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Expectation of being affected: an enactive perspective of spectators' expectations of contemporary dance

Spectators'
expectations of
contemporary
dance

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Abstract

Purpose – This article examines how spectators describe their expectations of contemporary dance by referring to action. Through discussing a qualitative audience study, the article argues that spectators always have an expectation of being affected by performances they attend. This expectation can guide their interest in attending performances of certain genres instead of other possible ones on offer. Additionally, the article points out how spectators can actively manage their expectations in order to be affected.

Design/methodology/approach – The study is based on 21 in-depth interviews with spectators at a dance venue, a company and a festival in Finland. The analysis of the interviews combines thematic analysis with metaphor analysis. Employing the paradigm of enaction and the concept of affordances, this article approaches expectations as embodied and dynamic, created in interactions between artists, producers and spectators.

Findings – The analysis shows that when speaking about their expectations of performances, spectators use bodily and spatial metaphors. Focusing on metaphors reveals how, for the spectators, performances afford a possibility for action that affects them. The interviewed spectators describe that contemporary dance is “not set in its ways”, and therefore it keeps them “awake” and their thoughts do “not fossilize”. This way, they understand contemporary dance as a genre that affords a possibility to be affected by allowing a freedom of own interpretation and surprising experiences if they desire such.

Originality/value – Concentration on the metaphors of language offers a deeper understanding of the active nature of spectators' expectations. Understanding how spectators describe their expectations by referring to action that enables the shaping of their emotions and thoughts can help the development of arts marketing and audience engagement.

Keywords Expectations, Affordances, Enaction, Metaphor analysis, Contemporary dance, Qualitative audience research

Paper type Research paper

1. Introduction

This article offers an understanding of how spectators describe their expectations of performances by referring to action. Although people often deny having any expectations of the performances they attend, the article argues they do expect to have an active relationship with the performance. They expect the performance to affect them in one way or another.

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Depending on the kind of effect they desire, people can actively manage their expectations. Eventually, this may have an effect on which performances spectators notice, feel drawn to and attend. The way in which spectators describe their expectations of particular genres, such as contemporary dance, can further define those genres for them. Therefore, the article encourages paying more attention on the role and nature of expectations in attendance, which can help us understand audience engagement more profoundly.

The article approaches expectations from the perspective of enactivism and with the help of the concept of affordances. Articulated by [Varela *et al.* \(1991, 2017\)](#), enactivism is a research paradigm within cognitive science that explains how people's actions are perceptually guided in a world that depends on their perception. This means that individuals' interaction with the world is proactive. They use their bodies and minds to perceive a world that makes sense for their actions ([McConachie, 2019](#); [Varela *et al.*, 2017](#)). This suggests that perception, senses and memories help spectators to navigate through different possibilities to experience performances and find those, which can be of meaning and value to them.

When considering why people do or do not attend performing arts events, previous research is frequently concerned about peoples' motivations. If expectations are mentioned, they are considered as almost equal to motivations. This paper acknowledges that both of these terms are defined in various ways across different disciplines. Others have considered the structure and components of expectations theoretically (e.g. [Huron, 2007](#); [Oliver and Winer, 1987](#)). Therefore, as a focus of attention is taken the spectators' own ways of describing and managing their expectations of a particular genre, contemporary dance. It is considered that both motivations and expectations have important role in people's ways of deciding which performing arts event to attend. However, it is suggested that analysing the spectators' own ways of describing their expectations may reveal beliefs, conceptions, imaginings, feelings and knowledge that underlie motivations to attend performances of certain genres. Expectations are considered as the ability to sense possible futures based on previous experiences, interaction with one's surroundings and a process of induction that is automatic and mostly unconscious ([Huron, 2007](#)).

Studies on arts audience attendance emphasize that escapism and relaxation, emotional experiences, new ideas and spending enjoyable time with family and friends are all factors that motivate the attendance. Barriers for attendance are lack of time, money and interest, lacking company to go with and being unaware of what is happening and where (see e.g. [Keaney, 2008](#); [Kolhede and Gomez-Arias, 2016](#); [Obaidalahe and Steils, 2018](#); [Pitts, 2016](#); [Purhonen *et al.*, 2014](#); [Virolainen, 2015](#)). A sense of belonging is an important factor in people's decisions on where to go and what to see. The more the spectators come to know about the artists and which performances they like, the more they are motivated to attend ([Pitts, 2016](#); [Walmsley, 2018](#)). However, it is still noted that there is a need to understand why audiences desire to attend a specific arts event ([Price *et al.*, 2019](#)).

