

Dance Techne: Kinetic Bodily Logos and Thinking in Movement

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Introduction

Though no one is likely to deny that dancing is a creative process, nevertheless, the production of “dance technique” is often understood as a laborious and mechanical process. The special strategy of the present article is to narrow the gap between “technique” and “thinking” in contemporary dance. In criticising technical attitudes and technisation in the production of dance technique, the article aims to develop a new concept, “dance techne”. Drawing on Maxine Sheets-Johnstone’s description of a kinetic bodily logos and Martin Heidegger’s notion of thinking and the ancient Greek term *techne*, the purpose is to interpret the Finnish dance teacher and professor Ervi Sirén’s method of teaching contemporary dance. First, I will show how the production of the dancer’s technique is regarded in modern and contemporary dance as a primarily technical operation. Next, I shall describe Maxine Sheets-Johnstone’s notion of thinking in movement improvisation and a bodily kinetic logos. Thereafter Heidegger’s *techne* is introduced in order to re-think creativity and skills in human production. Finally, illuminating Ervi Siren’s teaching method, my aim is to show how we might take a leap from dance technique to dance techne. The deepest question addressed here concerns the ontological nature of movement, a question persistently present in movement and dance research even if seldom stated and analysed. Using technique as a rational discipline designed to ensure our mastery over our bodily movements, we fail to understand the origin of movement in human skills and needs. The only way to gain access to movement is to let movement be and to let it address us, *challenge us*. In a paradoxical way, the aim is to outline the attitude of *Gelassenheit* in contemporary dance. First, I will reflect on how technique is employed by dancers to accomplish a variety of movement tasks.

Dance technique as a technical operation and technisation

The term “technique” may refer to a number of different things in Western theatrical dance. Modern choreographers have developed techniques as movement vocabularies to support their choreographic goals. Traditional modern dance techniques such as those of Graham, Humphrey-Limón or Cunningham constituted personified movement vocabulary styles.¹

¹ Martha Graham has asserted, “I have simply rediscovered what the body can do”, in denying that she has founded a “Graham technique” (Marian Horosko, *Martha Graham: The Evolution of Her Dance Theory and Training 1926-1991*, Chicago: A Capella Books, 1991, 2).

Modern choreographers have established schools or worked actively as teachers to produce skilled dancers in their technique classes. Thus, the usage “dance technique” in the modern sense came to embrace simultaneously four different aspects: *movement vocabulary, skill, style and method*. By reiterating a choreographer-teacher’s movements in a technique class, a student became skilful in terms of movement vocabulary and its aesthetics. This general style comprised a set of movements or permissible movement sequences held together by a system of kinaesthetic motivation.² In addition to skill and style, dance technique was regarded as a teaching method, since the pedagogy of the dance technique class was based on either identification with or imitation of movement phrases demonstrated in the class. This implies that students acquired movement through visual mimesis. As a legacy of this teaching method, exercises in dance technique classes are to this day highly repetitive and regimented. Phrases or sections of dances may be taught, but performing skills, interpretation, improvisation and choreographing are usually excluded in traditional dance technique classes.³

The achievement of the practical competences in a particular dance technique provides a framework which both enables and limits the body’s kinaesthetic potentials. In Heidegger’s terms, this type of dance vocabulary as a system of movements is a mode of *enframing* (*Gestell*). *Gestell* is sometimes translated as “frame” or “framework”,⁴ but “enframing” emphasises the verbal sense of ceaseless functioning which also ceaselessly modifies the dancer’s grip by bringing new movements and manners of taking hold of the body into the framework and excluding some as slightly dated.

As noted, the traditional modern dance techniques are understood as a rational discipline designed to ensure our mastery over our bodies. Dance students should work on a daily basis to reach this goal. Dance technique exercises have a transformative effect on the body; for the dancer, the repetition of daily practice will over time yield measurable improvement in

² Adina Armelagos and Mary Sirdidge, “Personal Style and Performance Prerogatives”, in Maxine Sheet-Johnstone, ed., *Illuminating Dance: Philosophical Explorations* (London & Toronto: Associated University Presses, 1984), 86. “Style” is understood as a twofold concept. Style₁, or general style, consist of a spatial vocabulary, a set of movements or allowable movement sequences held together by a system of kinaesthetic motivation. Spatial vocabulary is basically similar in meaning to the term movement vocabulary. Movement vocabulary is often used to refer solely to the discrete positions characteristic of a particular style such as the Graham technique or ballet. Style₂, or personal style, is the dancer’s particular contribution within style₁.

³ This characterization of “the traditional dance technique class” is related to the American modern dance and its legacy to the European dance after the Second World War. Improvisation formed the core of Mary Wigman’s “Tanz Technik”. Although *Technik* classes emphasised the acquisition of technical skills, it was taught through improvisation. At the Wigman School during the Weimar period, students acquired not a “technique” in the American sense, a codified movement vocabulary, but *Technik* in the German sense (Susan A. Manning, *Ecstasy and the Demon: Feminism and Nationalism in the Dances of Mary Wigman*, Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1993, 91).

⁴ Martin Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, transl. William Lovitt (New York: Harper & Row, 1977).

the body.⁵ In dance technique classes the initial phrases of movement are designated as warming-up, to preparing the body for the activity. Movement activity focuses on internalising certain coordinations in the body. One typical feature in traditional classes is that all movements can be divided into smaller units as movements of different body parts or as phrases of movement exercise.⁶ Dancers concentrate on head, arm, leg or torso movements by turns, working out one phrase at the time or combining these units together in various ways. The finer the unit acts are grained and the more firmly they can be combined, the more markedly they become technicised. For instance, focusing exclusively on the co-ordination of body parts lifting left arm at the elbow, bending the body left side as the arms pull down and stepping left we may leave aside the meanings of that movement or movement as gesture.

