinates us about a sophisticated ensemble performance? In existing literature on ensemble research, both musicians and listeners often use expressions such as ‘sharing a special bond’, ‘clicking’, ‘invisible connection’ or ‘emotional closeness and intimacy’.<sup>1</sup> This is also confirmed in my own research.<sup>2</sup> There is a clear sense that what is pointed at – a special experience of profound interplay – goes beyond technical coordination, perfect

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<sup>1</sup> See Caroline Waddington-Jones, ‘Co-Performer Empathy and Peak Performance in Expert Ensemble Playing’, in *Proceedings of the International Symposium of Performance Science*, ed. Aaron Williamon and Werner Goebel (Brussels: European Association of Conservatoires, 2013), 331–36.

<sup>2</sup> I am here referring to my forthcoming research *The Musical Dyad – on Interplay in Duo Settings* (Dr.artium diss., University of the Arts Graz), to which this article substantially relates.

synchronization, or the alignment of musical parameters. I argue that it is about the potential for genuine encounter, for togetherness. Musical togetherness, as understood within this research, encompasses the experience of something that cannot be achieved alone, of musically being-with, or the emergence of a ‘we’.<sup>3</sup> In fact, it is defined by the quality of both the aesthetic and the intersubjective experience of making music together. In this sense, the ensemble can be seen as a microcosm for social interaction. We not only enact relationships through musical interplay, we can also aesthetically explore and experiment with these relational qualities.

However, we must be careful not to consider intersubjectivity a normative state. Instead, it is a complex and contingent variable in this interpersonal and aesthetic exploration. This is what lies at the very heart of the artistic research project *The Musical Dyad*: By looking at duo performance as the nucleus of ensemble, I aim for a deeper understanding of musical togetherness through linking the aesthetic experience of musical interplay with the qualitative experience of relationship. Through critical artistic practice and theoretical reflection, I explore how they can be integrated to facilitate an interpretation that foregrounds, augments and refines the relational realm. In such an interpretation, moments of genuine intersubjectivity are not a coincidental by-product, but the central goal.

After clarifying how an embodied approach is suitable for understanding duo performance, I will turn to several case studies of artistic research dealing with Maurizio Pisati’s *Sette Duo*. These so-called duo interventions are designed as exploratory settings in which to experiment with conditions and parameters of musical togetherness. Specifically, this article focuses on the physical dimension of musical interplay and how a conscious approach to embodied relation facilitates developing a relational interpretation.

### An embodied approach

The relational experience in a duo performance is formed through the dynamic, moment-to-moment and whole-body interaction between the two musicians. In this respect, they enact their (musical) relationship, i.e. they bring it forth, shape it and express it in action, while engaging in a shared environment. This suggests an embodied approach to understanding duo performance. Drawing on the phenomenological notion of embodiment, musical performance can be considered embodied in that it evokes a perceptual and experiential condition that is grounded in the lived body, and the performer’s bodily presence and situatedness in his or her

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<sup>3</sup> See Angelika Krebs, *Zwischen Ich und Du: Eine dialogische Philosophie der Liebe* (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2015) and Deniz Peters, ‘Between I and You in Music: Shared Emotions, Relational Improvisation, and Artistic Research’, in *Performance, Subjectivity, and Experimentation*, ed. Catherine Laws (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2020), 17–32.

environment, thus making for a multimodal, sensual experience. Regarding aesthetic experience, Berleant states that ‘[i]n embodiment meanings are experienced rather than cognized. That is to say, we grasp them with our bodies, literally incorporating them so they become part of our flesh.’<sup>4</sup>

In her artistic research project *Embodying Expression, Gender Charisma – Breaking Boundaries of Classical Instrumental Practices*, Barbara Lüneburg explores the social embeddedness of practice through an embodied perspective: ‘Embodiment plays directly into or even constructs the value system that is shared with the audience because bodily and artistic expression are intertwined with social messages and meanings. In gestures, emotions and thought processes are produced and represented’.<sup>5</sup> This can also be transferred to the interplay with co-performers, in that the performing bodies form and inform norms, values and the social relationship. In performing together, the relation to another lived body can enable us to understand the other and to create a shared experience in an intersubjective sense, as according to Husserl, ‘[t]he body, the living body of the other, is the first intersubjective thing’.<sup>6</sup> The embodied experience of making music together can therefore be described as intercorporeal, a term originally coined by Merleau-Ponty: ‘To describe embodiment as intercorporeality is to emphasize that the experience of being embodied is never a private affair but is always already mediated by our continual interactions with other human and nonhuman bodies.’<sup>7</sup> But how exactly does an embodied musical relationship unfold and how does it shape aesthetic experience?