By analysing spectators' descriptions of expectations in terms of contemporary dance, this article offers a way to deepen understanding on why a group of spectators are or are not attracted to contemporary dance. Drawing on an interview study with 21 research participants and metaphor analysis, the article shows how spectators use bodily and spatial metaphors to describe the desired relationship with contemporary dance performances and its impact. This paper argues that interpreting the ways in which the participants talk about their previous experiences of and interest in contemporary dance offers a deeper understanding on the dynamic role of expectations in peoples' experiences of performing arts. Becoming aware of the active nature of spectator's expectations can help the development of arts marketing and audience management.

A case of contemporary dance spectators is an interesting one to observe. As a genre, contemporary dance is difficult to define. In comparison with spoken drama, musicals or popular music concerts, contemporary dance performances rarely concern any previously

known stories or follow a dramatic plot that can create clear expectations of the experience. For this reason, it provides an interesting case for discussion concerning spectators' expectations. The participants for the case study were collected from visitors and followers of three different actors in contemporary dance: the Zodiac – Center for New Dance, the Tero Saarinen Company (TSC) and the Full Moon Dance Festival (FMDf). Zodiac is a contemporary dance venue in Helsinki that produces performances by various dance artists. TSC is a dance company that produces the choreographies of Tero Saarinen. FMDf is a dance festival located in Pyhäjärvi, a small town in central Finland. These three organizations were selected because they illustrate the three central ways of producing dance performances in Finland and connecting them with audiences.

2. Understanding expectations – taking an enactive perspective

When previous audience studies mention expectations, they refer to them as the desire to see quality productions, and the devotion, skill and virtuosity of the performers. Additionally, these studies mention that performing arts audiences want the performances to challenge and surprise them (Burland and Pitts, 2012; Pitts, 2016; Walmsley, 2011). In terms of dance spectators, Reason and Reynolds have distinguished two interpretative motivations that can guide the spectators' participation in certain kinds of performances. As a result of their qualitative audience research, they propose dividing dance spectators into two groups: those who seek out rawness and sensuality and those who seek out release and relaxation in their dance encounters (Reason and Reynolds, 2010). In other words, based on the articles, expectations relate to the artistic quality and style as well as to the desire to be surprised. Yet, the spectators' own ways of dealing with their expectations and the ways in which they can influence the desire to attend performances of particular genre remain to be uncovered. Taking an enactive perspective could be of use here. It helps to consider expectations as interaction that spectators desire to have with the performance based on their previous experiences.

According to the enactive view of cognition, people enact the world around themselves from the point of view that matters to them. People and world are in a circular relationship in which they act upon each other. One of the central principles in enaction is sense-making, which refers to an individual's ability to interact and make sense of their social and physical environments. In other words, interaction with the world is proactive, in the sense that individuals use their bodies and minds to perceive a world that makes sense for their actions. People's memories and senses help them to navigate through various situations in a way that ensures their well-being, including in relation to arts events (McConachie, 2019). Expectations, the ability to anticipate future events, have an important role in people's sense-making in helping to select the most favourable events (Huron, 2007).

In theatre and performance studies, the enactive understanding of the circular relationship between individual's and their world is applied to performance situations. This implies that spectators constantly act upon a performance and it acts upon them. Due to this, spectators always expect something from the performers (Sofia, 2019). Therefore, here expectations are approached as being created in this circular relationship, in the interactions between artists, producers and audiences within the culture and environment where they reside.

2.1 Performance genres as affordances

In her theory of production and reception of theatre, Bennett acknowledged the role of expectations in the spectator's experience (1990). Following Hans Robert Jauss's concept of the horizon of expectations, Bennett pointed out that spectators hypothesize about the performance according to their horizon of expectations, which shapes the way spectators perceive each text and image about the performance as well as the performance itself

(Bennett, 1990). Bennett discussed further the role of expectations in the actual theatre experience. However, Bruce McConachie's cognitive and enactive approach to spectating considers expectations to be an important part of the spectator's preparation for going to any performance.

In terms of the performing arts, McConachie (2015) states that expectations are tied in with the spectator's memory and the local culture. From the perspective of enaction, one creates expectations of the event in relation to one's previous experiences. This means that spectators have built up knowledge of the conventions of attending performances. In their repeated performance visits, they have learned what kind of experiences certain performances can afford. Knowing the genre or style, the director, choreographer, dancers or other members of the performance can heighten some expectations and rule out others. As McConachie considers: "The affordances of all past performances will invariably shape viewer expectations about the performance to come" (2015).