Contemporary choreographers do not usually aim to develop a new technique as a movement vocabulary to support their choreographic goals, but rather encourage dancers to train in several existing movement techniques.⁷ Contemporary training systems attempt to efface personified style aspects from dance technique; dancers should create means of executing any movements and dance vocabularies. There are no longer "Graham dancers" or "Cunningham dancers", just dancers who should be able to work with any choreographer. The contemporary usage "dance technique" seems to refer to efficient means to transform the body and take hold of the body as capable of executing any movement.

The contemporary dancer's technique should be invisible. Dancers simply utilise certain exercises in order to secure the body ideals and aesthetics they need or aspire to. In dance technique discourse it is common to say that technique is in the service of dancing or it simply facilitates dance.⁸ Technique itself has no symbols or styles; it reflects nothing, but creates new actualities and potentials. It seeks to attain in movement the maximum results with minimum expenditure of power and energy. In order to render the body stronger, more sensitive and flexible with less energy, dancers pay attention to training techniques, daily schedule, nutrition, weight control and the prevention and cure of injuries. It is common for dancers to take a diversity of classes in ballet, contact, release, aikido, Pilates, Alexander, Feldenkrais, Body-Mind Centering, stretching and yoga, while their individual exercise program includes jogging, swimming, weight-lifting, etc. The pervasive traits of the ideal contemporary dancer are fuctionalisation in using the body in anatomically correct ways, the

⁵ Randy Martin, *Critical Moves: Dance Studies in Theory and Politics* (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 1998), 165.

⁶ Ernestine Stodelle, *Dance Technique of Doris Humphrey* (London: Dance Books, 1979), 31-219.

⁷ Susan Foster, "Dancing Bodies", in Jonathan Crary & Sanford Kwinter, eds., *Incorporations. Zone 6*, (New York: Urzone, 1992), 493.

⁸ Joan Schlaich & Betty DuPont, *The Art of Teaching Dance Technique* (Virginia: American Alliance for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance, 1993), 5.

body's symmetry, systematic improvement, perfection and a kind of automation-producing mode of movement. The coercive presence of dance technique is not concealed even though there is no direct exercise of coercion by a corporeal authority.

The criteria for this training program are becoming to an increasing extent shaped by sport and physical education specialists, nutritionists and physicians, who tend to reduce the body to the principle of physics, measuring heart rate, general level of strength and flexibility and muscular tone.⁹ These specialists offer knowledge of body techniques whereby one can improve the body's capacity to execute movements.¹⁰ Body techniques used in dance training sometimes become the principal object and end of the dancer's life.¹¹ Their use aims at a dance technique which should help dancers evolve their bodies to execute any movement needed. Technique is not only a tool and a means but a struggle, almost a *weapon*: it demonstrates the dancer's competence in the dance field. Struggling with financial problems and selling their own work, dancers are forced to defend themselves by the only weapon they have in this highly competitive field.

Technique in this present context is exclusively a topic of both the late Edmund Husserl (technisation/*Technisierung*) and the late Heidegger (technology/*Technik*). Using Husserl's words, we can define the way of thinking in general as technicisation, as a schematic relation between causes and effects which operates independently of the meaning of activity.¹² For instance, a printer and my computer are connected by a machine which prints my text precisely without reflecting on its moral implications. The difference between a machine and a human being does not matter on this level, as we notice in listening to the ways sport and physical specialists discuss the body. Technisation means greater reliability, tighter coupling of elements, less dependency on contexts, and more efficiency of control. Like sport and athletics in technically developing their training, Western theatrical dance is drawn into a process through which it becomes a mere art of achieving, a calculating technique functioning according to technical rules.

Discussing technisation in terms of dance technique, I am not accusing dancers of drifting into a mere instrumental relation between means and ends in dance training; I simply seek to show that the production of dance technique is involved in the Western technical way of thinking. In criticising technisation in contemporary dance my purpose is to inquire into the nature of thinking in bodily movements and the body's creative aspects. In what follows I try

⁹ Foster, "Dancing Bodies", 494.

¹⁰ Marcel Mauss, "Body Techniques", transl. Ben Brewster, *Sociology and Psychology* (London & Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979).

¹¹ Jan Ellen Van Dyke, "Modern Dance in a Postmodern World", Doctoral dissertation (The University of North Carolina, 1989), 89.

¹² Edmund Husserl, *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*, transl. David Carr (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1970), 46.

to illuminate other possibilities of connecting thinking and dancing skills, questioning the production of dance technique as a mere technical operation.

Improvisation as thinking in movement

It is commonly assumed that thinking is tied to language and that it takes place only via language. It is furthermore common to assume that thinking takes place by means of a symbolic system mathematical, linguistic, logical which have the capacity to mediate or convey thought referentially.¹³ To assume that thinking is something only the mind engages in and doing and moving are something only the body does is, in effect, to deny the possibility of thinking in movement.

