



Sviðslistadeild
Samtímadansbraut

Echo

Critical Reflection

Greinargerð til BA-prófs í samtímadansi

Pauline Van Nuffel

Vorönn 2018

Sviðslistadeild

Samtímadansbraut

Echo

Critical Reflection

Greinargerð til BA-prófs í samtímadansi

Pauline Van Nuffel

Kt.: 080497-4159

Leiðbeinandi: Ásgerður G. Gunnarsdóttir

Vorönn 2018

Abstract

This paper is a critical reflection about an artistic research I did about the echo. In this process I have researched the echo through movement, sound and voice in collaboration with a musician and composer Ingibjörg Elsa Turchi. The creation process were six weeks which we spent mainly in a dance studio researching by improvisation techniques what the echo meant to us and how we wanted to create a performance with it. Our main inspiration sources were John Cage, Jan Martens and Margret Bjarnadottir. They were our guidelines throughout the research on the echo in movement, sound and voice. In this critical reflection I write about my research, both theoretical as practical, the creation process and the performance. For this theoretical part I also researched the social and political aspect of the echo. A very recent and well known example of the social aspect of the echo is the #metoo movement which started with the twitter post of Alyssa Milano suggesting that have suffered from sexual harassment should support by writing #metoo which created a huge echo on social media in less than a day. The result was a 15 minutes solo dance performance by Pauline Van Nuffel together with live bass guitar music played by Ingibjörg. We concentrated mainly on repetition and the echo of it, which made the piece end in a storm of movement and sounds.

Research

I have researched the echo through sound, movement and voice in function of the end result which was a dance performance. For the theoretical research I have also studied the social and political aspect of the echo. I will discuss every element separately, I will write about what interests me about that element, who inspires me within this field, how did I use it in my practice and which roll it had in the performance.

I started researching the echo because I got fascinated by it when I was sleeping on the glacier or close by. The sound of the glacier breaking was very impressive and even when the action of the ice breaking was finished you could still here it, like a very loud thunder. Some minutes after the happening I could see the waves in the water arriving at our beach where were watching the calving ice. Once I decided that I wanted to work with the echo I started to research it in many aspects, such as movement, sound, voice, space and also social and political. For this research I wanted to gather the elements that interest me at the moment, which were for example the #metoo movement, and the climate change. Because both of the themes are very present in my live.

Definition of the echo:

- 1) A repetition of sound produced by the reflection of sound waves from a wall, mountain, or other obstructing surface. ¹
- 2) A detail that is similar to and makes you remember something else. ²
- 3) Any repetition or close imitation, as of the ideas or opinions of another. ³

I wanted to work with the echo in sounds, how does it work and which effect can it have. How can the sound influence movement and dance and how does it change the atmosphere? I wanted to create sounds / music myself on stage, both with the bass guitar as with other materials that I wanted to use on stage.

¹ Echo, "Dictionary.com". Houghton Mifflin Company, published: 2002, accessed: March 10, 2018, <http://www.dictionary.com/browse/echo>.

² Echo, "Cambridge Dictionary". Cambridge University Press, accessed: March 10, 2018, <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/echo>.

³ Echo, "Dictionary.com". Houghton Mifflin Company, published: 2002, accessed: March 10, 2018, <http://www.dictionary.com/browse/echo>.

For this I'm inspired by John Cage. In his performance 'Water Walk'⁴ it was very interesting for me to see how much it is as well a dance as a full performance. He has many tools on stage and needs to walk from one to the other one, instead of the traditional sitting or standing statically with an instrument on one place. It inspired me to make sound by just walking and making simple movements, in function of the sound with the help of other material. It is interesting to see how he is using the echo of the sound in 'Water Walk' because each sound may be short but there is still something left from it so it becomes music. He makes music out of materials that we would never see as music instruments because most of them are daily used object, such as a water boiler, an iron, ...

In the beginning Ingibjörg, the bass guitarist and composer who was live performing with me on stage, and me tried to experiment with making sounds together on the bass guitar by using different tools, such as a glass, a pen, some metal tools, ... But then we decided to just use it as a practice and as warming up to enjoy music but it would not be a part of the piece. The reason is that it influenced too much the atmosphere and music throughout the rest of the piece which was not fitting to our ideas. It created a more research-showing atmosphere, because it was a lot of trying out, and she didn't have the time to really teach me how to play the guitar so it would be less of a performance and more a research presentation.