The term "affordances" is useful for exploring how expectations can participate in spectators' interaction with their surroundings. The term comes from ecological psychology where Gibson (1979) originally coined it to describe the reciprocal relationships between organisms and their surroundings. McConachie has applied it in theatre studies to describe metaphorically the potential fits of certain genres of performances and audience enjoyment. This article follows the notion that affordances are realized in the relation between a feature in the environment and the perceiver's skills to notice that feature as a possibility for action (Chemero, 2003; Krueger, 2011; McConachie, 2015; Rietveld and Kiverstein, 2014) [1]. To clarify what this means with regard to performances, Joel W. Krueger's remarks on musical affordances are further helpful. Krueger argues that people perceive music as an affordance-laden structure that makes it possible to shape and regulate one's emotions (2011). Following this line of thought, dance performances can be considered as well affordance-laden structures. Whereas people can play music to affect their moods in various situations, this paper shows the way in which people can perceive dance performances as a possibility to shape their emotional and cognitive abilities.

In their interaction with the surrounding world, noticing advertisements, reading reviews or seeing images and videos of performances present people with possibilities for action. Depending on previous experiences, spectators can perceive different performance genres affording different kind of possibilities for shaping and regulating one's emotions and thoughts. The features in marketing materials of performances that a spectator is able to perceive as affording a possibility to be affected evoke expectations that further provoke emotional responses (Huron, 2007). Here it is important to acknowledge the intentionality and action tendency of emotions. Emotions move us towards and away from things and events in our environment. Therefore, as emotions move us, they make us act (Fuchs and Koch, 2014). As the article will show, an expectation to be affected in ways that enable the movement of emotions and thoughts is essentially involved in spectators' interaction with dance performances. With marketing, producers can try to direct spectators' expectations, but it can also mislead them. Eventually, spectator's personal expectations and the kind of emotions one connects with them can motivate one to attend a performance of a particular genre when recognizing it as affording the desired possibility for being affected.

3. Methods and material

This case study includes 21 interviews with spectators of contemporary dance that were carried out during the autumn of 2015 and summer of 2018 [2]. The research participants were collected from the Helsinki metropolitan area by collaborating with Zodiak in 2015 and TSC in 2018. Full Moon Dance Festival helped to find the participants from Pyhäjärvi and neighbouring municipalities in July 2018. The collaborators distributed the call for research

participants in their websites, newsletters and social media. A total of 15 women and 6 men, of whom the youngest is 18 and oldest 65, took part in the research [3]. The average age of the participants was 46 years. To protect the participants' anonymity and privacy, they are given pseudonyms when discussing the results of the analysis.

The participants varied in their frequency of attending contemporary dance performances and familiarity with it [4]. Over half of the participants were either currently actively practising or had practised at some point in their life some form of dance as a hobby. Practising dance as a hobby, however, did not mean that they were actively going to performances. In its entirety, the 21 interviewees were a group of people who were interested in dance as an art form. Most of them participated in the research because they wanted to reflect on their experiences with contemporary dance performances. The three Finnish contemporary dance actors Zodiak, TSC and FMDF offer their audiences performances that can extensively vary in their style. As a production venue, Zodiak's repertoire ranges from purely movement-based pieces to conceptual investigations of the body and movement. TSC produces the performances of choreographer Tero Saarinen. Saarinen is known for his distinctive movement style that combines classical and contemporary techniques with Asian influences. As a festival, FMDF's programme varies according to the artistic director. The programme of the summer 2018 had an emphasis on international artists who had not before visited Finland. The performances varied from technically virtuosic movement to multi-art-form productions.

As a research method, the study is a qualitative interview study informed by interpretative phenomenological analysis (Smith *et al.*, 2009). The interviews were designed around certain main questions about how the interviewees had become interested in dance and how they make meaning out of it. In the interviews, the participants told about their interest in contemporary dance and their previous experiences with it. Additionally, they discussed their expectations of it, how they describe contemporary dance and their relation to it as an art form. The central notion in this approach is that, when talking about their experiences of performances, spectators strive for meaning and understanding. Participation in my research has also been a means for them to make sense of their experiences of contemporary dance. As Kirsty Sedgman has pointed, the task of qualitative audience research is to capture spectators' pathways to meaning and value (Sedgman, 2017). Therefore, in this study, instead of being just informants, the participants are considered as creators of their own story of the experience.