Maxine Sheets-Johnstone seeks to show to that thinking in movement is our primary way of making sense of the world. For instance, infants as young as 2 to 4 months of age can track a moving object and anticipate its appearance. Infants even as young as two-and-a-half months have a sense of object continuity and solidity, and at six months have an incipient appreciation of gravity and inertia.¹⁴ The actual dynamic kinetic event is not reducible to a word or even to a series of words. As Maurice Merleau-Ponty reminds us: "My body has its world, or understands its world, without having to make use of my 'symbolic' or 'objectifying function'."¹⁵ There is a richly subtle and complex nonverbal world which subsists from the beginning of all our lives, a dynamic world which is neither mediated by language nor a stepping-stone to language. For instance, when we turn to any basic spatio-temporal or dynamic concept, the concept of distance, say, and recall how we first experienced and thought about it, we realise that we did so nonverbally. Sheets-Johnstone comes to the conclusion that rather than speak of the period before language as the *pre-linguistic*, we should speak of the advent of language as the *post-kinetic*.

Sheets-Johnstone finds thinking in movement in improvisational dance without specifying any form of improvisation. She shows that thinking in movement involves no symbolic counters but is tied to an on-going experienced dynamic in which movement possibilities arise and dissolve. In improvising, we are in the process of creating dance out of our movement possibilities, exploring the world in movement. At the core of this spontaneous creation, movement and perception are seamlessly interwoven, with the result that we perceive in the course of that exploration a density or fluidity, a sharpness and angularity of our movement. Our thinking in movement does not mean that we are thinking *by means of*

¹³ Maxine Sheets-Johnstone, *The Primacy of Movement* (Amsterdam & Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1999), 492.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 499.

¹⁵ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Phenomenology of Perception*, transl. Colin Smith (London: Routledge, 1962), 140-141.

movement or that our thoughts are *being transcribed into* movement. Movement is not a result of a mental process which exists prior to the activity. I am not first mentally exploring a range of possibilities, and then later taking some action in consequence of them.¹⁶ Thinking in movement is an experience in which the qualitative dynamics of movement combine to form an ongoing kinetic happening. The body grasps the qualitative dynamics in which it is enmeshed. "Grasping" implies a kinetic intelligence, as Sheets-Johnstone calls it, a kinetic bodily logos.

Sheets-Johnstone holds that in thinking in movement we discover the fundamental creative pattern of thought which is founded upon a kinetic bodily logos.¹⁷ Logos as a Greek word has great a wide range of meaning; it primarily signifies the intelligible principle, reason, structure, or order which pervades something, or the source of that order, or an account of that order. Heidegger also moves backwards to the Greek *logos*. Heidegger sees logos as derived from the verb *legein*, which means, as he consistently maintained, "to gather", "to collect together", "to lay one thing beside another", "to arrange one thing after another".¹⁸ In arranging a thing one sets it into the proper context within which it can emerge as the thing that it is. Now that which itself manifests is that which comes to presence of itself.¹⁹ Things are gathered by reason; these are derivative senses of logos. For Sheets-Johnstone, a dance improvisation as a dynamically evolving situation develops its own logic, its own reasonableness and integrity, and it develops that logic on the basis of a kinetic bodily logos. Such a logos appears in movement improvisation when we do have no time to think of the movement conceptually or symbolically. The "rationale" of the kinetic order is not founded merely upon acquired dance or movement techniques as such, i.e. automatic modes of behaviour, but upon movement potentials which lie "beneath" techniques.

I will continue Sheets-Johnstone's discussion of bodily thinking from the vantage-point of Heidegger's thought regarding the related concepts: *techné* and *poiesis*. The shift from Sheets-Johnstone to Heidegger requires a different way of looking, thinking and language. Sheets-Johnstone seeks to show how scientific (the cognitive sciences and psychology) and phenomenological research can complement one another, placing the phenomenon of thinking in movement in a phylogenetic perspective. While Sheets-Johnstone emphasises the post-kinetic aspects of thinking, in the late Heidegger's philosophy language and poetry take a central role. To be sure, Heidegger rejected the entire symbolic and representative character of language, the instrumental purposes of language in gaining conceptual control over our

¹⁶ Sheets-Johnstone, *The Primacy of Movement*, 488.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 491.

¹⁸ Martin Heidegger, *Der Satz vom Grund* (Pfullingen: Günther Neske, 1965), 178.

¹⁹ John D. Caputo, *Mystical Elements in Heidegger's Thought* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1984), 78.

world. For Heidegger, language is nothing human, instead, human is something linguistic.²⁰ For Heidegger things first come to be, i.e. appear, only, through language and when there is no word, there is no thing. Heidegger's claim that poetry occupies a privileged position among the arts by reason of its close affinity to language should be examined critically.²¹ In fact, Sheets-Johnstone's description of the advent of language as a kinetic period questions Heidegger's conclusion that when there is no word, there is no thing. Concepts such as "near", "inside", "heavy", "light", "open", 'close', all of them created corporeally, are experienced directly any time we pay attention to our body. These differences notwithstanding, Sheets-Johnstone's phenomenology and Heidegger's philosophy may complement one another to some extent. My purpose here is not to resolve their basic controversy, but to show how, by attention to Heidegger's philosophy, we may deepen our understanding of the potentials of bodily movement.

Meditative Thinking

Thinking, for Heidegger, is not psychological activity as it is for psychologists, conceptual as for philosophers or physical activity as for cognitive scientists. Thinking is one's sense of the way of life which conditions all of one's actions.²² Heidegger calls the thinking which corresponds to enframing "calculative thinking" (*rechnendes Denken*) and the thinking which finds its "free relationship" over against technology "meditative" or "reflective" thinking (*besinnliches Denken* or *Nachdenken*).²³ Calculative thinking occurs in such activities as representation, objectification, conceptualisation, evaluation, in organising, manipulating, planning, economising and rationalising. Heidegger calls calculative thinking "one-track thinking". One thinks in terms of going forward or backward. One is on a track and only forward and backward make sense.