This gave me the idea to explore more the sound of aluminium foil and the possibilities towards what to do with it. When we started working with the sounds of the aluminium foil, this was more technically a challenge. Ideally we wanted to have the sound of me walking on top of the foil live recorded and Ingibjörg would live edit it. But this was not possible for this setting due to technical reasons. The final solution was to record the sound on beforehand and have it already edited and play it during the performance. It amplified the sound that I made by walking on the aluminium foil. The sound would be played again after I would step of the foil, with the idea of that it is still echoing. Then towards the end of the piece the sound of the aluminium foil would played again and it would be helping Ingibjörg to build up for the last chapter of the piece.

The sound was slightly edited, to me it referred to a glacier sound, ice breaking and falling. Which was a subtle link towards the reason why I choose this topic because glacier sounds create an echo which I experienced myself. The foil made an abstract sound, the audience

⁴ John Cage, "John Cage "Water Walk"," You Tube, pulished: October 2, 2014, accessed: March 10, 2018. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gXOIkT1-QWY>.

could recognise it because they saw it live on stage but when it was edited it may be sounding more to other things that created memories for each individual and thus for me. Which is also one of the definitions of the echo, a detail that makes you remember something else. I like to have this underlying elements in a performance.

I wanted to research what the voice means to me in dance. Is the voice the echo of the movement or opposite? It is the first time that I include the voice in my own work. I wanted to start from the beginning with very basic research on the effect of using the voice on my movement and in changing the atmosphere. I started with using text, so rather spoken words in a context then sounds or anything else. At this moment my biggest interest on using the voice is what it does to my brain and if I would start moving different because of that. I tried out together with Ingibjörg to talk about our growing up and how it affected our lives, or things that happened in our lives that made an impact on it. But around the middle of the process we decided that it was such a big topic on its own that we would need to spend too much time on training and trying out things with the voice and text. It felt like we would need to keep it for a different piece. So I decided to use the voice in my warming ups. I used humming while I was doing some kind of rocking movements when lying with my back on the ground to feel the connection with all body parts. This movement is something I learned during my dance studies in Antwerp in connection to a Laban / Bartenieff ⁵method but I added humming to it as extra element to connect and distract, it makes the exercise more complex. I did this warming up in function of the movements that I used in my piece. I did movements where I always initiate with one part of the body and the rest of the body follows. In order to do this, I needed to be very relaxed and I needed to have my whole body very connected and ready to move. This warming up exercise with the voice worked the best for me because it is so strongly focused on the connections within the warm up before I start dancing.

⁵ "Bartenieff Fundamentals and Developmental Movement Patterns," Laban-analyses.org, accessed: March 10, 2018, <http://www.laban-analyses.org/jeffrey/2004-Bartenieff-fundamentals-Developmental-movement/summary-of-concepts.htm>.

I watched online a piece of Margret Bjarnadottir called ‘Cinematic’⁶ to get to know more methods of using the voice. She uses spoken text and at the same time she moves. The moves are improvised and are the ones that come to her mind the first.

I got inspired by the way she uses humour and how well the words went along with the dance. Her honesty on stage intrigued me even though she might be doing that through words, I wanted to use that through movement. Which I will describe more in the movement chapter. Still I had many questions about humour in dance, laughing could be a kind of echo in my piece. But at that moment I didn’t feel strong enough to bring humour in my dance.

To decide on what I was going to do movement wise I was inspired by Jan Martens⁷ way of choreographing and moving. Jan Martens interests me because the way he uses repetition and his performances are often very physical. He creates a firm atmosphere by dancers who are doing very big repetitive movements and exhaust themselves with it. To create the movements, I started with exploring some similar repetitive movements as Jan Martens and many others do (for e.g. Katrín Gunnarsdóttir). The idea is that I make the definition of the ‘echo’ visible, which means that I would do a repetitive movement and change it slowly.

Later I also started to try out the echo in the body in a different way. By giving one impulse with one of my body parts and experience what the echo of that impulse was. Except for that, I’m movement wise also curious to how it can make sound or a rhythm for e.g. the breathing which becomes louder when I got more exhausted. This exhaustion also affected the movement of my body and has a strong effect on the audience. People get taken by the speed of the movements and when it suddenly stops they experience an echo.