All the interviews lasted from 40 to 60 min, and each one of them was recorded and transcribed. The transcribed text forms the material of the analysis. In the analysis, the discourse dynamics framework for metaphor is applied (Maslen and Cameron, 2010), meaning that attention is paid to recurring metaphors that the participants use in speaking about their experiences and expectations. Lynne Cameron remarks that, when using metaphors in their speech, people often choose them according to how they are feeling about what they are saying. Therefore, through a study of metaphors, it is possible to analyse the various perspectives, beliefs, attitudes, values and evaluations that people have (Cameron, 2010). In terms of spectator's expectations of performing arts, a focus on the use of metaphors reveals the underlying conceptions and beliefs about the kinds of experiences performances can afford. Thus, metaphor analysis makes it possible to uncover the expectations that may guide spectators' motivations for attending a performance.

The basic idea is to look systematically for words and phrases in the interviewees' talk that refer to something else and then to discuss their meaning. In the analysis, the interview material has been first thematically organised in terms of spectators' expectations of attending a performance and of contemporary dance as a genre. Then recurring metaphors have been recognised and interpreted what they could refer to. In the analysis, Lakoff and Johnson's (2003) ideas about the bodily basis of metaphors have been useful. The analysis

shows how spectators try to make sense of their abstract experiences of performances by using bodily and spatial metaphors [5]. Such metaphors illustrate what they wish to do with the performance and how they wish the experience to affect them.

4. Analysis and discussion

As explained earlier, taking an enactive perspective on expectations and applying the theory of affordances to performance genres suggest that attending a performance is a possibility for action. This action mainly refers to experiencing emotions and shaping one's thoughts. Previous research has often considered emotional experiences and new ideas as motivating audiences to attend performing arts events. However, this paper suggests that spectators' personal expectations are involved in guiding which kind of emotional experiences or ideas one desires. Following McConachie, the emotions and feelings that spectators commonly experience in performances can highly define genres. All previous experiences of contemporary dance invoke certain expectations for future performances. Subsequent experiences further confirm the notion of what kinds of experience contemporary dance affords (McConachie, 2008). Seen through the concept of interpretative motivations of dance spectators that Reason and Reynolds (2010) identify, this means that those spectators who seek out rawness and sensuality in their dance encounters experience them as a pleasurable action. They can notice and be more attentive to performances that seem to offer the possibility of experiencing these qualities, and the feelings and thoughts they evoke. Although Reason and Reynolds show the links between spectator's responses to a dance performance and cultural competence, motivation and pleasure strategies, they do not speak of expectations or clearly define what they mean with the concept of interpretative motivation. Therefore, this paper argues that experiencing rawness and sensuality can be involved in spectator's expectations of contemporary dance, which can then motivate them to attend particular performances and follow particular artists' work.

The active nature of these kinds of expectations is evident when focusing on the way spectators talk about their experiences and expectations of attending performances. The following discussion shows how the participants of the study described their experiences and expectations with the help of metaphors. I consider that the recurrence of bodily metaphors highlights the active nature of spectators' expectations, that is, the action, which spectators can expect the performance to enable for them. Here this expectation is described as the expectation of being affected.

4.1 The expectation of being affected: the desired action

Talking about the expectations of attending performances with the research participants is a tricky issue. This became evident when they were asked the question "What do you expect of a contemporary dance performance?" Nearly every one of them answered that they have no expectations of the performances they attend. In fact, they said that they try to avoid building up any expectations. However, during the interview in relation to other questions, they often described what they hoped of attending a performance. Such statements clearly show the central role that expectations play in spectators' experiences. Consciously trying to avoid building up any expectations actually demonstrates that the research participants are acknowledging the impact their expectations may have on their experiences. Nevertheless, they have hopes and wishes for the performance. In this paper, these hopes and wishes are considered to be part of the expectations which spectators both consciously and unconsciously have of performances.

When the participants described their previous experiences, they often used words and phrases that refer to such actions as "being open" and "empty" when going to a performance

as well as something “opening up” to them in the performance. Furthermore, in their descriptions they often referred to “going forward”, “entering”, “moving and touching” or becoming “moved and touched”. Such words and phrases are metaphors that show spectators’ expectations of performances: they want to feel that the experience has affected them in one way or another.