There is no bridge from calculative to meditative thinking: the transition is a leap. Heidegger compares meditative thinking to the tracking of an animal as it follows a scent.²⁴ An animal on the scent gives itself over to the scent. Meditative thinking cannot bring knowledge as does science or produce usable practical wisdom. In terms of the normal functioning of enframing, meditative thinking is useless. Heidegger likens thinking to

²⁰ Martin Heidegger, "Language", transl. Albert Hofstaedter, in *Poetry, Language, and Thought* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), 207-8.

²¹ Joseph J. Kockelmans, *Heidegger on Art and Art Works* (Dordrecht & Boston: Martinus Nijhoff, 1985), 210.

²² Charles L. Betros, "Heidegger's Critique of Technology" (Doctoral dissertation, Fordham University, 1986), 144.

²³ Martin Heidegger, *Gelassenheit*, 2. Auflage (Pfullingen: Günther Neske, 1960), 12-13.

²⁴ Martin Heidegger, *Was heißt Denken?* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1984), 172.

thinking: thinking is essentially receptive. Meditative thinking is conditioned by things. The reality of the tree in bloom cannot be proved, and it is a mistake to try to prove it. In calculative thinking we attempt to make ourselves at home by fully possessing the world, in meditative thinking we dwell in our world.

Calculative thinking categorises any thinking which is not calculative as irrational. For Heidegger this is part of what constitutes calculative one-track thinking. He maintains that we must distinguish both the rational and the irrational from what we could call the *pre-rational*. He opposes the rigour of thinking to the exactness of the science. This thinking cannot be exact as the science is, but it can be rigorous. Its rigour subsists remaining in its "element".²⁵ As the element of a fish is the water through which it moves, the element of thinking is the unconcealment of Being. In order to remain in its element thinking must keep clear of calculation. Only in this way can it let "the simplicity of Being's manifold dimensions rule". Thinking must be rigorously faithful to its path. Movement (Be-wegung) is what is essential. Thinking must follow its own path. It does not set up a procedural machinery in advance with which it then attacks its matter.

As Heidegger remarks, the strange thing about thinking is its simplicity. This is not mathematical or naïve simplicity. We should learn thinking by unlearning what thinking has been up to now,²⁶ and what we must learn in order to unlearn calculative thinking is "letting-be", *Gelassenheit*. *Gelassenheit* is normally translated as composure or self-possession, and since no English word has similar connotations, the Heideggerian term is usually translated with "releasement" or "letting-be". The medieval German mystic Meister Eckhart, to whom Heidegger frequently refers, used the term "Gelassenheit". Heidegger repeatedly emphasises that letting-be does not mean passivity, indifference or neglect; it is an alternative to a thinking which is a willing. The deepest aspect of letting-be is that it is not just something that man does. It is the structure of what Being does. We have reason to wonder whether the significance of letting-be reaches as far as Heidegger thinks. It is difficult to relate his thought to concrete reality. Thinking is not supposed to solve practical problems, but to restore a sense for the mystery of being. This is clearly not a sufficient condition for changing the world. Despite the obscure description of meditative thinking, however, it seems clear that there is room for, and a need for, the kind of deep ontological critique of rationality Heidegger has put forward.

²⁵ Caputo, *Mystical Elements in Heidegger's Thought*, 197. Heidegger speaks of the strictness of thinking, to be sure, by which he means that thought must stay strictly within its element, which is Being, but such thinking is no longer philosophy.

²⁶ Martin Heidegger, *Was heißt Metaphysik?*, 9. Auflage (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1965), 188-89.

Techne and poiesis

Martin Heidegger's method of thinking moves within the rich and complex world of ancient Greek philosophy and language. Drawing on ancient Greek culture and art, Heidegger sought to criticise modern technology and calculative thinking and to present his idea of creation and production. According to Heidegger, the Greeks have had no word at all corresponding to what we mean by the word "art" in the modern sense.²⁷ By "art" the Greeks meant primarily an ability in the sense of being skilful in something. The Greeks named art together with handicrafts by the same word, *techne*, without a clear separation between the craftsman and the artist. *Techne* did not mean making or manipulating things, as technique does. *Techne* signified a revelation of something, of what lay in potential, its uncovering or bringing to light.²⁸ According to Heidegger, the Greeks conceived of *techne*, producing, in terms of letting appear.²⁹ *Techne* is a kind of knowledge, knowing-how, which includes knowledge of rules and procedures for production, but not as its essential aspect. For Heidegger, *techne* means to be entirely at home in something (indwelling), to understand and be expert in it. He says:

When we speak of dwelling we usually think of an activity that man performs alongside many other activities. We work here and dwell there. We do not merely dwell – that would be virtual inactivity – we practice a profession, we do business, we travel and lodge on the way, now here, now there.³⁰

And he continues, "Only if we are capable of dwelling, only then can we build".³¹ This implies that only if we are capable of dwelling, only then we can practice our professions. *Techne* is a name both for the activities and skills of a craftsman and for the arts of both mind and hand, but is also linked to creative making, *poiesis*. *Poiesis* is normally translated as "making", but Heidegger interprets *poiesis* as "bringing-forth" (*Her-vor-bringen*), creation.³² An apple tree

²⁷ In Heidegger's view, artworks, like every other aspect of human life, have followed a line of development that has been progressively moulded by the epoch of technology. However, Heidegger also sees art as a way to overcome the technical attitude. Referring to the latter idea of art, he does not mean the same as what we generally understand by contemporary art today as aesthetics. For Heidegger, art is a mode in which truth happens for us. Art is a mode of revealing, a setting-forth, in which humans and other object-beings come to presence. The poet, for Heidegger, is inviting us to enter this other region outside representational thinking. Discussing poetry, sculpture, painting, architecture and music, Heidegger says nothing of the art of dance.

