Musicality in Spoken Theatre

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Fiction, Metaphor, Dispositif

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Abstract

The purpose of this article is to address issues of artistic knowledge and artistic learning by way of studying, through a concrete exemplification, the meanings and implications of linguistic metaphor in artistic and educational conceptualizations of spoken theatre. Professional artists and pedagogues in this field habitually use the concept of musicality to point to key qualities in actors’ artistic work and learning processes. This article aims at a presentation, problematization and discussion of the findings of a recent extensive investigation into this usage. In order to attain this, the article is structured in six sections: an introductory presentation of (i) metaphorical language in learning processes and of (ii) the concept of musicality in the field of theatre; (iii) an overview of historical relations between music and theatre; (iv) a literature review of previous musicality research of relevance to the present topic; (v) a summary of a recent interview investigation into how Swedish theatre professionals view the meaning(s) of musicality in acting; and (vi) a problematization and discussion of the findings of that study, pointing to how this intermedial conceptual loan may be interpreted as a fiction, a metaphor, or a dispositif.

Keywords: Musicality, acting, spoken theatre, intermedial conceptual loan, metaphor, fiction, dispositif.
Musicality in Spoken Theatre

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Introduction

Through the development of artistic research, questions about artistic learning and artistic knowledge have gained new fuel, exemplified by several vivid contemporary theoretical and methodological discussions. The purpose of the present article is to approach such issues by way of studying, through a concrete exemplification, the meanings and implications of linguistic metaphor in artistic and educational conceptualizations of spoken theatre. Professional artists and pedagogues in this field habitually use the concept of musicality to speak of key qualities in actors’ artistic learning. Based on a summary of a recent extensive investigation into this usage (Bjerstedt, 2017), this article problematizes and discusses how its findings may best be interpreted, suggesting that this intermedial conceptual loan may be understood as a fiction, a metaphor, or a dispositif.

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Metaphorical language in learning processes

It is hardly surprising that the use of linguistic metaphors in learning processes has attracted scientific interest. On a general level, the role of metaphor in conceptualization processes as viewed in recent theories of metaphor (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Johnson, 1987; Fauconnier & Turner, 2002) would seem very compatible with ideas of developmental psychology. For instance, inspired by Piaget’s view of sensor-motoric experiences as a basis for children’s construction of reality (Piaget, 1951, Piaget & Inhelder, 1969), Swanwick (1988) views the development of children’s musical intelligence in terms of a progression from thinking with the body to conceptual understanding. Swanwick makes explicit connections between children’s development and the use of metaphorical language; the world, he says, is “thinkable” through metaphors, through “likeness” (p. 47). Such educational perspectives may blend well with the notion of ’metaphorical mapping’ viewed as a process of getting from bodily experience to the structure of thought and language (Johnson, 1987).

Several metaphor theorists insist that the functions of metaphor are fundamental to human thought (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Johnson, 1987; Fauconnier & Turner, 2002). It is hardly surprising, therefore, that metaphor should be considered crucial by some epistemologists and educational philosophers as well. Taking their point of departure in the paradox of Plato’s Meno (How can something radically new be learned?), Petrie and Oshlag (1993) maintain that ”metaphor is one of the central ways of leaping the epistemological chasm between old knowledge and radically new knowledge” (p. 583). Referring to the view on interactive metaphors proposed by Black (1962), they conclude that such a metaphor that creates similarities ”would allow truly new forms of knowledge and understanding” (p. 585); there would be no need to presuppose, as Socrates did, that the learner – in some sense – knows and understands already. According to Petrie and Oshlag (1993), interactive metaphors transfer ”chunks of knowledge” by way of their anomalous character (p. 587). They
are anomalous in terms of the learner’s current framework of understanding. When radically new knowledge is acquired, metaphors can be essential in bringing about a change in this framework.

Mayer (1993) focuses on what he terms the instructive metaphor hypothesis, “the idea that metaphoric language can play a productive role in fostering students’ understanding of scientific descriptions and explanations” (p. 561). In particular, Mayer focuses on how instructive metaphors create familiar analogies, thereby enhancing the learning processes of ”selecting, organizing, and integrating” (p. 572). Sticht (1993) distinguishes between on one hand metaphors as tools for thought and on the other hand metaphor as a tool for efficient communication: ”the effective use of metaphor for producing a functional context for communication and learning requires the teacher to know that students possess the knowledge addressed in the metaphor” (p. 624).

According to Schippers (2006), metaphors are common and probably important in music education, especially regarding ”intangible”, ”elusive” qualities of expression (p. 210). This observation has been one of the points of departure for a couple of Swedish investigations (Bjerstedt, 2014, 2017) of metaphorical usage in the artistic field; they both indicate how the understanding and conceptualization of a certain art form is developed through borrowing a central concept from another art form, thereby exemplifying the phenomenon of intermedial conceptual loans.

**Musicality as a metaphor in the field of theatre**

What is musicality? The word may of course denote abilities in music but in many other contexts as well, as, for instance, in Max Weber’s conception of religious musicality (Weber, 1973, p. 395) – or in sport reporters’ talk about musicality on the football field. Some might even want to state that musicality is a fundamental and important part of all human existence.
The phenomenon of words that are used in a transferred sense should probably not be dismissed too lightly. Metaphors can be meaningful in ways that are central to our understanding of phenomena (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Ortony, 1993).