Before the performance, I do not even aim to build up any images about what is going to happen because it would be counter-productive in relation to my value expectation, which is that I cannot know what happens. Instead, the performance happens in me or to me, so if I were very conscious about what is going to happen then the matter, which is there precisely to go beyond my cautious mind and somehow conveyed straight to me, would therefore be lost. (Jukka, 43, Zodiak) [6]

As Jukka explains, avoiding building up any conscious expectations of what is going to happen on stage actually makes it possible for the performance to affect him. This is evident in Jukka’s way of saying that the performance happens “in him” or “to him” and that it “is conveyed” to him. These can be considered to be metaphors that show the expectation that the performance will affect Jukka by doing something to him. In order for the performance to do something to Jukka, he needs to be attentive and open to it without any preconceived ideas.

This is an expectation that all the participants shared and described in various ways. For example, attending a performance can be a question of entering a world or space, surrendering to it, engaging and interacting with it and therefore you want it to lead to something.

That it somehow resonates. That you concentrate and go into it. That it sucks you in. Maybe it is like in all kinds of art performances that you follow them in a kind of flow and you do not understand what is happening around you, so that it captivates you. That is maybe something you look for, and wish for, that it somehow would captivate you. (Iida, 25, Zodiak)

In this quotation, Iida talks about the desire to “go into”, “be captivated” and “sucked in”, which indicate the expectation of emotional engagement with the performance. As McConachie has said, “Spectators generally seek to entrain themselves to the rhythms of the performance; it is more enjoyable that way” (2015). Having experienced a feeling that a performance captivated her and she enjoyed it, Iida comes to expect the same feeling of future events. The feeling of captivation becomes a value that she expects when attending all kinds of arts and cultural events.

In their descriptions of good and satisfying experiences, participants repeated the idea that you could immerse yourself in the performance, “go into it” or that “it takes you somewhere”. Furthermore, they spoke of the expectation that the performers have something to say and they are able to make connection with what the performers are doing on stage. This was also the case for a first-time visitor to a contemporary dance performance, who knew nothing about the artists before going.

I do not have anything in my mind what to expect from there, but of course I always expect some message, that it has some message why it is performed so that it is not just empty. (Marjatta, 57, Zodiak)

As Marjatta describes, a performance without a message is an empty performance, which can also leave the spectator empty. When the spectator desires to attend a performance with “an empty mind”, then it is not desirable to leave the performance feeling empty. Behind this belief that a performance should always have a message lie all the previous experiences of performances which have had a message that has affected the spectator. Therefore, this emphasizes performance as a situation in which the spectator expects that the performers want to say something to the audience. As a consequence, they know that they are expected to pay attention to the performers. Thus, the spectators expect the performers to present something that affects them.

I expect that it touches me and then I expect that it would wake me up. It is a different thing to be touched and awakened so that some ideas and feelings arise, even if it's nothing more than what I would have done differently. (Janne, 41, TSC)

The metaphors that refer to touching, moving, awakening and captivating in the participants' descriptions are evidence of the action that they expect the performance to offer. This means that spectators voluntarily put themselves in a situation in which they allow themselves to be captivated, touched, moved and awakened. As Janne describes, this action leads to feelings and thoughts, which can further spark ideas on how to act. Looking at expectations through metaphors reveals the kind of engagement spectators might desire with performances. Eventually, even though spectators may have no advance idea about the performance, or who are performing, the knowledge they have built up through their previous experiences in any kinds of performances may nevertheless create expectations of being affected in particular ways.

When talking about their previous experiences and expectations of performances, research participants systematically repeated words and phrases that referred to touch and movement, being open and empty, getting hold of, going forward or into something. As Lakoff and Johnson note, abstract experiences of events are conceptualized in terms of physical objects or entities which can do something to people or which can be used for something (2003). In this way, it is evident that the spectators expect to have an active role in the performance. They enact the performance from a point of view that matters to them, but this entails that performers interact with them and do not just move in their own closed world. The importance of interaction is seen in the participants' ways of speaking about disappointing experiences as being cold and something that they were unable to get hold of. Following Lakoff and Johnson (2003), these concepts structure our actions, what we perceive and how we relate to others and the world around. Therefore, they can also define spectators' expectations of performance genres. The expectation that a performance affords a possibility of being affected in ways that shape spectator's emotions and thoughts became evident when the research participants talked about their conceptions of and interest in contemporary dance.