²⁸ Leslie Paul Thiele, *Timely Meditations: Heidegger and Postmodern Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 195.

²⁹ Martin Heidegger, "Building, Dwelling, Thinking", transl. Albert Hofstadter, in *Poetry, Language, and Thought*. (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), 159.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 147.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 160.

³² Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, 10.

“brings-forth” its fruits as a silversmith “brings-forth” a chalice. In this sense of *poiesis*, there is a deep commonality between natural production and human production in that they both bring-forth whether by making or by growing. *Physis*, the arising of something from out of itself, is a bringing-forth, *poiesis*. *Physis* is indeed *poiesis* in the highest sense.³³ *Physis*, often translated as “nature”, signifies not simply geological or biological processes, but the Being of all beings. *Techné* is a mode of *poiesis* in the extended sense which Heidegger attributes to *poiesis*. This means that both humans and nature bring-forth their products. They differ only in that nature brings-forth itself whereas humans bring-forth from another. In the ancient world natural production is the primary sense of production, human production is derivative from it, or, as the usual translation has it, “art imitates nature”. In the modern world human making is primary and nature is understood as a self-making. *Poiesis* is related to that which comes-forth out of its own nature alone and *techné* is related to that which comes-forth only by our intervention in that nature.

Heidegger illuminates *techné* in describing the cabinetmaker’s work.³⁴ A cabinetmaker is not merely skilled in using his tools. His craft lies in his ability to understand different kinds of wood and the shapes slumbering within wood. He is not related to his materials in the way manner of the industrial machine operator who uses the raw materials. The craftsman has a feel for his materials, he has become part of them. The handling of the wood is not a mere manipulation of it, but proceeds with a sensitive, firm touch which assists the wood in becoming the cabinet. The cabinetmaker’s role is something like that of a midwife. In the *techné* of the craftsman there is a releasement toward things. Here we see that letting-be means neither passivity nor domination.³⁵ When *techné* becomes technique, the attitude of “letting-be” loses its priority over “making-be” and craft becomes domination. In this process work changes its character.

The artist’s work differs from the cabinetmaker’s work, though they both have *techné*. The creation of an artwork requires craftsmanship. In fabricating equipment, the cabinet, material, wood is used, and used up. It disappears into its usefulness. The material is all the better and more suitable the less it resists perishing in the equipmental being of the equipment.³⁶ The sculptor uses stone just as the mason uses it, in his own way, but the sculptor does not use

³³ The Heraclitean statement, “*physis* likes to hide”, led Heidegger to conclude that there is a mystery circumscribing the manifestation of *physis*, the Being of beings. The disclosure is never total; and there is an element of concealment in each and every instance of unconcealment. There is a primordial tendency for beings to hide and never to open up fully.

³⁴ Heidegger, *Was heißt Denken?*, 48-51, 53-55.

³⁵ Betros, “Heidegger’s Critique of Technology”, 171-172.

³⁶ Martin Heidegger, “The Origin of the Work of Art”, transl. Albert Hofstadter, in *Poetry, Language, and Thought* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), 46.

it up. The artist is a handiworker who knows how the material behaves, but he lets come what is already coming to presence.³⁷

Heidegger's description of the cabinetmaker's work and the artist's attitude toward material, urges us to think about the dancer's relation to movement and the notion of technique as *techne*. What would be dance *techne*? Shifting the focus from the dancer's techniques to *techne*, we discuss the dancer's relation to movement, not as a "making-be", but "letting-be" attitude. What does the "letting-be" attitude mean if it is not domination or passivity?

Wood as the cabinetmaker's material or stone as the sculpture's material differs greatly from the dancer's material, movement. From Heidegger's point of view, we should not approach movement as a manipulated object, but as an element we dwell in. Movement is not in our control, rather it befalls us, strikes us, comes over us, overwhelms us, transforms us. The task of moving is not an "object" of calculative thought. It is not we who play with movement; movement starts to play with us. We should also understand movement in the sense of *poiesis* which, whether brought-forth itself or brought-forth by us, remains inherently a mystery to us. Dwelling in this element, Heideggerian choreographers and dancers do not use movement as movements are used in everyday life; they do not use them up like the body's movements in everyday routines or physical exercise such as aerobics. In everyday routines the body's movements disappear into their usefulness. Dancers and choreographers work with movements in order to let movements set up a world.³⁸

It is said that the world in which Heidegger's man dwells is romantic, rural, aristocratic and old-fashioned. This is correct and should be taken into account when reading his works. It would nonetheless, be unphilosophical to regard his critique of technology as merely the expression of his personal preferences without considering its intrinsic merit.³⁹ My aim here is to suggest that there is room for a Heideggerian approach to interpret technique and thinking in Western art dance. In Western theatrical dance during the 20th century, there has been a tendency to question this technical attitude in dance practice. It seems that for example Anna Halprin, Deborah Hay and the Finnish choreographer, teacher and dancer, Ervi Sirén, have approached movement as an indwelling element which plays with us.

Heidegger does not claim that his own thinking is fully meditative. We do not learn thinking only by studying Heidegger's philosophy, but rather by listening to people who

³⁷ Martin Heidegger, *Nietzsche, vol.1: The Will to Power as Art*, transl. David Farrell Krell (New York: Harper & Row, 1979), 81-82.