In the field of theatre, the word musicality is often employed in such ways. Indeed, much theatre parlance would suggest that musicality in a certain sense – or perhaps in several ways – is considered to be crucial to the work of an actor. Musical terms and concepts are widely used as key concepts in theatre practice, in theatre education, and in writings on theatre (e.g., Ashperger, 2008; Boleslavsky, 1933/2003; Cole & Chinoy, 1970; Helander, 2007; Roesner, 2014; Staniewski & Hodge, 2003). For instance, the theatre director may be compared to a conductor, the actor (or the stage) to an instrument, and the script to a musical score. Furthermore, this usage includes the tone of the actor’s line, the pulse of dramatic dialogue, the timing of a dramatic scene, the rhythm of a performance, the musicality of the body, musicalized dramaturgy, and so forth – instances of this kind of musical terminology transferred to the field of theatre are numerous. To refer to theatrical phenomena as ‘musical’ is generally considered a value judgment with strong positive connotations – while the opposite could be said to apply with regard to the adjective ‘theatrical’ (Bjerstedt, 2017, p. 11).

Generally speaking, for an actor to act in a ‘musical’ way would seem to have to do with the play’s transformation from potentiality to actuality, ‘from page to stage’, from script to performance. The musicality of actors in this context, then, would refer to an ability to detect, identify and shape their own perspectives. The playwright John Webster [d. 1634], speaking of ”the excellent actor”, contends that the text on stage is something more than text on paper – and that this something is music: ”He adds grace to the poet’s labours: for what in the poet is but ditty, in him is both ditty and music” (cited from Cole & Chinoy, 1970, p. 89).
The step from text to performance is in itself an intermedial transformation – a journey from one medium to another. Wouldn’t it seem overly complicated, in addition to this transformation, to include in some mysterious way a third medium, music, in this context? That question has prompted a recent investigation presented in the book *Skådespelarens musikalitet* (Musicality in acting; Bjerstedt, 2017).

Needless to say, musicality is used as one metaphor amongst a plethora of metaphors in theatre. It is in the nature of a metaphor to only lend certain qualities of its origin to the new field (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Ortony, 1993). Without gainsaying, musicality plays a significant role in theatre parlance. Occasionally – though not very often – it is the subject of texts where actors and other theatre workers formulate reflections about their art (Bjerstedt, 2017, p. 11). But works that approach the topic of musicality in spoken theatre in a more comprehensive, analytical way turn out to be surprisingly rare. More investigative work in this field is called for.

In sum, I regard the actor’s musicality as a rich and fascinating field of research. It is also quite unexplored. The research question in Bjerstedt (2017) – approached by way of a literature survey and an interview study – was: How do theatre practitioners perceive the meaning of musicality in acting? Based on a summary of the findings in Bjerstedt (2017), presented in the next few sections, this article aims at a problematization of these results, addressing the question, How may the usage of this intermedial conceptual loan be interpreted?

The present article is structured in four parts: (i) a cursory historical overview of relations between music and theatre; (ii) a brief literature review of musicality research, focusing on links to aesthetic fields other than music; (iii) a summary of a recent interview investigation into how Swedish professional artists in the field of theatre perceive the meaning(s) of musicality in acting; and (iv) a problematization of the findings of that study, including the suggestion that the concept of musicality in the field of theatre may be understood as a fiction (Vaihinger, 1911), a metaphor
Music and theatre: An old relationship

The phenomenon of musical concepts in the field of theatre is far from new. Aristotle pointed to some assets he considered valuable for an actor, being the hallmark of winners in dramatic competitions: sound volume, pitch, and rhythm. These obviously are concepts that also belong in music.

Bjerstedt (2017) presents a brief literature review focusing on how the concept of musicality and a series of related musical terms have traditionally been used in the field of theatre. From this attempt to approach historical, descriptive and analytical texts in relation to a historical development of theatre that could be subsumed by the keywords rhetoric–realism–modernism, two general conclusions emerge: (i) there are significant relationships between music/musicality and all of these diverse ideals of theatre, and (ii) these relationships have undergone interesting changes throughout history.

Originally, the arts were integrated. Music has been an integral part of Western theatre during its long history. Contemporary spoken theatre could be considered a little more than century-long ”parenthesis” (Johansson, 2006, p. 26). Among actors in spoken theatre today there seems to be strong agreement that musicality is important. A study a few years ago even stated that ”it is necessary for an actor to be musical. Musicality manifests itself in everything from text management to the way you move your body” (Helander, 2007, p. 35; my translation).

In theatrical contexts, the concept of musicality is often put to metaphorical or metaphysical use. The Polish director Włodzimierz Staniewski [b. 1950] presents a concept of musicality that may – with its holistic, spiritual and cosmological dimen-
sions – call the ancient Pythagorean concept of ‘musica universalis’ or ‘harmonia mundi’ to mind: ”The earth is musical and man is musical. Man can be put out of tune and the same can happen to earth” (Staniewski & Hodge, 2003, p. 63).

Richard Boleslavsky [1889–1937] includes in his textbook on acting (1933/2003) a final chapter on rhythm, taking Dalcroze as his point of departure. According to Boleslavsky, rhythm is of the greatest importance not only to art but to the whole of life and the universe – although he does sarcastically admit the possibility of occasional exceptions:

There is not a stone in the universe without a sense of Rhythm. A few actors, maybe, but very few. Every normal being has it. (p. 132)

Even in more mundane contexts the concept of musicality in the field of theatre is often introduced in fairly general terms: pointing to, for instance, the voice, the body or the musicality of a text, although without going into detail on what is actually referred to by such concepts. Most likely they are employed in a figurative sense. When the ‘pulse’ of a dramatic scene is mentioned, one does probably not usually refer to three quarter time, and the ‘tone’ of an actor’s line is hardly an F-sharp.