4.2 Contemporary dance: difficult to grasp

To inspire interest in attending contemporary dance performances, they have to be considered as offering the possibility to be affected. This expectation of being affected involves a desire to "grasp", "get a hold of" and "get into" something, which are all metaphors used to refer to understanding. This became clear throughout the interviews with those participants who were first-timers as well as with those who said that they had at first not been very interested in contemporary dance. In both cases, the reason was given that contemporary dance either seemed incomprehensible to them or it did not match up to their conception of art. They had difficulties understanding what the skill is in contemporary dance that should be appreciated in order for it to be an art that can affect you. Therefore, the paper here continues to discuss how the expectation of being affected relates to contemporary dance by looking at the ways in which the research participants defined contemporary dance. The claim is that their impressions of contemporary dance reflect their expectations of it and how it can afford the opportunity to be affected.

Throughout the interviews, the prevailing conception was that contemporary dance is difficult to understand. Consequently, it is difficult to define and know what to expect of it. This intrigued those participants who were more familiar with contemporary dance. However, the idea of dance as being hard to understand discouraged the participants less familiar with it from attending. The Spectators' conceptions of dance as an art form are based on their experiences of dancing or watching others dance. Therefore, their bodily experiences

also define their understanding of contemporary dance as an art form and their expectations of future experiences with it. Furthermore, the level of familiarity that spectators have with contemporary dance can significantly determine their ability to perceive dance performances as a possibility to be affected.

When the interviewees were asked how they would describe contemporary dance to someone who knows nothing about it, many of them answered that this was a difficult task. Contemporary dance as an art form based on bodily movements challenges spectators because they need to focus their attention on the body. It became clear during the interviews that this poses certain challenges when attempting to make sense of the genre. Because of the expectation that the performance should affect you in one way or another, there is also a desire to find meaning, “grasp” or understand something in the performance. Having a conception of contemporary dance as something incomprehensible clearly does not promise an experience that will affect you, at least for those who are unfamiliar with dance.

I have not gone there [Zodiak] because I have seen the images of their repertoire and it does not interest me, maybe it has not attracted me, and then there have been some articles in the papers about Zodiak’s performances, so I have not wanted to participate in anything that goes to extremes with things like nakedness, I do not care for that. I do want experiences for myself, but on the grounds of the images, it has not been inviting to me. (Marjatta, 57, Zodiak)

The quote from Marjatta shows that the expectation of being affected is already present when spectators are interacting with the marketing materials, images and articles about performances. As she explains, the material about the performances in Zodiak has not afforded her the impression of a possibility to be affected in enjoyable ways. Marjatta further explained that she had not found the reviews of Zodiak’s performances inviting because she “had not got anything out of them”. She felt that the language of the reviews was so professional that she was not familiar with all the terms used. Together with the marketing images, texts and reviews of Zodiak’s repertoire, Marjatta had created an impression of contemporary dance as something for younger generations. She doubted whether it could offer her anything to identify with. Having trouble making sense of the images and texts about the performances in Zodiak made it hard for Marjatta to anticipate whether they would afford touching and moving experiences. The spectator’s conceptions of the nature of the art form or genre relate to this.

The contradiction between one’s own conception of art, and what contemporary dance appears to be became even clearer in the comments of one of the participants at the Full Moon Dance Festival.

I think somebody has even jumped on the roof of a store in the name of art so it has been kind of like I absolutely cannot get into it. It’s like I could go there myself to jump on the roof of the store and what is the difference between me jumping there or them jumping there, how is that art? (Seija, 37, Full Moon Dance Festival)

In this quotation, Seija describes her experience of a performance that happened on the streets of Pyhäjärvi during the festival. She had not attended the performance but just seen parts of it when passing by. During the interview, she said she considered herself to be someone used to watching more traditional art. She compared her impression of contemporary dance to that of ballet, in which it is easy to appreciate the skill of the artist in doing something that the spectator cannot do. Therefore, to see that someone is “jumping on the roof of a store” does not appear to be a skill worth appreciating. Saying that she “cannot get into it” is a metaphor for the whole experience of not understanding what there is to appreciate in contemporary dance. For Seija, in previous years, her conception of the performances at this festival had made it easier for her to dismiss it and do something else during it.