³⁸ Jaana Parviainen, *Bodies Moving and Moved: A Phenomenological Analysis of the Dancing Subject and the Cognitive and Ethical Values of Dance Art* (Tampere: Tampere University Press, 1998), 150-152.

³⁹ Betros, "Heidegger's Critique of Technology", 180.

might practise meditative thinking in their work.⁴⁰ By following their paths we may recognise how thinking and *techne* might be present in our “life-world”, showing gateways to non-technical attitudes. Describing Ervi Sirén’s path, my purpose is to bring out similarities with Heidegger’s thinking in terms of her letting-be attitude toward movement, which would appear to be neither domination nor passivity.

Ervi Sirén’s dance techne

Sirén has become well known for her method of teaching dance and choreographing in the small Finnish dance field.⁴¹ For twenty years she has been developing a unique method which differs from traditional dance classes such as ballet, Graham, Limón and Cunningham but also from contact improvisation or the release technique. The method of movement is developed reciprocally with dance and choreographer students at the Theatre Academy, in the Dance Department in Helsinki, where she worked between 1983-1989 as a teacher, since 1998 as a professor. Growing up in Riihimäki, she started her dance studies in classical ballet and Finnish gymnastics in the late 1950s. Having attended Riitta Vainio’s dance workshop in 1968, she began to become involved in modern dance. Qualifying as a gymnastic teacher, she continued her studies in New York with Viola Faber and Don Vagoner. At the late of the 1970s Sirén danced in prominent Finnish choreographies such as Jorma Uotinen’s *Paljastusten aakkeoset* (1979). At the beginning of the 1980s she became dissatisfied with her dancing, wondering why she or other trained dancers had lost their ability to execute simple movements like walking or running. She became concerned with the investigation of body therapy exercises in bioenergetics, Osho meditation and continuum movement, applying them in dance classes at the Theatre Academy. She was searching for a mode of moving by unlearning the shaping of the body in an external manner. She mainly choreographed works for dance students in the 1980s. Since the mid-1990s she has collaborated with professional dancers as in the duet *Sovinto* (1996) for Katri Soini and Jyrki Karttunen. Sirén was recently awarded the State Dance Award in recognition of her distinguished artistic work within the past three years and her significant long-term artistic activities.

At the beginning of the 1980s she discarded the modern dance class structures or formats used in most technique classes, based on selecting or composing movements. Like Simone Forti, Sirén thinks that in the traditional classes dancers learn to execute all kinds of

⁴⁰ Caputo, *Mystical Elements in Heidegger’s Thought*, 204–205. Caputo suggests that in Eugen Herrigel’s description of training in Zen archery in Japan in the book *Zen in the Art of Archery* one finds striking and revealing similarities to Heidegger.

⁴¹ For lack of written sources, both Sirén own writings and studies of her work, the description of her work is based on my interviews, observation and notes on her classes for two months five days a week at the Theatre Academy in 1998. The present article is the first endeavour to conceptualise her work.

movements in different body parts and movement exercises, but they are not *in a dance state*.⁴² Dancers expend a great deal of energy on remembering sequences of movement rationally while they lose the dwelling aspects of motion. They work hard to execute difficult or complicated steps and phrases in technically correct ways, focusing on body alignment and shaping of movement. For Ervi Sirén, the way of learning technique as a weapon suppresses the indwelling aspects of dancing, a creative state between waking and asleep. Body alignment and shaping of movement are only the secondary target in the education of dance students.⁴³ The primary target is to find a dance state on all its levels from excitement and boredom to relaxation and almost falling asleep. What kind of dance teacher urges students to fall asleep in a dance class?

As in contact improvisation and the release technique, Sirén emphasises the sensing of one's own body topography and bodily awareness. This involves a mapping of the structure of possibilities, not simply of first or ordinary appearances in a specific dance vocabulary. Without the development of the possibilities of the body's topography our mobility would consist in no more than functional movements and enframing movement vocabularies.⁴⁴ These inside-out methods of contemporary dance (contact, release and Sirén's method) and their internal focus usually open a gateway to the secondary aspect of movement, shaping the body and body alignment. Without the primary aspects of indwelling, dancers learn to use their bodies to perform tricks on the stage.

Stressing bodily awareness and the meaning of a dance state, Sirén, like many other dance teachers before and after her, returned to simple movements. Unlike most post-modern dancers, however, she did not focus on such "ordinary" or "everyday" movements as walking, running, standing and jumping. She has been evolving *arche movements*. I use the word "arkhe" in the same sense as in archetypes or architecture, as a first thing from which something is or comes to be. *Arche movements* are simple, usually circular, spiral-type movements on the various parts of the body's topography. Using the term "arche movement" I wish to emphasise their characteristics as gateways or starting-points to the world of movements without limits. Sirén may use no more than two or three *arche movements* per class. In repeating these arche movement for two minutes, ten minutes, twenty minutes, two hours, dancers may reach a dance state. In her classes logical progressions from warm-ups to more complex movement phrases are based on the dynamics of *arche movements*. She does not give segments of combinations which might bring on the technical difficulties which movement

⁴² Sally Banes, *Terpsichore in Sneakers: Post-Modern Dance* (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1987), 35.

⁴³ Cynthia J. Novack, *Sharing the Dance: Contact Improvisation and American Culture* (Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1990), 119.