Earlier in this paper I wrote about the honesty in movement. It means in my case that I made some rules and I want to be as right as possible. I wanted to start always the movement starting from one body part initiation, so I was very concentrated in doing that and being honest to myself about if I really felt the echo of that impulse or if I made it happen.

In order to make the echo as clear and as visible as possible. When the piece goes on, the rules change and become less strict and it is more about losing control. I was thinking about the moment that you don’t know where the echo is coming from and it makes you confused.

⁶ “Walk + talk 27 Margrét Bjarnadóttir,” Oralsite.be accessed: March 10, 2018, http://oralsite.be/pages/Margret_Bjarnadottir_cinematic.

⁷ Jan Martens, “DNAEurope - JAN MARTENS - REF15,” You Tube, published: Februari 18, 2016, accessed: March 13, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ySU2R7iC89E>.

I think you can find the echo in many things but for me the social aspect of the echo is important. It is interesting how people affect each other, how one person or event can start a whole movement in the rest of the world. Of course this is a lot about politics, but we can also see it in social cases. Such as the #metoo movement: for years and years sexual abuse and harassment is a problem in the arts field and for all those years' people paid very little attention to it. But suddenly one big case appears and a whole movement starts. "The movement began on social media after a call to action by the actor Alyssa Milano, one of Weinstein's most vocal critics, who wrote: "If all the women who have been sexually harassed or assaulted wrote 'Me too' as a status, we might give people a sense of the magnitude of the problem."

Within days, millions of women – and some men – used Twitter, Facebook and Instagram to disclose the harassment and abuse they have faced in their own lives."⁸

Creation process

A big part of my research was spent on finding out what specific aspects of the echo interests me the most and how I wanted to work with that. Once I decided to work with 'echo' it became very broad, I could see an echo in everything that happened around me, on the street, in the shop... I needed to eliminate many ideas but first I wanted to try out as many as possible.

Before we started the practices I wrote down improvisation exercises that I wanted to do together with my musician. It started with simple ones such as: I would dance and Ingibjörg would follow the movements with sound, and opposite. This was an exercise to see how we affect each other with what we do. We maybe should have tried this more and in different ways. We did this exercise only in the first rehearsals but then we stopped doing it because we felt like it was not teaching us much or it was not very useful. Only at the end, almost the last day before the performance, we decided to use that method in the performance. So Ingibjörg on stage used my movements as an impulse to play notes on the guitar. In the beginning we tried out that I would play with her on the guitar, so I would feel more connected to the sound. We started the first improvisation sessions like that and then Ingibjörg would continue

⁸ Nadia Khomami, "#MeToo: how a hashtag became a rallying cry against sexual harassment," The Guardian, published: October 20, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/oct/20/women-worldwide-use-hashtag-metoo-against-sexual-harassment>.

improvising with what we had created and I would start to play with repetition. In general, we had many ideas and it was hard to choose which ones we wanted to develop further and which ones were less interesting for us. I would like to improve in choice making, there were some exercises that we only tried once, we didn't take the time to develop it further and work on it more. The choice needed to be made on what is important and what not, which exercises do I need to try out more and when do I need to go on with something else?

Repetition was from the beginning an important element to my dance, the echo is defined to be a changing repetition starting from a source and being reflected by a surface. I started with repetitions that would slowly change, slowdown, speedup, ... But even in this there are endless ways to work with repetition so a lot of dedication went to that. I decided that the most important thing about the repetitive move would be the impulse, what makes the movement start. I worked mainly with using my legs as the start, the point that initiates the movement and the arms and upper body as the ones that show the effect of that movement. The next step I did in the creation of the piece was working on the development of the repetition. I researched more how the legs could push and initiate the move and the upper body follows but with the least muscular tension as possible and this would make me travel on the stage. It felt like the echo was traveling inside my body and it was very interesting for me to work with it, different than my usual habits of moving, where my legs are less involved. Then I started to look for more than one impulse each time, so I would give more than one move in the legs which would affect my upper body in a different way. It is a bit messier, less controlled. Like this I tried to accelerate and create a storm with movements, to then come to an end and have the silence after the storm. I wished I spent more time in defining this part and work on the precision and clarity of the movements, so the audience could see very clear the echo traveling inside the body. I had a hard time to rehearse on my own in the studio when Ingibjörg was not there, while I had a lot of dance material to practice. Maybe this would have made me feel more relaxed and confident during the performance.