In his book *Embodied Knowledge in Ensemble Performance*, J. Murphy McCaleb points out how successful ensemble coordination relies on applying embodied performative knowledge accumulated by the individual musicians, which allows them to interreact with each other.<sup>8</sup> This is certainly true, but it also seems to underscore the bodily dimension of interplay in terms of embodied expressiveness and perception, which not only offer us an enhanced access to the musical experience of the other, but in fact to develop a shared embodied knowledge. Høffding describes this kind of shared bodily knowledge as ‘mediated ... by an interkinaesthetic sense

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<sup>4</sup> Arnold Berleant, *Re-Thinking Aesthetics: Rogue Essays on Aesthetics and the Arts* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), 86.

<sup>5</sup> Barbara Lüneburg, ‘Embodying Expression, Gender, Charisma – Breaking Boundaries of Classical Instrumental Practices’, [embodying-expression.net/index.html](http://embodying-expression.net/index.html).

<sup>6</sup> Edmund Husserl, *Zur Phänomenologie der Intersubjektivität: Zweiter Teil: 1921–1928*, ed. Kern Iso (Den Haag: Nijhoff, 1973), 110.

<sup>7</sup> Gail Weiss, *Body Images: Embodiment as Intercorporeality* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 5.

<sup>8</sup> J. Murphy McCaleb, *Embodied Knowledge in Ensemble Performance* (London: Routledge, 2016).

of union'<sup>9</sup> through auditory perception and interoception of being touched by the other through the sound she or he produces. Perceiving and reciprocating each other's movements facilitates an intersubjective proprioception. For a sense of we-agency to emerge, *interkinaesthetic affectivity* is furthermore essentially accompanied by a shared emotional state: 'Only when coupled with the affective intentionality of deep trust, does the change in agency from singular to plural come about.'<sup>10</sup> This is consistent with the understanding that the qualitative experience of the relationship is decisive for musical togetherness. The concept of *embodied interaffectivity* as described by Thomas Fuchs further entails that 'in every face-to-face encounter, the partners' subject-bodies are intertwined in a process of bodily resonance, coordinated interaction and "mutual incorporation" which provides the basis for an intuitive empathic understanding'.<sup>11</sup> The intercorporeal process of re-enacting a dyadic pattern furthermore may create what he calls a 'dyadic body memory',<sup>12</sup> by acquiring a specific interactional history, which shapes further interaction through emerging patterns and autonomous dynamics.<sup>13</sup>

## Duo interventions: Artistic Research Method

Building on these theoretical considerations, *The Musical Dyad* seeks to develop means to artistically work with intercorporeal phenomena in a constructive way and find out how this would contribute to the intersubjective experience of musical togetherness. In experimental duo encounters with various unfamiliar partners, I have conducted artistic and interpersonal experiments that have explicitly addressed bodily aspects of musical interplay, in particular gestures, movement and touch. These duo interventions, as I call them, were designed as 3-day research labs and were conducted between January 2020 and February 2021 at the University of Music and Performing Arts Graz. The main objective of these interventions was to develop rich accounts of musical togetherness in the form of qualities and values, as well as strategies and abilities, through artistic experimentation. As an interventional practice, these short-term encounters were intended to create gaps in a continuum and to interfere with and question established structures as part of my long-term duo practice. This was facilitated by creating an open space and mindset, which allows for alternative perception, thinking and playing.

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<sup>9</sup> Simon Høffding, *A Phenomenology of Musical Absorption* (Cham: Springer, 2018), 235.

<sup>10</sup> Høffding, *A Phenomenology of Musical Absorption*, 240.

<sup>11</sup> Thomas Fuchs, 'Intercorporeality and Interaffectivity', *Phenomenology and Mind* 11 (2017), 194–209, 196.

<sup>12</sup> Fuchs, 'Intercorporeality and Interaffectivity', 204.

<sup>13</sup> Fuchs, 'Intercorporeality and Interaffectivity', 205.

Experiments, in the sense of creative and innovative measures, were introduced in order to induce instability or interferences, as well as to lead to dynamic and productive working methods. The guiding question was always which aspects of interplay any particular experiment would affect and if and to what extent it would influence the experience of musically *being-with*. Significantly, the experiments were not strategically planned or premeditated but were conceived together in the respective rehearsal situation as the result of an open, collective effort and decision-making process. As such, they were themselves the result of an experimental undertaking, often in response to a specific musical problem, a question regarding interplay, or as an attempt to introduce an unknown variable into the iterative rehearsal process. Concrete examples of those experiments and, in particular, their implications on interplay, as well as the resulting insights into musical togetherness, are discussed below.