⁴⁴ Don Ihde, *Existential Technics* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1983), 94.

may end up in. In her classes, movement cannot be divided into smaller units such as movements in different body parts or phrases in movement exercise. She says about one of the *arche movements* called the “cat movement”: “Anybody can do the cat movement. But who is prepared for an inner journey? That is what makes it a totally different thing.”⁴⁵ *Arche movements* are interwoven with breathing tones. She has named breathing tones by animal and nature sounds such as “snake breathing”, “bee breathing” and “wind breathing”. The mover should combine these breathing tones with *arche movements*. Sirén maintains that there are blockages in various parts of the body. *Arche movements* and breathing tones awaken or soften these blocked parts.

Through focused awareness, breath and movements, dance students begin to give up actively controlling their own visual image and body alignment. They learn to move by unlearning the shaping of the body in external fashion. Without trying to be “creative”, they begin to vary the *arche movement*, still keeping contact with the original and very simple idea of movement. In a way, *arche movement* remains transcendent to the dancer, despite its simplicity. This is improvisation within strict limits. By repeating *arche movement* dancers often find a condition where they are no longer actively executing the movement, but are moved by the movement, ending up in complex sequences and virtuosity. She says: “In this practice, when you achieve *arche movement*, you may easily achieve virtuosity in movement. Doing a Relevé exercise in a technique class, it may be difficult to keep balance. Starting with an *arche movement*, when the target of the form is not Relevé, it may be easy to rise on one toe.”⁴⁶ Nevertheless, it is inevitable that students mechanically repeat a simple movement, frustrated and bored. All kinds of dance states and feelings are possible. When dancers keep on moving, they have to confront these conditions and possible dead-ends, find their own frustrations and solutions within the *arche movements*. Sirén reminds us that the body is never motionless; in finding a connection to its pulsations, movement is generated by our gentle guidance and we find ourselves somewhere in the midst of moving and moved. As improvisation this dynamically evolving situation develops its own logic, its own rationale and integrity, and it develops this logic on the basis of a kinetic bodily logos. The challenge is to let go or put away the self, our habitual, learned movements, rhythms and styles, and then allow something new to emerge out of the creative flux.

⁴⁵ “Kissaliikekin, kuka tahansa osaa tehdä sen. Mutta kuka suostuu menemään itsensä sisälle? Se on se, mikä taas tekee siitä kokonaan toisen asian” (An interview of Ervi Sirén, 23 September 1999).

⁴⁶ “Tällaisessa työskentelyssä, kun löytää alkuliikkeen, saattaa päästä helposti virtuoottisiin suorituksiin. Tekniikkaharjoitus, jossa on tehtävänä nousta yhden jalan varpalle, tasapainon saavuttaminen voi olla vaikeaa. Sen sijaan alkuliikkeestä alkava harjoitus, jossa muoto ei varsinaisesti tähtää varpalle nousuun, saattaakin olla helppoa nousta yhdelle jalalle suoraan maasta” (written notes on Ervi Sirén’s dance class, 24 September 1998).

It has been common to speak of movement theories, as systems of organising, conceptualising and analysing movements. All movement theories are based on a kind of metaphysics, i.e. some fundamental idea or essence of movement. Doris Humphrey stated that movement is a line or an arch between two poles.⁴⁷ In Rudolf Laban's movement theory, movement metaphysics envisages a zero point or a mathematical origin in systems of coordinates like a central immovable hinge. For Laban, movement concerns primarily *the body in space*, not *the body* moving and moved matter. He maintains that every movement impulse prompts the body to abandon equilibrium in oblique directions. These directions can be identified in relation to the current notion of three dimensions.⁴⁸ He sets out from the three dimensions of the upright human body – the up/down vertical axis, side/side horizontal axis, and the forward/backward sagittal axis.⁴⁹

The crossing-point of these axes is called here the zero point, the immovable hinge. Movement constitutes a vector from one point to the other in movement metaphysics. Sirén's notion of the essence of movement, her movement metaphysics, is based on spiral-like movement or the motion of the medusa, in which movement has no beginning or end. Like the movement of the human heart there is no zero point, no clear direction, its own movement echoes and vibrates in itself. Movement is a special matter, not in space, it is a spatial element, what we are and where we may dwell.

Sirén's idea of movement differs from Labanian movement metaphysics. If movement is a state, condition or element, we should study it and find our own ways or paths. *Arche movements* are only the navigation points in the ocean into which we should dive and try to make sense of it. One could compare Sirén's dance practice to certain meditation states, or states in which we arrive at a certain level of concentration and where it is no effort to do what we are concentrating on doing, because our whole system is flowing in that direction.⁵⁰ Her method urges students to explore movement, dive into the strange element, not merely technically drill movement units as is frequently the practice in traditional dance technique classes.

In Sirén's classes dancing is not separated from choreographing. Traditional dance technique classes rarely offered ways to develop movements or study a specific movement in detail, taking one's own time and space. Movement exercises were usually executed in unison, with no substantial individual deviation from the rhythm and tempo of the group. In

⁴⁷ Stodelle, *Dance Technique of Doris Humphrey*, 13-16.

⁴⁸ Vera Maletic, "The Process is the Purpose", in Jean Morrison Brown, ed., *The Vision of Modern Dance* (Princeton: Princeton Book Company, 1979), 55.

⁴⁹ Suzanne Youngerman, "Movement Notation Systems as Conceptual Frameworks", Maxine Sheet-Johnstone, ed., *Illuminating Dance: Philosophical Explorations* (London & Toronto: Associated University Presses, 1994), 111.

