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# Audio Description for Dance Performances:
## An Artistic and Collaborative Approach

Abstract

Dance performances are one of the most difficult events to audio describe, as the onstage reality does not only serve the plot of a choreography, but it also "[creates] and [recreates] a visual array abstracted from narrative content" (Kleege 1994, 9). The nature of dance performances often requires the use of specialised terminology in the audio description, although the audience of the performance is not necessarily expert in dance or performances. To achieve an effective description, balance between the satisfaction of people with some knowledge and people with no knowledge on the topic is needed. However, this is not the only balance that the audio description needs to achieve. Dance performances are markedly events preferably enjoyed live, more than any other type of performance, and the various meanings that are captured by movements, facial expressions, music, and visual effects, rather than a verbal script -even a cryptic one- that is meant to unfold a certain meaning, makes it impossible for the audio describer to work alone. Based on the example of *A Clear Midnight*, a performance choreographed by Maria Koliopoulou, and audio described in Greek by the author for the 2021 Athens Epidaurus Festival, the aim of this paper is to analyse a more collaborative and creative approach to audio description, one that is mostly called "integrated" audio description and aims at "connecting both audience and performer to each other and the artistic content of a piece in a positive way" (Cavallo 2015, 133).

## 1. *Introduction to Audio Description and contemporary dance*

Audio Description (AD) is "a precise and succinct aural translation of the visual aspects of a live or filmed performance" (Hyks 2005, 1), or as Fryer defines it, "a verbal commentary providing visual information for those unable to perceive it themselves" (2016, 20), thus helping blind and partially sighted people access

live or pre-recorded audiovisual media. As Mills (2015, 2) demonstrates, AD can imply much more than the description of images, for "[d]epending on the source medium, it can include the reading aloud of text; explanatory remarks on sound cues, noises, and musical themes; and descriptive narration about visual elements such as settings, actions, costumes, and facial expressions".

Patiniotaki (2019) suggests that it is exactly this intersemiotic nature of AD that has made the joint study of AD in the field of Translation more complicated than other types of Audiovisual Translation, such as subtitling and dubbing, where the translation practice is more 'evident' in the way information is transferred. Fig. 1 below is the author's attempt to visualise signal transfer in AD, whereby "[t]he audio of the source text is retained in the target text and can be both verbal and non-verbal, and the audio describer transfers it as such, with or without verbal additions, while the visual content is transferred through verbal means".
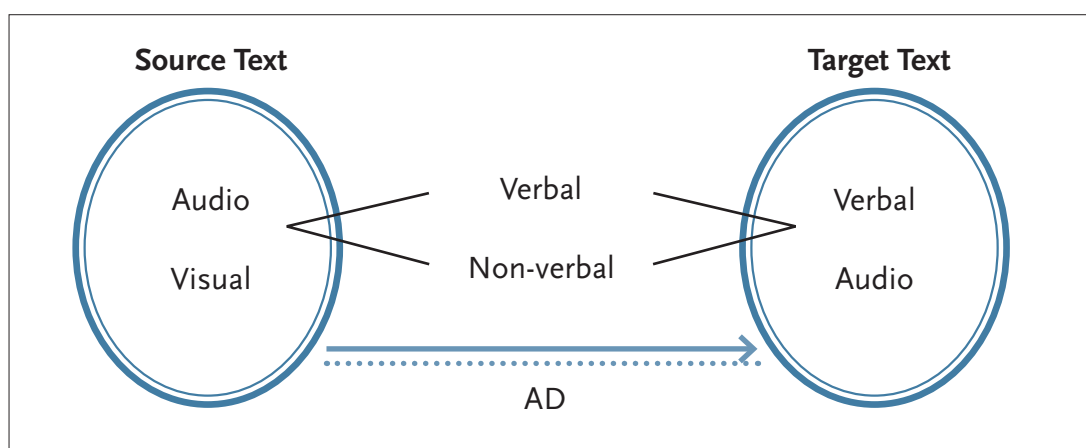


Fig. 1. Signal transfer in AD (Patiniotaki 2019, 86)