This further illustrates how spectators' conceptions of art and what they value in it connects to their expectations of being affected. Eventually, this influences how they become interested in contemporary dance. For those unfamiliar with dance, the notion of contemporary dance as difficult to understand and define implies a lack of the possibility to be affected in the way they desire. Perceiving contemporary dance as a genre that affords challenging experiences relates to the spectators abilities and their desire to challenge those abilities in a particular context. For those of the research participants who were enthusiastic about dance, this indefiniteness was a source of interest and a promise of unexpectedness. The contradictions raised by contemporary dance as a genre and its impact are well articulated in the following quotation:

It is somewhat double-edged because on the one hand I have a preconceived attitude that it is over artistic, which no one else can grasp but the artists themselves, but on the other hand it is free expression by means of dance. It is not set in its ways. (Tuija, 44, Zodiak)

As Tuija describes, contemporary dance as a genre can raise a connotation of something incomprehensible but also about something that is not predetermined. The idea of contemporary dance as a genre that is constantly evolving and difficult to anticipate eventually proved to be an important factor for regular visitors to dance performances. In terms of the expectation of being affected, this might sound contradictory, but, ultimately, surprising moments in dance performances can be those that mostly affect, leave a mark, touch and move the spectators.

4.3 Contemporary dance – not “stuck in a rut”

In the end, it was precisely the difficulty of defining contemporary dance that kept the participants interested in it. Among the research participants, the regular visitors considered contemporary dance to be nearly anything as long as it came from the body. The body as a source of art was considered to offer a great variety for freedom of expression, which then enables freedom of interpretation for the spectator. For these participants, the freedom of interpretation defined contemporary dance. It was experienced both as a challenge and as an attraction.

The lack of words and clear storylines in dance both enable and challenge the spectators to be free to make their own interpretations. However, it was felt that this demands that the spectator stays alert and attentive during the performance, which is not always easy.

Because in both contemporary music and dance there are no words, they go into such abstract areas that it marginalizes the audience because it demands some own activity and perceptive skills and comprehension so that you can [follow], and then you hear a lot undervaluation about contemporary music and dance because of the lack of understanding. (Janne, 41, TSC)

Janne connects contemporary dance to contemporary music as non-verbal art forms, which “go to abstract areas”. In referring to “abstract areas”, he defines contemporary dance as more difficult for audiences to approach, as it demands the spectators' readiness to deal with abstract issues and find their own way of understanding. As he contemplates, contemporary dance is often undervalued due to the fact that it is not easily understood. However, the freedom of movement and interpretation was also connected to contemporary dance as a genre that is “constantly on the move” and not “stuck in a rut”. Quite a few of the participants described that contemporary dance makes it possible to question conventions and break barriers.

In the form that it is now, it is very good, it does not have to be pleasant, clashes can happen and in that way it can shape me to think differently, it keeps you awake, and your thoughts do not fossilize into always wanting the same. (Aki, 56, Full Moon Dance Festival)

Aki defines contemporary dance through the clashes that he has experienced as positively affecting his own ways of thinking. Similarly to Janne describing that contemporary dance forces the spectator to be alert, Aki has experienced that the clashes in contemporary dance keep him awake and on the move in terms of thinking about what dance can be. Although the participants acknowledged that there are conventions in contemporary dance, just as in any other art form, they still considered that there is room to stretch and break conventions.

By paying attention to the metaphors that the interviewees used to describe contemporary dance, the article shows how the conception of contemporary dance as a challenging genre relates to the expectation of being affected. Describing contemporary dance with such metaphors as “not being set in its ways”, spectators “staying awake” and thoughts “not fossilizing”, the participants define contemporary dance as a genre that resists categorizations and tries to break conventions. Therefore, it affords these spectators experiences that affect them by surprising and challenging them to seek their own interpretations. Ultimately, for this group of spectators, contemporary dance seems to be a promise of surprising and affecting experiences, which can also keep the mind of the spectator “on the move”. This makes it possible to enact the performance from a point of view that matters to spectators, as long as they are willing to face the incomprehensible.

5. Conclusion

This article has offered an understanding of the active nature of spectators' expectations of attending contemporary dance performances. The purpose of the article has been to show how in spectators' talk, expectations refer to action that can define interest and motivation to attend performances of certain genres. Approaching expectations from an enactive perspective, and with the help of a theory of affordances, suggests that, for the spectator, performances and various genres are affordance-laden structures that present possibilities for action. When spectators see performances in this way, then their expectations also involve an active relationship with the performance. The case study of contemporary dance spectators and the metaphor analysis of the interviews present a further evidence of the expectation that performance experiences should affect one. Therefore, it supports the findings of earlier research about the desire for emotional experiences when attending performing arts events.

