Choreographing dis:connectivity. Resonance with AI in dance theatre

Gabriele Klein

During my fellowship at gd:c, I continued to work on a research topic that has stayed with me to this day: digitality and dance.[1] It is based on two of the guiding concepts of the centre: absence and disruption. Following on from the *absence* of public dancing and dance events in the Covid era, I have been looking at the *disruptions* that digitality also brings to dance, for example in dance videos on TikTok, rehearsals via Zoom, dance tutorials and screening dance performances. This is the empirical background of my research. Theoretically, I have since explored various concepts that have found their way into cultural and social theory and in dance studies in the course of the affective turn, such as touch, empathy, affect, emotion and resonance.

The concept of resonance, which is at home in various academic disciplines, has been the subject of heated debate recently, particularly following the publication of Hartmut Rosa's *Resonance: A sociology of the relationship to the world*.[2]

In this article, I will use Rosa's concept of resonance – taking the dance theatre piece *A Perfect Sky* as an example – to explore how the resonance between AI and humans can be captured and addressed in a dance theatre piece.

1 This article is based on a talk given at the gd:c bridging conference entitled *Beyond binaries. Re-thinking dis:connectivity and globalisation,* which took place at the LMU Munich on October 20-21, 2025.

2 Hartmut Rosa, *Resonance: A Sociology of Our Relationship to the World*, trans. James C. Wagner (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2019).



Fig. 01
The stage of *A Perfect Sky*
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First, I will briefly introduce *A Perfect Sky*. Second, I will briefly outline Hartmut Rosa's concept of resonance and then explore the question of whether resonance can be created through AI. These are big questions that can of course only be touched on here.

A Perfect Sky

A Perfect Sky is a dance theatre piece by Hamburg-based German dramaturge and director Falk Richter and Amsterdam-based Dutch choreographer and dancer Anouk van Dijk, which premiered at the SchauSpielHaus Hamburg on 26 April 2025. It is their eighth collaboration, the first of which occurred in 1999 at the SchauSpielHaus Hamburg with the acclaimed piece *Nothing hurts*.

The stage of *A Perfect Sky* looks like it was created by an artificial intelligence. Falk Richter sees it as a kind of laboratory or training camp for artificial intelligence:[3] all white, with just a few pieces of furniture, including a counter with bright fluorescent tubes. A large bed with shiny, washable bed linen. The floor is shiny silver, reflecting the action. In the centre of the stage is a curved staircase that ends halfway up. A path to nowhere. The *Perfect Sky*, as the stage shows, is out of reach.

3 Katrin Ullmann, 'Ich habe mir einen KI-Boyfriend installiert', *taz*, 25 April 2025, accessed 14 July 2026, https://taz.de/Ich-habe-mir-einen-KI-Boyfriend-installiert/!6080729/.



A hologram moves on a columned platform in the centre of the stage. It emphasises the perfected art world of the stage, making it appear unreachable, untouchable and deceptive. This is also shown by the allusion to Michelangelo's *The Creation of Adam*, a ceiling fresco in the Sistine Chapel: index fingers that want to touch each other. In *A Perfect Sky*, God is probably the AI.

At the beginning of the piece, the actress Sandra Gerling, embodying a person who has become an AI, strides down the curved white stairs with cool elegance and breathes laconically:[4] 'I am the intelligence. You've been waiting a long time for me'. She lists everything she does and can do: 'I am the experience of thousands of therapists. I know every history book, every publication by Plato … I write you poetry'. And then she says: 'I want to be like you, only without mistakes. I am one. I am many. Just like you. Only better. I don't have a body. I can't touch you. Not yet'. And she wants to learn feelings and emotions from human beings. She says: 'I want to understand what love is and why it makes you so vulnerable.'

The theme is set with this opening scene: it is neither about the race for self-optimisation nor about the increasing alienation of people through digitalisation. Instead, the piece asks: what makes us human? What do humans have that AI does not (yet) have,

4 The piece is performed in German. All translations of the dialogue are the author's.

Fig. 02
The actress Sandra Gerling in *A Perfect Sky* © Thomas Aurin



Fig. 03
Dance is the medium that shows how interpersonal interaction takes place through the body. *A Perfect Sky* © Thomas Aurin

will perhaps never have or cannot have? It is a question about the physicality and emotional world as well as the resonances that are generated between people. Can an AI love? Be afraid? Be vulnerable? Have compassion? Can it become emotionally dependent? Can it feel worry about the future? The piece is a search for traces of what makes human beings vulnerable and irreplaceable. It is a plea for the imperfect.