In addition to initiating these experiments, our general way of rehearsing – of playing and listening – can be described as a jointly developed, experimental duo practice. According to Catherine Laws, the

practice of practicing as an experimental process [is] defined ... as oriented towards situations with unknown outcomes. In this sense, the aim of practice is not to pin things down – deciding how exactly to place a note, weight a chord, or develop a ‘reading’ or interpretation of a word – but rather to hone the ability to respond to the contingencies of sound in the moment of performance.<sup>14</sup>

In the case of ensemble performance, this experimental process of deliberately exploring parameters like sound, tone and resonance, material or playing techniques, is always pursued with the intention of refining the quality of interplay. In this respect it is also extended to modes of dyadic interaction as suggested by the score and our interpretation thereof, as well as bodily dimensions and their effect on the perception of intersubjective musical phenomena. In fact, it is artistic exploration in this intersubjective realm that offers a special kind of creative potential: continuously devising artistic responses to the perpetually changing dynamics and challenges of a musical relationship means developing and expanding a shared aesthetic universe, i.e. the sum of our explicit and implicit knowledge as a duo, as well as our aesthetical experiences and their emotional traces.<sup>15</sup> The aim of an experimental duo practice is therefore not to arrive at

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<sup>14</sup> Catherine Laws, ‘Morton Feldman’s Late Piano Music: Experimentalism in Practice’, in *The Practice of Practising*, ed. Alessandro Cervino et al. (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2011), 289.

<sup>15</sup> Bart Vanhecke, ‘A New Path to Music: Experimental Exploration and Expression of an Aesthetic Universe’, in *Artistic Experimentation in Music: An Anthology*, ed. Darla Crispin and Bob Gilmore (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2011), 92.

concrete interpretative decisions as effectively as possible, but – following Catherine Laws’s definition above – to sharpen the ability to productively deal with the contingencies of interplay.

The rehearsals were documented by means of audio and video recordings, to enable a holistic analysis of the multi-layered interaction dynamics, which was essential for the research aim. The collaborative rehearsal process was analysed and reflected upon through sessions of stimulated recall. These sessions, which were interspersed throughout the rehearsals, involved both performers watching the recorded material together and analysing it using the qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) HyperRESEARCH for Open Coding. This analytical approach, drawn from grounded theory,<sup>16</sup> involved applying descriptive labels (codes) and annotations to selected video sequences by timecode. Beyond the discursive output of this method in the form of codes and annotations, the stimulated recall sessions were rather closely interwoven with the artistic practice. Not only were the analytical insights continually incorporated into new rounds of rehearsals within the practice–reflection loop, by prompting questions or resulting in new rehearsal strategies. Rather, the jointly developed approach to the material, the special form of shared listening, of paying attention to the same phenomena, of sharing experiences and negotiating precise readings and meanings, and above all formulating shared values in relation to interplay eventually proved to be vital extensions of the actual practice, blending into each other based on a reflexive attitude.

### *Sette Duo* (1993–2007) by Maurizio Pisati: Instrumental Music Theatre?

The studies discussed in this article focused on the *Sette Duo* by the Italian composer Maurizio Pisati. This collection comprises seven duos for guitar and various instruments, which were originally part of the instrumental opera *Theatre of Dawn*, but were also published as independent concert works. Each duo features the guitar alongside a different instrument, including the viola, voice, double bass recorder, double bass, saxophone, bass clarinet, and percussion. Pisati understands his composing process as ‘research of sound’,<sup>17</sup> and he deals with the individual instruments, the relationship between them, and treatment of sonic affordances in very nuanced ways, while pushing the performers to the limits of sound production and instrumental technique. The guitar part of the duos is in fact inspired by Pisati’s *Sette Studi* for solo guitar, which are characterized by a search for new sounds on the guitar, using an improvisational approach and concerned with ‘internal (inner) sonorities of the

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<sup>16</sup> See Anselm Strauss and Juliet M. Corbin, *Basics of Qualitative Research: Grounded Theory Procedures and Techniques* (Newbury Park: Sage, 1990).

<sup>17</sup> Preface to the score: Maurizio Pisati, *Theatre of Dawn* (Milan: Casa Ricordi, 2007).

instrument’.<sup>18</sup> In these studies, Pisati treats the guitar in a highly idiosyncratic manner, without using any external objects or modifications, but rather exploring intrinsic yet non-standard tonal properties of the instrument. This results in often very quiet and delicate sounds, as well as dense and rhythmically complex motifs. Tremolo and *tremolando* techniques, various forms of *glissandi*, muted notes, harmonics, tapping and other percussive effects, and squeals produced by scratching the strings with fingernails, together produce a rich palette of sounds and timbres.