During the creation process of the piece I didn't feel like I was the director and Ingibjörg was just doing what I would tell her. I really liked that it was a research for both of us and she was also learning something and coming with proposals. She had many ideas and things she wanted to try out, it was very inspiring to work with her. But I also discovered that it is not easy to work with somebody, it is more difficult to schedule a rehearsal as she had so many projects. I ended up having way more rehearsals on my own than expected which was not

easy, the music was so important that it felt like I couldn't do much alone. But I worked on the movement parts that were set and planned what I wanted to try out with her when she was back. I really liked to work together with a musician who performed live with me on stage but I should have been more clear from the beginning how much I wanted her in the rehearsals and I should have made a schedule for the whole period from the beginning. I learned how important a good planning is and how important it is to make it together on advance.

Some visual images that came to my mind when I thought of the echo, is the ripples that appear when you throw a stone in the water. Or the echo of the ice braking and the waves that the ice creates in the water. This is another reason why I wanted work with aluminium foil, it refers to this image of the water. When you step on it the shape of the foil changes and light gets reflected in different directions. I liked the visual aspect that every step will leave a trace behind and that the stage will look different after the performance than before. Further it was interesting to explore the sound of the aluminium foil and the possibilities with that. I decided that the foil would be laying in front of the stage because the audience could see the effects of the foil the best from above.

For the lights I decided to work with 2 shadows on the back wall. In the beginning of this process I wanted to work with 2 other dancers, but that didn't work out. I started experimenting with the shadows on the wall and liked the effect of it. Depending on where I was in the space the audience could see one or two shadows, and suddenly one would appear or disappear when I was moving. It felt like another way to represent the echo. The atmosphere was comfortable for the audience to watch partly because Ingibjörg was sitting on a chair playing the bass guitar with warm lights on her. But that was the atmosphere that I wanted, I wanted to create a kind of wave that would take the audience on a small journey and into a little storm of movement and then on the calm ocean. For the lights and the space design I'm quite happy with how it was now for this short period of time we had to do all of this our self. I maybe would have liked to make it different if there was more time for it, I think I would have tried out the performance without the aluminium foil on the ground and maybe and maybe only a video of it. I wished we also had time to work more on the sound of the aluminium foil which was playing through the speakers. I would try out more different kind of sounds or I would like to find more sounds that would refer to glacier sounds.

The working method

We didn't establish a strict working method, every time was quite different. We didn't find a systematic way to start the rehearsal, sometimes we only had a very short time of working together, sometimes we had a long rehearsal. Only during the last sessions, I tried to introduce a warming up that we would do together, she would play on the bass guitar and I would warm up through movement. It is a point that I would like to improve for the next time that I would need to do something like this. I missed a warming up where we would come together with our minds into the rehearsal because we did already many other things that day and sometimes we started working without really knowing what we were doing or aiming for. Furthermore, we always did some improvisation sessions. The whole process was based on improvisation, both music and dance wise. We recorded always what we did by camera and watched it together and gave ourselves feedback. There was a lot of trial and error. We struggled a lot with how to get Ingibjörg more included in the performative part and how to make dance and music on the same level, instead of one supporting the other. But this was very difficult for us both, I feel like we didn't get where we wanted to, maybe the element missing here was time, to be able to try more. When we were creating this part I was thinking many times of an improvisation teacher I had in Antwerp where we also worked with live music. Her name is Agostina D'Alessandro, she works mainly with release technique, which was not where I was working on this time, but I tried to remember how we worked together with the musician. She always taught us not to work too much together with the musician, to go against the music. Because this practice was so in my brain it was hard for me to rethink it. Still I'm not sure what I should have done, I never like when it is romantic dance on romantic music for example but maybe for this piece it was needed to have a parallel line between dance and music. But because of this course and memory I had, we worked a lot around each of us creating our own echo's, so I would do it with dance and Ingibjörg with music and we would be more in our own worlds. I worked a lot with repetition and then it was trying out what kind of music and atmosphere was needed for that. This was a long and quite difficult process, we solved it by doing improvisation sessions over and over again to find the right music. At the end we used our first exercise we did, where my movement would be an impulse for Ingibjörg to play a note so there was an echo traveling between us.