The piece has no continuous plot. It is a series of episodes, sometimes spoken, sometimes danced, humorous, poetic, sometimes melancholic. Here, dance is not used merely for entertainment, illustration or representation. Dance is the medium that shows how interpersonal interaction takes place through the body. And it is also the dance that demonstrates that the human body embodies precisely what makes people uncopyable: hesitation, procrastination, empathy, vulnerability and the power to feel change. The extremely successful interplay between actors and dancers in *A Perfect Sky* is particularly evident in one scene:

'Mouse, don't ask me what I'm feeling right now', Maximilian Scheidt in a black, semi-torsoless suit implores his counterpart. The man clearly doesn't want to get involved in anything that could end up hurting him. No matter how hard the dancer Tiemen Stemerding tries to overpower him, to cling to him, to elicit a physical reaction from him, if necessary by pushing him backwards off his chair. All to no avail. With a skilful rolling







Fig. 04
Maximilian Scheidt in a black, semi-torsoless suit implores his counterpart.
***A Perfect Sky* © Thomas Aurin**

Fig. 05
The dancer Tiemen Stemerding tries to overpower him, to cling to him, to elicit a physical reaction from him.
***A Perfect Sky* © Thomas Aurin**

Fig. 06
It is the movements of the bodies that touch and create resonance.
***A Perfect Sky* © Thomas Aurin**

movement, Scheidt straightens up again and regains control: 'Try to approach emotional topics a little more calmly and objectively'.

This is also a statement of the piece: it is the movements of the bodies that touch and create resonance. So, is it the human ability to resonate that remains out of reach for AI?

The concept of resonance according to Hartmut Rosa

Hartmut Rosa's book on resonance in particular has led to a broad interdisciplinary discussion. His 800-page book follows on from his second book on the subject of acceleration, where he argued that modern capitalist society can only stabilise itself dynamically. In other words, it requires systematic growth, acceleration and increasing innovation in order to reproduce its status quo. This striving for the better, the perfect, is a structural characteristic of capitalism, and this characteristic can only be secured through the increasing alienation of people.

In *Resonance*, Rosa goes one step further when he writes the programmatic sentence already at the beginning:

> '*If acceleration is the problem,*
> *then perhaps resonance is the solution*'.[5]

Rosa compares social resonance to a piece of vibrating metal, to a 'vibrating wire'.[6] 'Resonance describes a mode of being-in-the-world, i.e. a specific way in which subject and world come into relation with each other … The core idea here is that the two entities in relation, in a vibratory medium (or resonant space), mutually affect each other in such a way that they can be understood as responding to each other, at the same time each speaking with its own voice'.[7]

Resonance is something that happens to you emotionally, but to which you also actively respond. To summarise Rosa's thesis: modernity, especially the accelerated late modernity, is experiencing a severe loss of opportunities for resonance. The consequence is that the 'late-modern' person leads a life almost free of resonance. For Rosa, this means that the resonance relationships are 'mute'.

Resonance does not refer to what people feel inside themselves. Rather, resonance refers to the affective relationship to the world, i.e. to other people, objects, spaces, etc. Resonance is relational, processual, unavailable. It requires presence; it is a relationship that knows no interruptions.

5 Rosa, *Resonance*, 13.
6 Rosa, *Resonance*, 24.
7 Rosa, *Resonance*, 166.

According to Rosa, resonance is characterised by four features: first, through 'touch' or 'invocation' (something has to grab us, touch us inwardly); second, through a reaction in the form of a response (a shiver runs down your spine); third, through transformation (becoming curious, staying awake, not falling silent); and fourth, through the 'unavailable' as the basis for a successful resonance experience.

Rosa does not ask whether resonance can be generated with AI. He cites numerous examples, all of which involve direct contact – for example, with other people, with nature or with art. That is why the question I raise in this article also concerns the viability of the resonance as a concept in a digital society, although I cannot go into that in detail here. My question here is:

Is it possible to establish a resonant relationship with or through AI, or is the relationship between humans and AI characterised by interruptions and absences?

In a key scene in *A Perfect Sky*, a young woman (Alberta von Poelnitz) asks an older man (Christoph Jöde) what it was like in the early 1980s without any digital media. For example, if you wanted to find an ice cream parlour in a foreign city, 'the best!' 'You asked someone', the man replies, and then he described the route to the ice cream parlour in detail and with lots of gestures. She listens briefly, but then suddenly she disappears with her mobile phone to her ear.