Although linguistic usage seems to testify to a close relationship between the art forms music and theatre, this does of course not imply that all theatre workers feel familiar, knowledgeable and confident regarding music. My own experience as a theatre musician and as a music teacher for acting students is that the contrary is often the case: bewilderment, alienation or uncertainty may characterize many actors’ outlook on music.

Music and theatre – worlds apart?

In literature on theatre you will find widely differing views on the relationship between theatre and music. The border between the two art forms may emerge in quite
different ways depending on where you look. Historically, the distinction is not clear; rather, the two art forms have often been integrated to a great extent. Outside Western culture you will often find a close, even inextricable link between theatre and music; for instance, in Indian, Chinese and Japanese performing arts. But this study regards a culture where there is a relatively clear distinction between the two art forms; namely, in contemporary Western spoken theatre.

Since theatre could be seen as being ”at the same time a unique moment and a repetition”, theatre researcher Kurt Aspelin coined the term ”theatrical event” in order to try to capture this peculiar and complex nature of theatre (Tjäder, 2008, p. 11; my translation). In this respect, theatre might be said to be more akin to music than, for example, literature or visual arts.

It has been possible to perceive music and theatre as art forms that are related but nevertheless lack clearly defined points of contact. Jacques Copeau [1879–1949] made it a point to integrate music in his training of actors: both solo and choir singing, musical literacy and basic instrument skills. But according to Copeau’s biographer, his reasons for this policy were not entirely clear: ”Music was a mystery to Copeau, which is perhaps why he continually sought to incorporate it into the training” (Rudlin, 2000, p. 69). It would seem, then, that Copeau’s view that theatre needs music may have had to do with his perception of music as somehow alien to theatre.

The relationship between music and theatre has also been perceived as a matter of translation. Michael Chekhov [1891–1955] formulated a series of concepts and techniques of actor training. The impact of his techniques on today’s theatre education and theatrical practice is described in a 400-page volume entitled The rhythm of space and the sound of time (Ashperger, 2008). Under the heading ”Composition of the performance”, Chekhov (1992) presents a series of exercises that relate to concepts such as pause, crescendo and diminuendo, and (internal and external) tempo. He describes his key concept atmospheres by way of a musical analogy: the atmospheres are
concrete modes of expression that may be compared to the different keys in music, and they need to be listened to in the same way as you listen to music. Chekhov’s concept of psychological gestures also has a musical dimension, which he describes by way of both melody and rhythm, and its aim is to serve as a link to the actor’s subconscious mind. Furthermore, he introduces an exercise that aims to translate music into psychological gesture. To Chekhov, then, the main reason to choose music as a source of inspiration would seem to have been the fact that he viewed music as an art form at a considerable distance from naturalistic theatre.

Some have suggested that there is a crucial difference between theatre and music, namely, the degree of independent creation. According to this view, while theatre merely imitates the world, music is about creating and thereby bring something new to the world. One rather extreme version of this perspective is exemplified by William Archer [1856–1924] who contends that acting is imitative; when it ceases to imitate, it ceases to be acting and becomes something else instead, perhaps orating, dancing or posturing (Cole & Chinoy, 1970, p. 364). Gordon Craig [1872–1966] formulates this view even more drastically: the actor’s outlook on life is the same as that of the camera. According to Craig, the actor never perceives his task as a creative one – such as the musician’s task – but seeks only to reproduce reality, to produce an image that can compete with the photographic image (Cole & Chinoy, 1970, p. 379).

One of the very few scholars who have written extensively about musicality in the field of theatre is David Roesner (2014). He employs Michel Foucault’s term dispositif in order to pinpoint how the concept of musicality, in his opinion, has come to be used in the theatre. The word is not easy to translate; perhaps one can summarize it as an umbrella term for mechanisms and structures that enable the exercise of power. Roesner (2014) considers musicality as ”a central, influential, transformative and multi-faceted dispositif with significant impact on the theatrical landscape of the last 150 years and more” (p. 257). It is an approach which I consider compelling, and I be-
lieve it is important to keep it in mind throughout the many various aspects of musicality described in this study: the concept is not merely descriptive; rather, in many ways it works prescriptively, as an evaluative term which is almost always positive.

Roesner (2014) does not, however, primarily focus on musicality as a norm, but as a sort of umbrella term that covers a variety of ways in which theatre approaches music in various historical, aesthetic, and artistic contexts: ”I will use it heuristically to analyze a varied set of interart movements” (p. 9), he says. He is particularly interested in how music and musicality have acted as agents for the development of the theatre, ”the central role that music has had until today in innovating theater”:

while I cover a range of theatrical forms, from text-based, character-driven drama to surreal, anti-psychological or postdramatic theatre, as well as improvised and/or devised forms of theatrical performance, there is a unifying element in the experimental, reformatory, sometimes revolutionary nature of the practices under investigation. (p. 1)

What really is of interest to the present study, however, is not primarily the concept of musicality in theatre in such a general sense, but the concept of musicality in an actor: embodied, practised. Obviously, this is an interest that is rooted in my own experience from working with actor training, but also in statements that have captivated and mystified me. The actor Rolf Lassgård [b. 1955] once said in a newspaper interview: ”I have the musicality of an actor, not of a musician” (Monk, 2004; my translation). The focus in the following sections – a review of musicality research, a summary of an interview investigation, and the concluding discussion – is on the phenomenon of how the intermedially borrowed concept of musicality is used in the field of theatre with reference to qualities and abilities in the actor.
Musicality in the field of music: A brief literature review

What may have been the first attempt to analyse the concept of musicality was made by a German music journalist, Christian Friedrich Michaelis (1805). He suggests in his article ”Über die Prüfung musikalischer Fähigkeiten” that the ability to concentrate, musical memory, and musical imagination should be included as testable criteria of musicality. Michaelis does not mention perception, however. In our time, it may seem strange that he highlights as a primary musicality criterion something that, according to contemporary opinion, would rather be seen as a result of musical socialization: good taste (der musikalische Geschmack). In French aesthetic tradition, however, Bon Goût had long been a central concept. According to a common view, good taste was to some extent given by nature, not a consequence of musical socialization (Ljungar-Chapelon, 2008).