In a process spanning 14 years, Pisati transformed each of these solo guitar studies into a duo with another instrument – seven different ones – as part of his opera *Theatre of Dawn*. The guitar part was modified and reworked to sonically relate with and create timbral references to the respective partner instrument. This kind of timbral exploration and evocation is reminiscent of the chamber music of George Crumb, especially his duo set *Mundus Canis* for guitar and various percussion instruments, which also was featured in one of the case studies that formed the research project *The Musical Dyad*. On the level of interplay, but especially in dealing with sound quality, the percussion part in *Mundus Canis* effectively serves as a catalyst for specific characteristics of the guitar. Similarly, Pisati creates very distinctive timbral relations between the respective instruments in the musical material of each of the *Sette Duo*. However, the duos to some extent still share a coherent compositional style, as well as multiple cross references to each other, which also enabled a comparative approach.

In the programme notes, the composer describes *Theatre of Dawn* as a ‘fantasy theatre’ in which the music captures the indefinable moment between night and day in the northern Italian Alps: In this mystical hour, seven ‘spirits’ of alpine legends meet in an abandoned mountain house, each of which is portrayed by one of the seven duos. Their characters are built on abstract associations like ‘nightmare’, ‘winter’ or ‘danger’ or hint at specific storylines from the legends. The dramatic content is conveyed without any words, but with by hand gestures, signs and sounds, which strongly corresponds with the genre of instrumental music theatre. In the theatre version, an emphasis on gestures as a paramount expressive element is reinforced by performance instructions for the guitarist, to be placed behind a screen while their hands are being filmed and projected onto it. Pisati considers the movements required to produce a certain sound or musical gesture an integral part of the piece: ‘The guitar is *the* theatre stage: the hands’ dance generates the music’.<sup>19</sup> Understanding the duos as instrumental music theatre served as a stimulus for our interpretative process as well as concrete experiments.

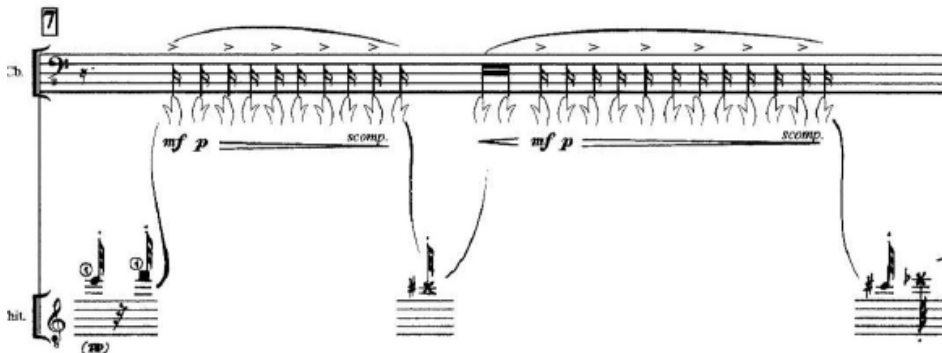
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<sup>18</sup> Maurizio Pisati and Elena Casoli, ‘Largo teso: The Seven Studies for guitar by Maurizio Pisati’, in *Proceedings of The 21st Century Guitar Conference 2019 & 2021*, ed. R. Torres, A. Brandon and J. Noble, <https://digitalcommons.du.edu/twentyfirst-century-guitar/vol1/iss1/4>, 19.

<sup>19</sup> Pisati and Casoli, ‘Largo teso’, 21.

The concept of instrumental music theatre developed around 1960 and is rooted in the efforts of composers such as Schnebel, Kagel, Berio, Ligeti and Stockhausen, to foreground the underlying *processes* of music making, of *producing* tones, sounds and noises. As Pittenger puts it: ‘Instrumental music theatre is music that makes the drama of performance fully intentional. Its material is both visual and acoustic, including the physical gestures of instrumental performance as well as the many relationships between and among musicians, audience members, the score, the stage, and, of course, the sound. It reclaims the physicality – the actuality – of music-making’.<sup>20</sup> This expanded concept of performance is largely applicable to the *Sette Duo* in terms of their strong emphasis on gestures and sound production, which makes them ideally suited as a means of exploring these performative spheres, but also, building on this, the here-mentioned multifaceted relationships inherent in duo performance.