Apart from the complexity related to its recognition as a type of translation (Patiniotaki, 2019), AD is characterised by creativity, potentially to an extent exceedingly rare to experience in other types of translation, since professionals are expected to produce scripts based on the existing content (audio and visual, verbal and non-verbal). At the authoring stage, a number of parameters need to be taken into consideration, mainly: a) the information provided in the original script and the audiovisual elements of the material that is to be audio described, b) the style and the purpose of the script and the original content,

c) the medium of delivery (i.e. television, cinema, theatre, exhibitions and the like), d) the manner of delivery (i.e. open and heard by all or closed and heard through headsets), and last but not least e) the needs of the audience.

Quoting Dolmage (2014), Mills suggests that AD is a genre of ekphrasis (i.e. expression): "In Disability Rhetoric, Dolmage discusses the destigmatizing effect of this move; ekphrasis encourages us to imagine 'accommodations' for people with disabilities as adding artistic and rhetorical value, not simply transposing or distilling meanings" (Ibid.: 2). These authors have recognised the personal aspect involved at the authoring stage, with describers' decisions being determined not only by the needs of the audience for equal access to information, but also the need to experience art. The notion of ekphrasis and creativity in AD is not as welcome in all contexts, with guidelines often purposefully issued to restrict subjectivity (Fryer 2016, 165).

Among the types of content that can be audio described, dance performances could be considered as the most demanding one, and one that cannot be restricted with guidelines due to the complete lack of verbal reference as well as its live provision. An even bigger challenge for an audio describer is contemporary dance, which is characterised by "ephemerality, corporeality, precariousness, scoring, and performativity" (Lepecki 2012, 15), distinguishing it from all other kinds of dance performances. Kwan (2017) explains that in addition to the contemporaneity of such performances, i.e. their temporality as performances that take place in a particular period, they are also tied to it in a peculiar way. Citing Lepecki, Kwan (2017, 39) refers to the "ontological definition of dance as a time-based art, of dance as inherently in time, thus inherently contemporary", highlighting in parallel the 'constitutive quality of dance':

[T]his constitutive quality of dance when placed into a visual arts framework, provides the potential for political and aesthetic radicalism. That is, when situated alongside the typically static visual arts or when framed, for example, in the institutional structures of a museum, dance "as a practice of contemporaneity" is radical.

Temporality though can also be found in the form of delivery of such productions. In search for technological solutions for pre-recorded AD in live events, Vander Wilt (2020, 771) argues that "[l]ive theatrical events pose an interesting problem for AD services. Like fixed media, the descriptions must be timed appropriately so as not to disrupt other aural aspects of the show (musical numbers, dialogue, etc.)". However, live events are rarely identical, constituting

the content that the audio describer build the script around fluid. Among the various elements that can be different among performances are a) changes in the script and reorganisation of the plot (either due to human parameters or late decisions not communicated with the describer), b) problems with technical parameters of the event (e.g. lighting), and c) change of venue (e.g. works on tour). All these call for instant decisions that only a describer who has deeply studied and understood a play can make. Nevertheless, temporarity is not the only challenge a describer needs to address in a live performance, especially in a dance performance and, more importantly, in a contemporary piece. The biggest challenge lies in the decisions of what to include in the description, how to express it and how much to interpret from the dancers' movements.

One of the characteristics of contemporary dance is that it is expressive and characterised by fluidity in the dancers' movements, allowing for a variety of bigger dance genres to be produced in contemporary versions, e.g. jazz, lyrical, ballet etc. This means that contemporary dance is not simply a genre of its own, but it can be found both as an added value/characteristic of a more mainstream type of dance, or as an individual type, allowing dancers with divergent backgrounds to be trained accordingly and join a contemporary show. Due to its free nature and diversity, contemporary dance has also benefited mixed and dedicated dance groups and initiatives with disabled dancers. Panagiotara (2019), reporting on the iDance educational Erasmus+ project as part of the Europe Beyond Access initiative, explains how contemporary dance acts in a democratising manner allowing for wide collaboration and experimentation, while respecting difference and enabling diversity, all of which are materialised in the form of dance education in inclusive dance groups. It could thus be argued that the more inclusive dance groups available in a country, the bigger the chances of disabled dancers participating in such a group, and by extend the number of disabled people attending performances out of interest in dance both as audience and as artists.