One of the first attempts to approach the concept of musicality with scientific methods was made nearly a century later by the surgeon and musician Theodor Billroth (1895). He proposes a variety of aspects of musicality: rhythmic talent and feeling, melodic talent, technical and mechanical talent, expression, melody and rhythm, memory, and a kind of sensuous receptivity to auditory stimuli. Billroth also tries to approach the issue by way of a negative formulation: who is unmusical? His answer to this question focuses on receptive and reproductive (in)ability. A person is unmusical who "cannot remember, recognize, or by humming or whistling reproduce an extremely short, rhythmically distinct and very clear melody, one which is not conceivable without a simultaneously perceived harmony" (Billroth, 1895, p. 232; my translation).

For a long time there have been considerable differences between different orientations within the area of musicality research, for instance, between researchers in
music psychology and educational practitioners (Pauli Jensen, 1970a). Some have wanted to describe musicality by measuring an individual’s response to different musical elements such as pitch, intensity, timbre, and rhythm (e.g., Seashore, 1919, 1938). Others have considered musicality as a combination of awareness of tonal and rhythmic patterns and emotional response to these patterns (e.g., Mursell, 1947). Still others have focused among other things on the question of how, based on previous experience, a person learns to perceive musical patterns (e.g., Pflederer, 1963). A concept of musicality that might be considered as related to this, although formulated in even more general terms, is Peter Bastian’s (1987) maxim ”Musicality is the ability to perceive diversity as one” (p. 47; my translation).

Obviously, as a rule, explanations of and attempts to define musicality have contained references to music. For instance, Jørgen Pauli Jensen (1970a) provides this example of an interpretation of musicality:

in the broadest sense, the complex psycho-physiological structure that is a necessary but not sufficient condition that he or she will be able to perceive music as coherent (structured) and meaningful (receptive m.) and express themselves musically (productive, reproductive and creative m.). (p. 615; my translation)

Pauli Jensen (1970b) suggests, however, that also ”aesthetic categories” in a broad sense (for instance, comic, tragic, grotesque, absurd) could constitute a field of interest to musicality research (p. 99 f). I take this as a suggestion that musicality can be a relevant concept also beyond the boundaries of music. This is of course a proposal that I consider to be of great interest in connection with the present study of musicality in the field of theatre. But similar observations are very rare in the literature I have studied. One of the few I have come across is Sture Brändström’s (2006) observation about the communicative aspect of the concept of musicality, to which I shall return shortly.
Brändström (1997) addresses the relation of musicality to the influence of heredity and environment: "Much evidence suggests that the ability to express oneself musically is biologically inherited and equal for all, while the differentiated expression – how the music sounds and how it used – is socio-culturally conditioned" (p. 102; my translation). Brändström (1997, 2006) presents three main perspectives on musicality: absolute, relativistic and relational musicality.

In Brändström’s (1997, 2006) use of the term, absolute musicality is the view that some people possess musicality within them, as it were. It is a perspective rooted in a view of individual opportunities for learning advocated by psychology in the first half of the 1900s. The concept is linked to an elitist approach to musicality as an inherited and rare ability. Against this absolute perspective on musicality, the objection has frequently been made that musicality tests will only provide a measure of receptivity, not of the ability of practical music making.

The second main perspective presented by Brändström is relativistic musicality: the view that all people are considered to be musical in the sense that they have both the ability to experience music and to express themselves musically, provided that the environmental conditions are favorable. It is an approach whose roots can be traced to the 1970s sociology of education. The critical influence of environment is emphasized. The primary purpose of musical education is not to train experts. The focus is not on skills, but on musical experience. The relativistic conception of musicality, according to Brändström (1997), has had educational implications that can be summarized "in terms of dialogue, reciprocity, self-expression” (p. 14; my translation). The concept of creativity is significant to this perspective on musicality. The focus has shifted from skill aspects to "personal experience, meaning, musicianship and understanding” (Brändström, 1997, p. 15; my translation).

One of Brändström’s interviewees puts forward the following criterion of musicality, which I regard as particularly rich in potential:
it sounds like speech, it breathes and there is a natural flow. (Brändström, 2006, p. 149; my translation)

Indeed, a conception of musicality that explicitly relates this concept to qualities in human speech would appear to be interesting and relevant to an investigation of musicality in acting.

In a later essay, Brändström (2006) supplements the two aforementioned perspectives with a third one, focusing on the communicative aspects of music. He calls this third perspective *relational musicality*. Its origins may be found in the "communicative turn in Swedish education" (p. 146; my translation), such as the influence of socio-cultural perspectives, relational thinking and hermeneutic theory on educational theory and practice.

The absolute and relativistic perspectives on musicality are both individualistic. While Brändström finds an absolute approach to dominate higher music education, he notes that on "the highest artistic level of education" communicative aspects and musical experience are emphasized (Brändström, 2006, p. 152; my translation).