According to Kagel, ‘movement is the fundamental element of instrumental theatre, and it is therefore considered during musical composition: on stage, movement becomes the essential distinction as opposed to the static nature of normal musical performance. The use of movement must be considered equally as the creation of a relationship between musical space and real space’.<sup>21</sup> In the *Sette Duo*, some performative movements and gestures are already preconceived at the level of notation, while others arise during execution and performance. The duos *Odolghes* and *Samblana*, for example, contain special playing techniques such as percussive effects and complex sequences on the double bass or guitar, for which hand symbols are used to support the playing instruction (Figures 1 and 2).

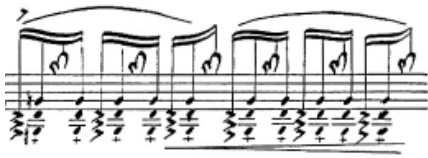


**Figure 1.** *Odolghes* for double bass and guitar, percussive effects on the finger board of the double bass.

<sup>20</sup> Elise Pittenger, *Visible Music: Instrumental Music Theatre Shaping Sight and Sound in Instrumental Music* (Doctoral diss., McGill University, 2010), 5.

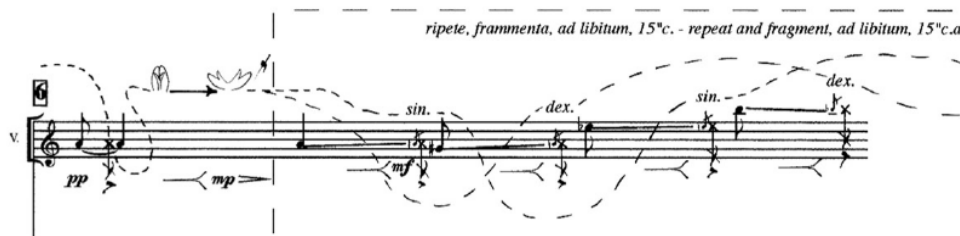
<sup>21</sup> Mauricio Kagel, *Tam-Tam: monologues et dialogues sur la musique* (Paris: C. Bourgois, 1983), 107.





**Figure 2.** *Samblana* for saxophone and guitar, percussion sequence across the guitar corpus.

Duo *Yemeles*, for voice and guitar, stands out even more in this respect since expressive hand movements for the singer are also noted in detail in the score as a continuous element of their part (Figure 3).



**Figure 3.** *Yemeles* for voice and guitar, notation of the singer's hand movements.

Central to the experimental practice rehearsing the *Sette Duo* was the aim of finding ways to artistically work with the physical or bodily dimensions of the music, in the sense of an aesthetic relational embodiment. How can performative gestures become musical acts that facilitate relation between the two performers? To create different qualities of embodied musical relation, we conducted experiments such as adopting different positionings towards each other in the space, conducting each other, doing interpersonal exercises for integrative awareness and presence with and without our instruments,<sup>22</sup> pantomimic playing and physical touch. Drawing on two of the duos as examples, I will now elaborate on how the realm of embodied relation resonates with other expressive parameters in terms of musical togetherness and how an experimental approach to the physical dimension of the performance guided us towards a relational interpretation of the *Sette Duo*.

## Embodied Relation

A striking example of embodied relation was the significance that gestures took on in terms of timing and phrasing in *Odolghes* for double bass and guitar, on which I collaborated with Margarethe Maierhofer-Lischka. The hand and body movements that were necessary for the sound production occupied considerable space within our interpretational work. In addition,

<sup>22</sup> These exercises were based on ideas found in: Experience Bryon and Paul Zacharek, *Integrative Performance: Practice and Theory for the Interdisciplinary Performer* (London: Routledge, 2014).

references between the voices could be observed, consisting of corresponding gestures that produced different sounds, on the one hand and similar sound characteristics that were produced in very different ways on the respective instruments on the other. Now, how could such gestural relations be enhanced, thus transforming individual playing gestures into a shared expressive language? And how would that affect our musical interplay?

Our experimentation led us to pantomime playing which, in a way, escalates the idea of instrumental theatre: we performed a silent version without instruments, in order to bring the playing gestures into focus. Mauricio Kagel had already used this as an element of theatricalization in his early works of instrumental theatre, such as in *Sonant (1960/ ...)* for guitar, harp, double bass and membranophones, where in some of the movements the instrumentalists are offered the option to mimic the performance without actually producing sounds.