## 2. *Integrated and collaborative Audio Description*

Subjectivity and other characteristics of AD have been discussed mostly in the context of AD for the cinema, as this form of AD could be considered more restricted and conventional since the temporal parameters and the existence of

audio verbal elements in most cases lead to the production of an AD that cannot deviate too much from the content in terms of interpretation. Especially when adherence to guidelines is required, objectivity may be specifically requested. However, objectivity does not only lie in the way AD is written and recorded, but also in the choice of information to be included in the AD script. As mentioned in the previous section, those choices are less clear when it comes to live performances, especially in the absence of scripts, which do not always allow for a clear determination of a plot or a line of events, often requiring interpretation of what is presented on stage.

In the ADLAB Audio Description guidelines of 2015, Remael et al. recognise subjectivity at the level of interpretation based on the acceptance that the audio describer is a viewer, and thus has their own understanding of what they see and decide how to 'translate' it based on their understanding. The authors of the guidelines argue that "no one ever sees the same film" and that "[t]his is no different for the blind and visually impaired audience since it is just as heterogeneous as the sighted one" (Remael et al. 2015, 16), and go on to suggest "a balance between a personal interpretation and personal phrasing (subjectivity) and more text-based interpretation and phrasing (objectivity) that leaves room for further interpretation by the blind and visually impaired users" (Ibid.). This admittedly liberating approach could entail risks when there is no text to assist viewers' comprehension and their interpretation of what is described to them. Although the authors suggest that an integrated and collaborative approach to AD is required for all artistic content, with focus on contemporary dance performances, they consider that it is of paramount importance.

Fryer (2018) clearly determines two types – and two poles – of AD, Traditional AD (TAD), and Integrated AD (IAD), with the first one being characterised as neutral, non-auteur, and collaborative only among audio describers, which could lead to the dissatisfaction of creators with the outcome. On the other hand, IAD is seen as a more creative process that allows for collaboration between the audio description team and the artistic production team. The outcome of such collaborative approaches to AD can be more creative and artistic than that of TAD. In fact, for IAD to be possible, creators need to be aware and in complete agreement with the provision of AD. The author of this paper has often had to produce AD for live events where the creators were either not aware that the service should become available (usually when a performance is provided as part of an accessible festival), or

they were against any 'evident' provision of the service that could affect the experience of the sighted audience. The latter has not been experienced at the level of open provision of the service, since the author has taken on such projects only when the request came directly from the artistic team. Yet, they have found themselves in situations where the service was requested due to external requirements, e.g. a requirement for a performance to be accessible in order to receive governmental funding. When collaboration directly with the creators was not feasible, the author was forced to look for alternative routes of integration[1] or a more traditional approach.

It is important to clarify that IAD in this paper is not used to refer to open descriptions only. It refers to descriptions that have been produced and delivered artistically, whether in an open or in a closed format, as a result of collaboration with the artistic team and the utilisation of artistic skills of the describer, e.g. voice acting and positioning according to the content, use of vocabulary to engage, entertain, as well as educate, and more. We could thus talk about a more creative and collaborative approach to AD, which is integrated to the original product, regardless of the mode of delivery.

Udo et al. (2010) characterise their AD for Shakespeare's Hamlet 'unconventional', in that it was designed in collaboration with the creative team to fit the whole style of the production. It could of course be argued that IAD and collaborative AD are two different things but, traditionally, collaborative AD in the industry has been used to refer to more than one describer working on the same AD. At the same time, open AD is very clearly defined based on its mode of delivery. Based on the above, it could be considered that the parameter of artistic integration is stronger in the definition of IAD mentioned above and is thus used hereby to refer to an artistically produced AD significantly enhanced by the collaboration between the audio describer and the artistic team. Further to that, Udo and Fels (2010) refer to IAD that can be fine-tuned to serve different purposes, removing the mode of provision from the parameters that make AD integrated. On a similar note, Whitfield and Fels (2013) identify another type of AD, hybrid AD, which combines characteristics of TAD and IAD, with AD being produced creatively and emotively, but after the production stage. However, the purpose of the current paper is not to strictly define the different forms of AD or categorise the specific type of AD for dance performances accordingly.