Brändström (2006) points to one aspect of a hermeneutic approach as particularly important, namely, that a central feature of all art is communication, the willingness to communicate with others. In sum, he notes that:

> based on the hermeneutical presuppositions upon which this text is based, a relational perspective appears to be the most suitable. Although this text primarily deals with the field of music, it is not too daring an assertion to hold that these perspectives on communication are largely transferable to other parts of the aesthetic field. (p. 154; my translation)

Since my aim is to explore the concept of musicality in the field of theatre, Brändström’s statement is of course of special interest to me. The communicative aspect of the concept of musicality provides a link to other parts of the aesthetic field, espe-
cially theatre. Such connections between the arts are extremely rare in the musical literature that I have perused. (Granted, a wider scope of research literature – e.g., neurobiology and music psychology – might perhaps have yielded further perspectives of relevance. In the context of the present investigation, however, I have limited myself to research literature with closer relations to the field of arts education.) The examples that I have found include the proposal that “aesthetic categories” in the broadest sense can be of interest to musical research (Pauli Jensen, 1970b, p. 99f); the interview quote suggesting that a criterion for musicality may be that ”it [music-making] sounds like speech” (Brändström, 2006, p. 149); and the relational perspective on musicality that Brändström (2006) advocates.

Musicality in spoken theatre – an interview investigation

My strategy in Bjerstedt (2017) in order to investigate the usage of the concept of musicality in the field of theatre was to turn to those who should arguably know best: wellknown and recognized theatre workers with extensive experience of acting. I conducted extensive, open-ended interviews with thirteen Swedish actors, directors and playwrights. The aim of the interview investigation was to provide a few answers as to how practitioners in the field of theatre perceive the meaning of musicality in acting.

Method

For the purpose of attaining a deeper understanding of the usage of concepts and metaphors among practicing artists in the field of theatre, a hermeneutic approach including extensive, loosely structured qualitative interviews emerged as an adequate approach (Bjerstedt, 2017, pp. 20–24).
Bresler (2017) provides a broad presentation of the educational potential of 'aesthetic-based research', advocating an open-minded approach: "it is crucial to balance the development of expertise with the curiosity of a beginner’s mind. [...] Verstehen, empathic understanding, is a special kind of seeing. [...] genuine listening to voices other than our own (or echoing our own) in recognition of others’ richness – voices of artists situated in different places and times" (pp. 653–655). Such a stance was central to the interviews with professional theatre actors, directors, and playwrights.

The interviews were carried out in 2010–11 (Bjerstedt, 2017). Several considerations guided the selection of interviewees: I wished to interview experienced artists who were interested in talking about musicality in theatre and who preferably had experiences from working with theatre education. These professional artists all consented to being presented without anonymization of the material: Stina Ekblad (b. 1954), Gösta Ekman (1939–2017), Lena Endre (b. 1955), Staffan Göthe (b. 1944), Henrik Holmberg (b. 1946), Mia Höglund Melin (b. 1973), Sissela Kyle (b. 1957), Rolf Lassgård (b. 1955), Ann Petrén (b. 1954), Marie Richardson (b. 1959), Göran Stangertz (1944–2012), Tobias Theorell (b. 1969) and Ivar Wiklander (b. 1939).

My way of perceiving and applying the research interview is informed by the approaches expressed by Steinar Kvale (1996). Through the interview I want to attain descriptions formulated by the interviewee in order to interpret and describe the meaning of the phenomena in question. The exploratory interview does not aim to test hypotheses. It is open and not particularly structured. The exploratory interview aims at understanding a topic from the interviewee’s own perspective, at generating knowledge – as a conversation, as a story, as a relationship. Kvale (1996) points out that such exploratory interviews can widen and change the researcher’s own perceptions. One of the main purposes of an explorative study is to discover new dimensions of the topic that is the object of investigation. The interviewees direct attention to new and unexpected aspects of the studied phenomena; during the analysis of the
interview transcripts, new distinctions may be discovered. But the study does not merely relate the conversations without comments. The selection, arrangement and merging of interview statements has been an extensive process. If the results were to be reported only on the basis of the informants’ self-understanding, without a deeper interpretation of the material, an important research dimension would be lost. In the analysis, the different voices are rearranged and confronted with each other and, not least importantly, with the researcher’s way of perceiving and interpreting the phenomena.

Findings: Three kinds of abilities

In the interviews with thirteen renowned Swedish actors, directors and playwrights presented in Bjerstedt (2017), a number of everyday terms emerge as descriptions of important qualities in acting: for instance, life, security, presence, focus, courage, and communication. In addition to them, one central term emerges which has been borrowed from another art form: musicality. Several of the interviewees’ perspectives on musicality in the field of theatre relate to a pattern of receptivity–activity: abilities to listen combined with abilities to act with awareness of qualities such as balance, focus, tempo, and rhythm (Bjerstedt, 2017, p. 85, 148). The ability to be open and ”have an ear for everything” (p. 86) is described as essential to actors’ interaction with each other as well as with the audience. Several additional interview statements will be cited and analysed in the concluding section of this article.

In the interviews (Bjerstedt, 2017), a relatively broad scope of concepts and metaphors emerge. They may all contribute to the explanation of what it means for an actor to act musically. In this section I will attempt to formulate a kind of overall picture based on the interview responses. In a way the task is, of course, not feasible; the image I can hope to accomplish must be both vague and incomplete, maybe also contradictory. My overall impression of the talks is that an actor’s ability to ”act with
musicality” can be seen as composed of a series of skills that complement each other. I have come to consider three key words to be particularly important: presence, structure, and fluidity. (A certain arbitrariness in the choice of words is inevitable. Alternative names might be: sensuousness–scheme–interaction; or perhaps: now-feeling–orchestration–communication. This said as a reminder of the power – and inadequacy – of words. After due consideration, I choose these three: presence, structure, and fluidity.) Each of these terms should this be perceived as a term for a collection of qualities and abilities that are central to the actor’s musicality. All of these abilities are closely linked. The capacities for presence, structure, and fluidity are integrated and interdependent. They engage, interact with, and presuppose each other – in space, in time and in interaction.