Performance

I was quite nervous on the day of the performance, the general run the day before didn't go very well. I was very tense and it was hard to find out how to perform it and not just dance it. During the first performance I really tried to relax more and be less busy with the audience and with everything around me but trust more in myself and be strong in what I was doing. I felt like it was already a good improvement with the general run so I was happy with what we did. On the second performance I felt very tired and it felt impossible to do the whole 15 min, it was like I was drowning but trying to stay with the head above the water. Somehow people that saw both performances liked the second one much more. Maybe this state of pushing through made me also more released and just fighting for the end. Maybe I was thinking less about everything I was doing and that was needed. As always, I wished I would feel more comfortable in performing, I experience a very strange balance between enjoying to be watched, showing what I made and being so uncomfortable standing there. Sometimes I feel like I'm trying to hide myself on stage, it is scary to really be vulnerable and honest on stage, allow people to watch me doing my most precious thing. I guess it is training that would help.

What I miss when I watch my piece on video is context, if you don't know that it is about echo than it looks like just many movements in a row and it is not really clear about what it is or what I want to say with it. It is a struggle within me, because I don't want to make a piece where the story or theme is too obvious, that is just my personal taste. But I also don't like it when it looks like a person is just moving because he/she is good in it. There need to be something in it, and I didn't find it yet in my own piece. I liked the connection between me and Ingibjörg it worked well, but I think we could have developed it further as well. I liked manly the end of the performance because it feels like it is going somewhere and it is not without reason that I am moving but still there was something missing.

Conclusion

It was a difficult process, I had a hard time dealing with stress, making decisions and keep on being motivated and inspired enough to work. It was very good for me to work together with Ingibjörg she is a very inspiring person and musician, I am very happy that we kept working together till the end and that we could perform live on stage the two of us. I had very good moments and I learned many things. Dance wise I learned that I should stick to a few movements or methods and develop them as much as possible. I should find the

performativity inside my performance and the confidence. I think that I made something challenging for me, which is something I'm happy about. I really tried to use fast movements and go till the end of my energy, which is normally something I never do to myself but only when somebody else asks me to do that. I tried to master the dance material and the technique of it what worked out very good. I'm happy about the collaboration with the music and I think we succeeded to create an echo with that. At the end I really enjoyed the performing itself and feel the audience watching the end result. I felt like I danced with passion for dance on stage and that I was proud of what we created in this small period of time.

Bibliografie :

Bartenieff Fundamentals and Developmental Movement Patterns,” Laban-analyses.org, accessed: March 10, 2018, <http://www.laban-analyses.org/jeffrey/2004-Bartenieff-fundamentals-Developmental-movement/summary-of-concepts.htm>.

Echo, “Dictionary.com”. Houghton Mifflin Company, published: 2002, accessed: March 10, 2018, <http://www.dictionary.com/browse/echo>.

Echo, “Cambridge Dictionary”. Cambridge University Press, accessed: March 10, 2018, <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/echo>.

Jan Martens, “DNAEurope - JAN MARTENS - REF15,” You Tube, published: Februari 18, 2016, accessed: March 13, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ySU2R7iC89E>.

John Cage, “John Cage “Water Walk”,” You Tube, published: October 2, 2014, accessed: March 10, 2018. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gXOIkT1-QWY>.

Nadia Khomami, “#MeToo: how a hashtag became a rallying cry against sexual harassment,” The Guardian, published: October 20, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/oct/20/women-worldwide-use-hashtag-metoo-against-sexual-harassment>.

“Walk + talk 27 Margrét Bjarnadóttir,” Oralsite.be accessed: March 10, 2018, http://oralsite.be/pages/Margret_Bjarnadottir_cinematic.

Concept text

Pauline Van Nuffel is a third year student at the Contemporary Dance Department at the Iceland Academy of the Arts. Pauline started her dance education in the Royal Conservatory of Antwerp during one and a half year and after continued in IAA where she will be graduating in June 2018.

In Echo, Pauline Van Nuffel and Ingibjörg Turchi, musician/composer, research the different relationship the echo has with sound, movement and space . How do these element affect each other and how can they make that visible? How can movement change the space and what is the effect of the music on movement and opposite? How can the echo travel insite the body?

Performers:

Dancer/ choreographer: Pauline Van Nuffel

Musician/Composer: Ingibjörg Elsa Turchi

Link to video:

<https://vimeo.com/258340831>