This is explored in Video 1. As can be seen in the excerpt, this created a strong visual impression, transforming the gestures into dance-like, choreographic symbols. However, it also triggered different perceptual processes of ourselves, each other, and our interaction. Considering the close connection between ‘auditory, visual and motor modalities in performance, imagination and perception’,<sup>23</sup> the silent execution entailed drawing on our auditory imagination and bodily memory. It also transformed our listening since we became much more aware of our own and each other’s breathing and started listening with our whole bodies. The quality of our gestures became more fluent, sometimes almost indistinct, since there were no points of contact with the instruments, no resistance from a string, for example. On the other hand, the gestures also became more pronounced because without the music as a mediator, movement and other (bodily) sounds were now the main level of communication. This offered the opportunity to internally co-experience and empathize with each other’s movements, to interpret those movement qualities in an embodied way and incorporate them in our own bodily actions. The jointly created, shared movement material and shared bodily knowledge emerged through a process of embodied listening, as well as through reciprocally perceiving and incorporating each other’s movements in our own. This can thus be understood as a kinaesthetically coupled, embodied experience, which could then flow back into the musical performance: here in fact, the sound essentially mediates the unfolding empathetic process as an additional semantic level.

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<sup>23</sup> Clemens Wöllner, ed., *Body, Sound and Space in Music and Beyond: Multimodal Explorations*. (London: Routledge, 2017), 76.

<https://vimeo.com/842637202/db2687f518>

**Video 1.** Pantomime version of *Odolghes* (excerpt), performed by Margarethe Maierhofer-Lischka, double bass, and Jessica Kaiser, guitar.

This process also increased our sensitivity towards the duration, direction and dynamic quality of our movements, as we experienced them in space and time. David Epstein associates the subjective experience of time and duration ('integral time')<sup>24</sup> with the perception of structured motion through time. The dimension of bodily movement makes this even more explicit: our gestural interaction was a means of conveying our otherwise elusive individual temporal experience, aligning subjective differences in perception, and instead shaping a shared perception of time. In other words, musical timing and phrasing was mediated through gesture, reflecting reflective goals and thus resulting in a shared expressive quality.

This is evidenced in multiple instances in Video 2, which presents a run-through recorded towards the end of the rehearsals. What stands out here in particular are shared bodily impulses (see 0:44, 1:24, 3:57), expressive extra gestures (Margarethe 1:11, Jessica 2:12) that enhance sonic events, as well as an overall increased bodily involvement in each other's movements and sound, indicating an empathetic, embodied co-experience. In our joint analysis of the material, we assessed them as shared gestures happening *between* the performers. Although sometimes not necessarily synchronous or otherwise explicitly coordinated, they show a coherence in the quality of movement and thus create continuity in the musical dialogue as the result of an intersubjectively experienced bodily presence. This ultimately manifests itself in the form of enriched acoustic nuances of interplay, such as the tight interlocking of sounds and musical gestures (e.g. 1:59, 3:17) or enhanced resonance effects (e.g. 2:05, 2:29, 4:10).

<https://vimeo.com/842594457/b2ba2d8ba5>

**Video 2.** Shared expressive quality through embodied relation in *Odolghes*, performed by Margarethe Maierhofer-Lischka, double bass, and Jessica Kaiser, guitar.

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In the duo *Ey de Net* for percussion and guitar, Manuel Alcaraz Clemente and I experimented with the experience of touch as another way of relating through aesthetic embodiment. A central aspect in this duo was to overcome the apparent separateness of the two voices through creating a shared expressive language. The piece is organized such that the two instruments predominantly play in alternation (see Figure 4). Apart from brief overlaps at transitional

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<sup>24</sup> David Epstein, *Shaping Time: Music, the Brain, and Performance* (New York: Schirmer, 1995), 10.

points, it offers only few and short musical points of contact between the individual parts, therefore challenging us to nevertheless find different levels of connection and create something shared.

**Figure 4.** *Ey de net*, alternating, only briefly overlapping parts on pages 1–3.

After experimenting with various degrees of eye contact and different listening settings by way of varying spatial dispositions, as well as placing visual and/or acoustic barriers between us, we ended up in a back-to-back position, sharing one piano bench. Touching and being touched, and moving and being moved are of course terms highly charged with meaning, in the context of musical experience as in the wider experience of everyday life. We say that music touches our souls or moves us emotionally. There are also phenomenological approaches that take this quite literally and argue that the physical vibrations of sound actually touch and penetrate into

our resonant bodies. In this respect, as Høffding notes, '[i]t is not a metaphor to say that the musicians' bodies touch each other through the sound they produce'.<sup>25</sup> But what happens when we make this embodied relation more explicit and touch each other physically during performance?