**Presence**

It is important for an actor to be here and now with all one’s senses. If acting is to be perceived as credible by the audience, the actor’s ability to be present is crucial. This is a quality that can be expressed in different ways. Marie Richardson formulates presence in terms of focus, but also desire, curiosity and respect in relation to fellow actors: to have ”all senses open” (Bjerstedt, 2017, p. 103; my translation). Staffan Göthe and Mia Höglund Melin speak of the courage to expose oneself to the present. Several actors highlight that what goes on on stage must ”live”. Gösta Ekman talks about yearning for a ”maximum ’now experience’” (p. 74; my translation). Stina Ekblad compares musicality to a ”feeling for the situation” (p. 164; my translation). ”When all actors forget themselves but still keep their agreements, then it’s swinging”, Marie Richardson says (p. 164; my translation).

In sum, to act musically with presence may mean to have the courage to plunge into the unknown, to focus on your fellow actors, to be in the right place at the right moment, and to have maximum openness for the new, for the present.
Structure

It is also important for the actor to be able to perceive, analyse and build structures. It seems to be required to have both an awareness of ”musical patterns” in a play text, and an ability to manage these patterns. Göran Stangertz emphasizes how important it is to ”orchestrate” a theatrical performance: to balance and interpret the text, so that the audience perceives that which it should be perceived. Musicality in the theatrical field, according to several interviewees, involves an awareness of qualities such as tone, tempo, rhythm and pause. For many, contrasts and variations in rhythm and dynamics appear to be central.

In sum, to act musically with structure may mean to perceive the variations and contradictions in the text, to see the big picture, to identify and relate to the text’s musical qualities, to create meanings and build a whole by shaping the text musically in time and space.

Fluidity

It is also important for an actor to be free, relaxed, active and open. As I mentioned, in the words of several interviewees, acting must have what they call life. If the audience experiences this, it gives them a feeling of safety and security. Acting should also have life in the sense that there is no mechanical repetition.

Furthermore, several actors emphasize communication as a key objective of acting. Hence, Sture Brändström’s (2006) concept of relational musicality – formulated with a focus on music’s communicative aspects – may be important also to understand the function of musicality in the art of spoken theatre. ”What we mostly mean by musicality is the responsiveness of interaction,” says Iwar Wiklander (Bjerstedt, 2017, p. 88; my translation). The concept of fluidity points to the dynamics between listening and action, between sensitivity and rhythm/timing, between receptivity and
activity. Several actors mention how one reaches flow through openness, by relating to the circumstances.

In sum, to act musically with fluidity may mean to live and to act in a free and relaxed manner, to interact, to work rhythmically in voice and body, to drive, to switch rhythm, to be active.

Implications of interview findings

In the interviews, the actor’s musicality emerges as a physical and an intellectual but also a holistic capability. The actor’s qualities and abilities that have been categorized as presence, structure, and fluidity are seen as interacting with one another. Based on the informants’ views, it seems reasonable to view each one of these categories as a necessary (but not on its own sufficient) condition for what has been called the actor’s musicality. The ability to act musically, then, could be taken to mean this: *to be here and now with all one’s senses, to perceive, analyse and build structures and to be free, relaxed, active and open.*

Such an overall description might make abilities such as those ascribed to the categories of presence and structure to appear as opposite or even contradictory ones: on the one hand, an intellectual capability of structure, and, on the other hand, a physical capability of presence. But I think that would be a simplistic and misleading picture. The ability to be present, to experience as fully and richly as possible the ‘music’ of the play, could probably largely be a matter of sensuous, physical processes – alongside intellectual ones. To be in the right place at the right time also requires cognitive, analytical and structuring abilities in the actor. Furthermore, the ability to structure is not purely intellectual. Firstly, there are of course sensuous components in experiencing qualities such as heaviness, lightness, density, airiness, variations and contradictions in a play text. Experiencing them exceeds a purely analytical discernment. Secondly, relating to the text’s qualities is an equally complex process. Not-
withstanding that planning how to relate to these qualities and evaluating afterwards how it went off may be seen as intellectual processes, the actual implementation of these plans still will include bodily components such as breathing, movement, voice and rhythmization. The relationship between abilities subsumed by the categories of presence and structure hence would appear to be an integrated one.

The abilities included in the category of fluidity are distinctly physical in character. But that does not mean that they are disconnected from the intellect. The ability to give and receive impulses includes an integral relationship between mind and body. Simultaneous activity and receptivity emerge as the essence of the actor’s fluidity. The concept of fluidity is thus clearly related to the concept of presence: lack of presence means lack of openness and receptivity. It also has obvious connections to the concept of structure: the actor must be responsive, open and receptive to qualities, variations and contradictions in the text of the play. In summary, therefore, the relationship between the capability of fluidity and the capabilities of presence and structure would appear to be an integrated one.

A rather rigid schema such as the one presented here may of course only in a limited sense claim to depict what is included in the musicality of an actor. Yet, what would an actor’s musicality mean if it did not include abilities of structure? In what contexts might an actor be said to act ‘musically’ without such abilities? Even in a theatrical equivalent to free jazz, a happening or a performance, some kind of structure is reasonably constructed. What would an actor’s musicality mean if it did not include abilities of fluidity? A soloistic performance neither giving nor receiving impulses? What would an actor’s musicality mean if it did not include abilities of presence? Chance? Trance?