In addition, the paper shows how the spectators can actively regulate their expectations in order to be affected. They attend the performance with “open” and “empty” minds but hope that it will affect them in one way or another. Therefore, they want to form an active relation to the performance in order it to affect them. The research participants describe the desired interaction with the performance in terms of bodily and spatial metaphors. These highlight the nature of the expected action as being touched, moved and captivated or being able to go forward, enter into and open something when attending a performance. These words and phrases ultimately refer to experiencing emotions, feelings, ideas and thoughts in performances as favourable action. This may lead to a feeling of being affected in a way that is enjoyable and beneficial.

However, if spectators consider a performance genre, such as contemporary dance, to be difficult to define and understand, then they might perceive it as affording them a challenging experience. This might not enable them to shape and regulate their emotions and thoughts in desirable ways. Eventually, depending on spectator's level of familiarity with contemporary dance, the expectation of being affected can also guide the interest in attending performances. The kind of impression the spectators have of contemporary dance, particular venue or artist influences what kind of experience they perceive the genre, venue or artist to afford for shaping their emotional and cognitive abilities.

The analysis of the case study of contemporary dance spectators reveals the way in which the expectation of being affected and spectators' conceptions of the genre are connected. If one's perception of contemporary dance as not being "stuck in a rut" evokes positive feelings, it can imply a promise of being affected in favourable ways. The enjoyable action that the case study participants eventually relate to contemporary dance is the freedom to make their own interpretations of the moving bodies. In other words, they expect to be able to enact the performance from a point of view that matters to them. Attending a contemporary dance performance involves the expectation of experiencing something unexpected and being affected by it. The desire to be surprised, expect the unexpected, can eventually make the spectators try to manage their expectations by consciously avoiding reading or hearing too much about the performance beforehand.

This shows that dealing with expectations is a complicated issue for both the producers of performances and their spectators. Consciousness of how expectations might affect spectator's experience of the performance and the evaluation of it can make the spectators to regulate their relation to the material about the performance. This represents some challenges for the producers of performances when considering how to communicate and what to publish before the performance. However, becoming aware of that spectators' central expectation is to have an active relation with the performance in order for it to affect them can help when considering various options for marketing, communications and audience engagement. For example, in the case of contemporary dance, one might want to consider whether the material conveys an image of the performance as a possibility for action that shapes one's emotions and thoughts. Does the material invite freedom of interpretation or does it make the performance seem incomprehensible and difficult to approach? Whatever the possible action is nevertheless depends on the theme and content of the performance.

The principle limitation of this study is its small scale and its focus on only one art form and genre. Thus, the results are not generalizable. This paper has not discussed many other influential factors regarding an individual's expectations of particular performance events, such as family member's, friend's and critic's opinions. Additionally, comparisons between expectations of different art forms and genres need further research. However, focusing on the bodily and spatial metaphors that the participants use to describe their expectations provides a glimpse into the dynamic, embodied relation that spectators have with performing arts events. Metaphors illustrate the ways in which spectators conceptualize, define and make sense of attending performances. In contrast with previous research on individuals' motivations for arts attendance, this study emphasizes to take into account the role of expectations in spectators' decision-making. In the end, marketing and communications are about creating expectations. Therefore, understanding the active nature of expectations and spectators' ways of managing them can help to develop the processes of marketing, communications and audience engagement.

Notes

1. Affordances as a term is used in various different disciplines. In this work, the possibilities to act in one's environment according to one's abilities refer to all kinds of activities that one may regard as beneficial to oneself depending on the situation. The ability to perceive affordances depends both on one's skills and on one's relation to the environment. This article follows Chemero's discussion in which affordances are defined as relations between particular aspects of animals and particular aspects of situations (2003).
2. The material is part of the research data collected for a PhD project on the dynamics of value creation in the audience experience of contemporary dance.
3. With the help of Zodiak, I gathered a group of ten, with the Tero Saarinen Company a group of six and with the Full Moon Dance Festival a group of five participants.

4. The participants had to fill out a short registration form for expressing their interest in taking part in the research. In this registration form, I asked them to indicate how often they had visited a dance performance during the past 12 months. Five of the participants had not visited any dance performances, nine of the participants had attended one to four performances, five had attended five to ten performances and two of the participants had attended ten to fifteen or more during the past year.
5. The participants could refer to attending performances also with other metaphors. For example, performance could be referred to as a journey or a location. I have decided to leave other metaphorical expressions outside the scope of this paper because the purpose has been to focus here only on the most frequently used metaphors. An extensive discussion of the other metaphors used would be a topic for another paper.
6. The interviews were done in Finnish and the original quotations were translated into English. The original quotations are available from the author.

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