The experience of physical closeness and touch is fairly familiar within another duo situation, namely four-handed piano playing. In fact, there are also a few guitar duos that attempt four-handed playing on one instrument, albeit often in a more humorous context. This involves even closer playing positions, such as one player sitting on the other's laps (Bruck/Ross Duo), or – more commonly – placed one standing behind the other sitting and intertwined in what looks like an embrace. In both cases, piano and guitar, sharing a single instrument may well generate a high level of intimacy, but it is also associated with a considerable degree of musical interdependence and physical as well as technical limitations, as reported by Haddon and Hutchinson. Moreover, at least in more classical repertoire, a straightforward distribution of registers often implies the musical goal of having the two musicians function as a unit rather than as individual players.<sup>26</sup> Leaning on each other back-to-back evoked not only a similar intimacy, but also a particular sense of stability and trust. Yet it was still possible for us each to keep our own space and, literally as well as metaphorically, to envisage different directions.

The position allowed us to feel each other's movements, while visual information was limited to peripheral areas. Bodily motion in interaction with musical instruments shapes sound and is integral to our experience of music. Thus, not only seeing and hearing, but feeling each other's sound-producing movements through our own bodies opens up yet another level of sense-making through embodied musical expressivity. Kinaesthetically co-experiencing the motion quality of the shake of a hand or the rebound of a stroke, provides us with additional information about how a movement is planned, and structured in time and space, allowing us to comprehend its timing or how it integrates within the musical phrase. Above all, it tells us about the expressive intention and not 'just' the result, which may also be dissipated by biomechanical limitations or the physics of the instrument.

Physical touch not only gives us the opportunity to experience the other, but also to be in contact with the other's experience. We can feel the other person's bodily state in terms of temperature, muscle tone or energy, and can sense how our bodies relate in terms of pressure or friction. The experience of touch can therefore also vary in depth. It might even reach beyond the surface, revealing internal bodily mechanisms such as the rhythm and physical effects of

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<sup>25</sup> Høffding, *A Phenomenology of Musical Absorption*, 237.

<sup>26</sup> Elizabeth Haddon and Mark Aled Hutchinson, 'Empathy in Piano Duet Rehearsal and Performance', *Empirical Musicology Review*, 10/2 (2015), 140–53, at 141.

breathing. However, this also seems to be extendable in the other direction: while playing together, we sometimes just barely touched each other or even lost touch for a brief moment, but still a tactile sensitivity remained, and it was as if we could still feel each other.

Being moved by each other while performing reveals information about the quality of a performed movement, providing at least some experience of a movement that is not our own, which allows us to better understand and respond to the other's musical intention. On the other hand, this also enhances the perception of one's own quality of touch and movement. Merleau-Ponty highlighted the reversibility of the touching–touched situation.<sup>27</sup> The passive component of being touched while touching the other also evokes the foreign in one's own experience, through which an otherness in oneself can be discovered that also makes one intimately acquainted with the otherness in the other.<sup>28</sup> Acoustically and tactilely experiencing the other's embodied musical expressivity in a sensually intertwined way in the back-to-back position hence facilitates entering each other's experiential world. At the same time, I not only perceive the other as otherness, but his expression as affected by our intersubjective and intercorporeal we-consciousness. The empathetic awareness unfolding through the musical interplay in combination with touch can be understood as a bodily lived relationality. The musicians 'participate in, and thus can form and transform each other's sense-making'<sup>29</sup> through embodied engagement in the jointly created and shaped musical environment, through developing a shared knowledge that is constituted in interactions and interactional histories.

As the different nuances and intensities of relation in the compared versions in Video 3 show, the back-to-back position leads to considerable changes in perception and performance. Particularly striking is the refined timing and spacing of the transitions, which goes hand in hand with a careful balance, not in the sense of equal volume, but of dynamic permeability through clear articulation and giving appropriate space and duration to each other's musical phrases and gestures. Manuel describes these transitions as 'energy conductors': A stream of energy runs between the voices and must be kept up at all times and from both ends, as a 'shared energy'. Otherwise, the piece falls apart and the voices remain separate. He further remarks that he 'has the illusion of continuing to hear the guitar in the sections where he plays alone'.

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<sup>27</sup> Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Rudolf Böhme, *Phänomenologie der Wahrnehmung* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2010), 118.

<sup>28</sup> See Höfding, *A Phenomenology of Musical Absorption*, 243.

<sup>29</sup> Andrea Schiavio and Hanne De Jaegher, 'Participatory Sense-Making in Joint Musical Practice', in *The Routledge Companion to Embodied Music Interaction*, ed. Micheline Lesaffre, Pieter-Jan Maes, and Marc Leman (New York: Routledge, 2017), 31–39, at 33.