In the section on the concept of musicality in the field of music, it was concluded that rather few musicality researchers seem to have been interested in the relevance of musicality to communication or to aesthetic categories in a broad sense. The image of
musicality that emerges in the field of theatre is a rich one. To musicologists, it may perhaps seem peculiar with its emphasis on the concepts of presence, structure, and fluidity. The prospect of bringing this image of musicality to the field of music and try it out there emerges as a tempting one. To what extent may these three categories of abilities be used to describe the concept of musicality in music? Might such a description be perceived as adequate by musicians, musicologists and music educators?

For an actor to act in a ’musical’ way is a multifaceted thing. A concise way to express the function of musicality in theatre may perhaps still be that the actor, in the words of the Renaissance playwright John Webster, ”adds grace” – but this grace is a rather complex one.

Discussion

The aim of the study (Bjerstedt, 2017) was to explore a concept used in the field of theatre by way of a literature survey and an interview study. There may be reason to discuss what may actually be achieved through such an approach. In trying to formulate some sort of unifying, summarizing perspective, I will not avoid the question of its validity.

First, there is the issue of selection. How may the selection of interviewees have affected the survey results? There are many different kinds of theatre, and there are radically different views on the relationship between theatre and musicality; already a comparison between, for instance, the formal restraints of Racine’s ’word music’ and the improvisational forms of the commedia dell’arte will make this abundantly clear. How would the results of this study have been affected if the interviewees had had, for instance, other types of theatre experience, and belonged to a different age span? In many ways, the actors’ different backgrounds manifest themselves in the interview responses. One example clearly illustrates how different kinds of outlook on theatre, ’aesthetics’, can be associated with differences in character in interview responses.
Various images of theatrical ‘music’ emerge in the interviews: (i) theatre as chamber music, with a focus on interpreting the playwright’s intentions (exemplified by actress Stina Ekblad), (ii) theatre as jazz, with a focus on relating in a flexible way to the whole (exemplified by actress Ann Petrén), or (iii) theatre as “more just like drums” (a citation from my interview with actress Mia Höglund Melin). As I stated in the beginning, my choice of interviewees was partly guided by my wish to talk to people with extensive theatre experience. This may have resulted in receiving fewer comments from those young theatre workers named “a courageous generation” by Mia Höglund Melin, people who want to abolish traditional genre classifications and “play in a new way” (Bjerstedt, 2017, p. 121; my translation). The overall picture that has been gained from these particular interviews would probably look a bit different if I had interviewed theatre people with different preferences and conceptions regarding style and genre. To admit this does not mean that this study loses its value, but that there is cause for further investigation.

The construction of concepts or metaphors

The relationship between language and external reality is rarely regarded as unproblematic. For centuries thinkers have spun variations on the theme that our observations cannot be objective, that both our experiences and our linguistic expression of them are necessarily guided by theories contingent on human thought.

The term construction often occurs in contexts where the freedom of human knowledge is problematized. I am interested in how concepts and terminology can be borrowed from one area of use (music) and transferred to and applied in a new field (theatre). That makes these kinds of issues relevant. Does a term such as ‘musicality’ refer to an underlying reality, an ‘essence’ which is timeless and independent of human consciousness? Or is the concept constructed in order to mean something else? What does it mean to say that someone is acting musically? Ludwig Wittgenstein an-
ticipated latter-day constructionist, anti-essentialist approaches with his well-known laconic words: ”the meaning of a word is its use in the language” (Wittgenstein, 1953/1992, § 43, p. 31). The social constructionist opposes to an essentialist approach and considers, on the contrary, phenomena and concepts as products of human choice; the socially constructed reality is an ongoing, dynamic process in which social phenomena are created, institutionalized and become tradition (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). From this viewpoint, the concept of musicality could be considered as socially constructed. The interview statements contain examples of how the term is used in the field of theatre to clear 'feedback effect': as positive opinion, as an assessment measurement, as an overall aim, or as a tool for analysing the theatrical work of yourself and others.

Is there any real core behind this sort of talk – some kind of essence of musicality? A dominant perspective in theatre methodology following Stanislavsky is to focus on a character’s actions – not on the character itself (Sjöström, 2007). Similarly, one could consider musicality as a dynamic activity, rather than a static property. Gender theory and queer theory have advocated a performative approach where what is traditionally perceived as properties is rather understood as something that people do, not as something they are or have. With such an approach, the question of the existence of an underlying identity becomes crucial. Following Lars Elleström (2005), it could still be argued that the very concept of construction assumes that some sort of essence is possible, and that these two terms get their meaning through their mutual dynamics: ”Perhaps a dialectical understanding of the two concepts is necessary. The essence is something that is constantly becoming, and construction always exists in its coming to be” (p. 252; my translation). I view such considerations as important to this survey. When we speak of ‘musicality’, our relationship to the concept is arguably dynamic in exactly this way: we create and recreate (construct) it through our way of using it, while we at the same time have conceptions or even convictions regarding its core (essence).
With regard to how we use our concepts, there is a forgotten but not uninteresting approach called *fictionalism*, a doctrine of "useful fictions" formulated by the German philosopher Hans Vaihinger [1852–1933] in *Die Philosophie des Als Ob* (Vaihinger, 1911). In several respects, this 'as-if philosophy' is reminiscent of latter-day theory of cognitive metaphor (e.g., Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). According to Vaihinger, human thought cannot comprehend the given by merely using purely theoretical considerations. We have to create a number of useful, beneficial *fictions* which are regarded as if (als ob) they were true as long as we use them. There is an interesting terminological consistency between Vaihinger’s as-if philosophy and the contemporary theatrical methodology of Konstantin Stanislavsky where the term "as if" also plays a significant role. According to Vaihinger, fictions are inadequate, subjective, metaphorical conceptions. They differ from hypotheses that can be verified (made probable); the task of fictions, on the other hand, is merely to serve in appropriate ways in a life practice. Whether fictions are self-contradictory or otherwise false is of secondary importance, according to Vaihinger. This way of considering our use of concepts is particularly interesting in the field of art. The arts do not require logic in the same way as science; thus metaphors may function in the arts in the same way as fictions in science. The concepts we choose to employ may convey a better sense of reality – by deviating from it. Even though spoken theatre does not contain music, many claim that musicality is necessary to the actor. Perhaps this view could be understood as an ’as-if’ fiction – or as a metaphor.