⁵⁰ See Banes, *Terpsichore in Sneakers: Post-Modern Dance*, 34-5.

terms of dance education there are special classes for learning to make dances and choreographing. Technique and choreography classes have been kept strictly separate, even though most choreographers have also been dancers. In fact, many modern choreographers emphasise their dancer identity; like Martha Graham, however, they usually limit their own dancer's creativity in interpretation. Nowadays, the situation has changed, since dancers participate more and more in creating their movements with the choreographer. Nonetheless it is still very common to think that dance technique does not entail creativity in developing movement.

What is this creativity? Sirén's classes cannot be called creative dancing in the traditional, Labanian sense. Nor are they merely improvisation classes, because the tasks are very limited in repeating simple movements. They also differ from contact improvisation, which focuses on touch and interaction with another person. According to Sirén, movement creativity arises in situations where possibilities to move are limited. In an interview she told me about her last pregnancy, when she was feeling sick for months, unable to do almost anything. In that situation, just lying on the mattress, she began to develop one of her *arche movements* with her hands and legs. Confined to simplicity and limitation in movement the body starts to find new paths to move and transform motion by itself. In Sirén's classes the aim is to return bodily thinking, a bodily logos, leaving aside personal effort to produce or invent new striking movements. She says: "You cultivate your personality, going deeper and deeper within, finding a kind of motion of the amoeba, a kind of undulating movement of the cell. It is inside all of us . . . and then we end up with the question, what is my own movement? And who am I? Does it exist at all? When you have found yourself, what is it then? Or is it something that constantly changes?"⁵¹

This idea of creativity resembles Heidegger's notion of the ancient Greek word *poiesis*, as when an apple tree brings-forth its fruits. For Sirén, dancing is waiting for something-to-happen as we anticipate the apples seeing the tree blossoming. Her relation to movement is not a "making-be", but a "letting-be" attitude. This means neither passivity nor domination.⁵² Borrowing Anna Halprin's words here, when we let movement keep growing, something will happen. Impatient young dance students are terrified when Sirén says that sometimes this

⁵¹ "Lähdet kehittämään omaa persoonasi, menet syvemmälle ja sitten alkaakin löytyä sellainen, ikään kuin ameban, solun syke. Se on kaikkien meidän sisällä. Se on kaikkien meidän sisällä... ja siten tullaan kysymykseen, että mikä se oma liike sitten on? Ja mikä on sitten minä? Vai onko sellaista olemassakaan? Kun etsit ja vihdoinkin olet löytänyt itseni, niin mikä se itse sitten on? Vai onko sekin muuttuvaa?" (An interview with Ervi Sirén, 11 August 1998).

⁵² Anna Halprin argues: "The process is the purpose; let it be, let it keep growing, and something will happen. And what happens generates its own purpose. I'm being very repetitive, but in this sense it's nonintellectual and very nature-oriented" (Maletic, "The Process is the Purpose", 133).

something-will-happen may take six months, one year, ten years, twenty years.⁵³ Her letting-be attitude is easily understood as laziness in the puritanical dance world by dance students who seem still to strongly believe that without sweat and pain one cannot achieve any results in dancing. Watching Ervi Sirén's working and listening to her ideas of movement, I cannot help seeing a resemblance between her idea of creating movement and Heidegger's idea of *techne*. As Heidegger's discussion of *techne* shows, pushing and working hard does not necessarily lead to indwelling or knowledge of movement, though it may produce a technique. Sirén's intuitively evolved method of teaching and creating dance as a *techne* reaches beyond the technical and Puritanical attitude. The task of moving is not an "object" of calculative thought, the most effective ways to manipulate the body, but releasement toward bodily thinking and bodily *logos*.

Conclusion

As Heidegger maintains, we must distinguish both rational and the irrational from what we could call pre-rational. Sirén's search for a dance state might be called a pre-rational dance discipline, in contrast to the traditional rational dance disciplines or its opposite, an irrational or "anything-goes" attitude towards dancing. The leap from dance technique to dance *techne* does not involve a transition from highly codified skilful movements to internal experience, from discipline to "natural" or everyday movement. Dance technique and dance *techne* are not binary opposites. By dance *techne* I mean reaching a certain understanding of movement, but also the delimitation of that understanding, throwing it off balance, robbing it of its security. For each mover, access to this presence is gained not by any human accomplishment, but by "letting" something be accomplished in the mover. I wish to emphasise that this "Heideggerian" interpretation of movement still calls for deeper examination. Nevertheless, I hope that this discussion may open a transition from the technical mode of approach to dancing skills to wider discussion of "dwelling in dance", not only on the pedagogical but also hopefully on a philosophical level.

⁵³ Training Zen archery in Japan, Eugen Herrigel describes the great difficulty he experienced acquiring the first step, learning how to draw the bow, letting the hands do all the work while the rest of the body is relaxed (Eugen Herrigel, *Zen in the Art of Archery*, introduction by D.T. Suzuki, transl. R.F.C. Hull, New York, N.Y. : Pantheon Books, 1953, 34). Herrigel worked for weeks, unable to draw the bow right, while the master's only advice was to "relax". After devoting a full year to mastering the first step, Herrigel advanced to the next stage, learning how to release the bowstring. The difficulty is to release the string in such a way that the arrow is not jerked and caused to wobble, and so that the body of the archer is not shaken. The master tells Herrigel he must learn to "wait" (Ibid., 5) for the moment when the arrow should be released. According to Caputo, Herrigel's training in Zen archery takes place in the sphere of *Gelassenheit*. In the same way that Herrigel was told that letting go of yourself was a matter of waiting, Sirén holds that dance training consists in waiting for "something-to-happen".