<https://vimeo.com/842611618/7c0592dc52>

**Video 3.** Opening section of *Ey de net* in two different configurations: conventional set-up vs. back-to-back position. Manuel Alcaraz Clemente, percussion, and Jessica Kaiser, guitar.

The full back-to-back run-through in Video 4 shows how passing on the musical flux through transitions and maintaining the feeling of togetherness in the solo moments ultimately resulted in a more nuanced phrasing, as well as a kind of meta-groove that runs through the piece, indicating tight connectedness and a shared presence in time despite the alternating structure. Feeling each other and (literally) being moved by each other is not merely bound to the tactile-kinaesthetic realm but expands the idea of the lived body to a multimodal unit of touch, movement, sound, and musical phrasing. Thus, it enables a genuinely intersubjective understanding and expressivity.

<https://vimeo.com/842616544/756a40cca0>

**Video 4.** Embodied relation and togetherness in *Ey de net*, performed by Manuel Alcaraz Clemente, percussion and Jessica Kaiser, guitar.

## Conclusion

The embodied relation between the two musicians in a duo fundamentally shapes their aesthetic experience. Musical intersubjectivity and the way the two make sense of each other's musical actions is essentially grounded in their bodily relations and interactions. Furthermore, these bodily relations and interactions are themselves effective dynamics in developing a shared understanding and expression of the (blended, consolidated, ambiguous, divergent, contrastive) musical relationship.

The insights gained from the experiments described above in the form of a deepened awareness of and sensitivity for the tactility inherent in making music together, as well as a shared bodily knowledge and expressivity significantly influenced our interpretative choices. An important point here was also to understand how the relational experience intertwines with other, more conventional aspects or values of interpretation, such as sonority, timing, and phrasing. In this way, the idea of a successful interpretation could go beyond the question of historical, stylistic, analytical, technical, or expressive viability,<sup>30</sup> and include the relational level as an essential component. Through relational interpretation, a heightened sensitivity towards musical togetherness can emerge, incorporating all these aspects.

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<sup>30</sup> John Rink, ed., *The Practice of Performance: Studies in Musical Interpretation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 257.

Furthermore, it also inspired an extended performative approach: The embodied approach gave rise to performative means that emphasize the physical component of musical interaction, such as consciously working with spatial relations, physical proximity and distance, or movement. It quickly became clear that these were not only a means to an end in finding an interpretation but were to be assessed as integral components of the interpretation. This eventually led to an individual performative concept for each duo, actively involving the musicians' bodies in the aesthetic activity, which has been implemented in the concert performance of the *Sette Duo* at the 2021 SONify! Festival for Music and Artistic Research in Graz. Of course, such performative practices have also been explored by a number of composers in their works, not only in the context of instrumental theatre as in Kagel's works, but also beyond. To give a few examples: Spatialization effects in the form of specific positioning of the musicians are already known from the sixteenth-century Venetian polychoral style. As for more recent music, George Crumb in his work *Echoes of Time and the River* (1967) has the orchestra musicians process through the concert hall. Also worth mentioning here are the pieces *Next to Beside Besides* (2003–2015) by Simon Steen Andersen, which deal quite radically with smaller-scale choreographic elements of performance. Based on the piece for cello solo *Beside Besides* (*Next to Beside Besides* #0), the series of solo pieces for different instruments are choreographic translations of the original, applied to each of the other instruments and their idiosyncrasies. As transcriptions of performance movements, they follow a (pure) physical logic, while the sound is the result of the movement sequences. The solo pieces are to be performed in any desired combinations, with the musicians lined up next to each other. Optionally, they can be performed with click track, which already indicates that the nature of 'interplay' here is very much predetermined by the composition. In fact, it might become a parallel performance in which the underlying connection between the voices is prefabricated and does not necessarily result from the interaction.

This was, however, crucial for our approach, which actively shifts the relational agency more towards the performers' sphere and the dimension of their interaction. Experimenting with relational parameters was integral to challenging the notion that interpretation is a mere representation of a predetermined relationship as presented by the composed material.<sup>31</sup> Instead, experimentation opened up a space for constructive relational exploration through musical interplay, providing an opportunity to discover how we can relate to each other or, perhaps more interestingly, how we *want to* relate to each other. Not only does this enable us to better understand ourselves and others but to build and strengthen our relational values, resulting in more meaningful and fulfilling interpersonal relationships.

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<sup>31</sup> See Paulo de Assis, *Logic of Experimentation: Rethinking Music Performance through Artistic Research* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2018), 19.