One reason to consider that what we are dealing with might be viewed as a *metaphor* could be the fact that musicality is put forward with such an overwhelming positive consistency in the field of theatre. In factual issues there is rarely total agreement. But an overall impression of my previous experiences in theatre and theatre education as well as of the literature study and interview survey (Bjerstedt, 2017) that have been summarized here is that there is a remarkable consensus regarding the concept of musicality in the field of theatre. The interviewees are unanimous in their
high valuation of musicality, agreeing that it would be unreasonable to imagine a theatre that strives to be unmusical. It is not impossible to conceive of such a compact unity as a lack of reflection and questioning, an absence of discussion. The word ‘musical’ has been given a position as an umbrella term for a variety of desirable abilities and qualities in theatre, and it is rarely questioned, if at all. In music education, metaphorical language is common and probably also important (Schippers, 2006). It seems possible to interpret the term ‘musical’ in the theatrical field as a metaphor, a fiction or a construction. The perspectives introduced by Vaihinger (1911) may be relevant here, and even more so the recent theories of conceptual metaphor (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980) and conceptual blending (Fauconnier & Turner, 2002). I also view Max Black’s (1962) and Paul Ricoeur’s (1975/2003) remarks about the interactive nature of metaphors as fruitful in this context: metaphorical speech provides a new description of reality. The metaphor allows us to see reality anew; it is a tool for discovery. To interpret the meaning of metaphors requires a gentle and open approach. To speak of musicality in acting does not just mean to say something about what acting is, but also to assert something about what musicality is. The metaphor is bidirectional.

Based on the results of this study, would it be possible to interpret the concept of musicality in the field of theatre as a social construction with a normative function? Discourse analyst Jonathan Potter (1996) has pointed out how descriptions can be analysed both as actions and as constructions of fact. The notion that it would not be every actor’s aim to act with musicality is viewed by the interviewees as an unreasonable one. While the term ‘musical’ has positive connotations in everyday language, the opposite goes for the term ‘theatrical’. May the relationship between the field of theatre and the term ‘musical’, with its strong positive connotations, be interpreted as a parasitic one? Might one function of such a normative, socially constructed concept of musicality within theatre be to exclude certain theatre practitioners? Mia
Högland Melin points out that the term ’musicality’ is also used prescriptively in the field of theatre:

> I believe that when you talk about musicality, there is a sort of elitism. Who am I to say that I have better taste than another person? When you talk about musicality, I think you touch this. Is one out of two musicians more musical than the other one? Or is this piece played in a more musical way than the other? Is this painting better than the other? Deep inside many would probably like to answer: yes, I think this one is better. But we refrain from that, because there is an elitism when you reach a certain level. Can you really talk about this? (Bjerstedt, 2017, pp. 161–162; my translation)

As mentioned earlier, David Roesner (2014) views the concept of musicality in the field of theatre as a dispositif in Foucault’s sense: as mechanisms and structures for the exercise of power. As such, the concept points beyond the focus on sound, on the auditory, in conventional musicality, Roesner holds, and it points in several directions: firstly towards the embodied and prelinguistic, secondly towards the cognitive, towards a way of understanding theatre. Musicality, Roesner points out, can function very differently in theatre. In some forms of theatre, musicality becomes a means of disciplining the actors, in others a means to liberate them. Sometimes musicality represents the immediate, sometimes the contrary: a reflective stance. While musicality to Adolphe Appia could provide the way to the ”inner essence” of a drama, Vsevolod Meyerhold rather viewed musicality as a way to create distance (p. 257). In sum, according to Roesner, this dispositif is characterized by its ”transformative potential” (p. 258).

In line with this, the use of the musicality concept in the field of theatre might be viewed as symptomatic of two phenomena which could deserve critical attention: first, what Mats Alvesson and Kaj Sköldberg call discursive introversion, where a particular use of language, through being institutionalized and perceived as obvious, will
dominate consciousness and discussions; and secondly, what these authors call mystifications, that is, myths or ideologies that will limit understanding (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2008, pp. 338). To treat such themes critically based on a larger scope of empirical material would be an important task for future research.

The summaries and statements expressed in the presentation of findings in the preceding section should be seen against this background, and therefore be handled critically. In sum, I believe that these reflections and considerations add significant perspectives to previous views on educational metaphor in the arts as presented by, e.g., Swanwick (1988), Petrie and Oshlag (1993), Mayer (1993), Sticht (1993), and Schippers (2003); we should not ignore that the concept of musicality is arguably a constructed one, permeated by normative aspects when employed in the field of theatre.

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