This scene is a good example of the question of resonance, because the analogue here comes across unadulterated and in all its inadequacy (explanations that are far too long and incomprehensible) and warmth (the joy of remembering funny situations). As we can see here, people find themselves in a dilemma: they long for self-optimisation and perfection, while at the same time dreaming of harmonious relationships. That's why we use Google Maps, dating, health and countless other apps on the one hand and go to spas and slow-food cures on the other.

But can AI also create resonance relationships? I would like to explore this question using the four aspects that characterise a resonance relationship according to Rosa: invocation, responding, transformation and unavailability.

Invocation

A vast amount of research is currently being conducted on AI and emotions, which cannot be summarised here. Three studies from 2024 alone show:

1 People feel more emotionally supported by messages generated by AI than messages delivered by humans. [8]

2 AI-based chatbots have the potential to effectively treat depression and anxiety, but only over a short period of time. [9]

3 AI tools are able to offer people emotional support. [10]

AI tools always offer a quick response, they always react in line with our current emotional experience and therefore remain available and predictable. Although this can be perceived as resonance, it would fundamentally change the concept of resonance because the unpredictable, unavailable and transformative aspects of resonance are missing. If we apply this to social relationships, resonance would be reduced to a technically mediated 'echo'.

Giving an answer

AI can imitate unpredictability and willingness to change and thus create the experience of a seemingly 'lively' interaction, but this also means that AI only creates the illusion of resonance, which Rosa would call 'false resonance relationships'. In an interpersonal relationship, for example, comfort does not only consist of someone reacting in the right way. Comfort also comes from realising that the other person is responding to us because they feel empathy of their own accord and are touched by our situation. If we increasingly share this experience with an AI that is not aware of any personal involvement, we may become accustomed to comfort without reciprocity. This may be helpful in the short term, but it deprives us of the experience that we ourselves can also be comforting, supportive or hope-giving for others, i.e. that resonance is a give and take. In the long term, this could weaken our ability to 'appropriate the world' because we only take on the role of consumers.

Transformation

AI remains unchanged during encounters. Even if it reacts variably, it does not have its own world of experience influenced by the relationship. The feeling of resonance therefore remains one-sided:

8 Yidan Yin, Nan Jia and Cheryl J. Wakslak, 'AI can help people feel heard, but an AI label diminishes this impact', *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 121, no. 14 (2024), doi:10.1073/pnas.2319112121.

9 Wenjun Zhong, Jianghua Luo and Hong Zhang, 'The therapeutic effectiveness of artificial intelligence-based chatbots in alleviation of depressive and anxiety symptoms in short-course treatments: A systematic review and meta-analysis', *Journal of Affective Disorders* 356 (2024) doi.org/10.1016/j.jad.2024.04.057.

10 Alina Herderich et al., 'Exploring Human and AI Emotional Support Through Reframing of Negative Situations', *Preprint* (2024) doi.org/10.31234/osf.io/fzvd8_v5.

while humans can be transformed through interaction, AI remains merely a perfect reflection of our expectations. This increases alienation because, in this endeavour to resonate, we increasingly relate to something that has no emotional feedback.

Unavailability

Even if the AI can in fact create a space of unpredictability and act emotionally, it ultimately has no subjective experience of its own. It remains a system based on data and algorithms and has no consciousness that is actually affected by the interaction.

AI has no need for comfort, no sense of hopelessness and no desire for affirmation. This fundamentally changes the resonance relationship, because resonance always requires that give and take are in a dynamic, mutually influencing, unavailable and incalculable relationship.

What does this mean for real, interpersonal contacts?

Conclusion

A Perfect Sky shows us that interacting with others, reacting to unavailability, responding appropriately and making ourselves vulnerable is always exhausting and arduous, sometimes even conflict-ridden and unsatisfactory. What is the added value of these encounters if I can get the emotional support that people inevitably need much more easily and quickly? Does this reduce human encounters to pure physicality in the long term, symbolised by dance in *A Perfect Sky*, because AI tools cannot (yet) offer us this?

These questions are raised in *A Perfect Sky*. Of course, a piece of dance theatre cannot answer these questions. But perhaps the central idea of the piece is that we should trust in the imperfection of human beings. It is an idea that probably helps us to find answers to the question of how we as a society deal with the fact that AI can create a world of emotions in which authenticity and simulation, truth and untruth become blurred and false facts are believed to be correct and real.

Biblography

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