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1 Collaboration with other members of the artistic team.

3. *Audio describing* A Clear Midnight

*A Clear Midnight* is a 2021 production. It is a contemporary dance performance choreographed by Maria Koliopoulou, and audio described by the author for the 2021 Athens Epidaurus Festival. The choreographer was inspired by Walt Whitman's poem *A Clear Midnight*, which was published in the section "From Noon to Starry Night" of the seventh edition of *Leaves of Grass* (1881).

*A Clear Midnight*

This is thy hour O Soul,
thy free flight into the wordless,
Away from books, away from art,
the day erased, the lesson done,
Thee fully forth emerging, silent, gazing,
pondering the themes thou lovest best,
Night, sleep, death and the stars.

This poem functioned as a source of inspiration for the three people who conceived the idea of the performance: Vaggelis Artemis, Yiannis Isidorou and Maria Koliopoulou, which was choreographed by the latter and performed by nine women. The Prosxima Dance Company that performed at the Epidaurus Festival was founded in Greece in 1996 and it is based on the ideal of utilizing the dance medium to foster communication within the wider community. The Company works "as a collective of artists, allowing for diversity to emerge and be integrated in the creative process. Its productions vary in context, structure and choreographic style and they have been presented in different performing platforms such as museums, theatre stages, industrial and open spaces" (Prosxima Dance Company, 1996-2022). With four out of nine dancers being disabled, the group also bears social characteristics that are closely linked to the rights-based approach to access services, as presented by Patiniotaki (2019) based on the social model of disability, although the author considers that this human right of equal access to entertainment should be recognised, and the relevant needs be satisfied much more broadly, regardless of the participation of disabled artists in productions.

The following paragraphs summarise the main challenges of AD in *A Clear Midnight* in terms of the content, the timing of the script, the scripting process,

the management of visual elements, voicing annotations, anchoring, decisions related to building concepts and characters and providing a context for the performance, during the preparation, script finalisation, and live delivery of the audio description, followed by the practice applied. Throughout this account, special attention is paid at the collaboration between the describer and the artistic team towards the provision of a high-quality description that carries the meaning as it was meant to be presented by the creators, understood by the artistic team, and interpreted and adopted by the describer for the purposes satisfied by the AD service, i.e. giving access to a contemporary dance performance for audience with limited access to the visual channel of communication.

### 3.1 *Challenges linked to the nature of the performance*

Audio Describing *A Clear Midnight* was demanding because of the peculiar nature of the performance. In addition to the challenges mentioned in the previous sections, the visual elements that complemented the performance made the task of audio description a really demanding project. The stage and the on-stage setting, the video that played live during the performance, the constantly changing clothes of the dancers, the lights that were stabilised a couple of days before the performance, the continuity of the movement patterns as well as their individuality by dancer, the diversity among dancers, the innerness of the dance patterns, the dancers' breathing techniques that were resonant throughout the performance and were directly linked to the dancers' constantly changing positioning and movements, made it extremely difficult for the describer to prepare a solid draft early at the preparation stage. That led to a series of drafts that would change after each rehearsal based on discussions with the artistic team.

### 3.2 *Preparation and collaboration*

The describer of this performance was offered no preparatory materials before attending rehearsals, other than a generic description of the performance as provided at the promotional material of the Athens Epidaurus Festival (online, 2021):

Midnight in a bar, with performers in the role of patrons, taking over the stage and leading to a place where the ecstatic body rules supreme, beyond conventions and obstacles. Nine dancers, with or without physical disabilities and visual impairment, create a piece verging on 'dance epidemic'.

How are communities built? What is the use of scapegoats and the role of ritual violence? These questions inform the choreographic research, drawing on both the element of surprise and the optimism suggested by immediate experience and being present in the moment.

The describer contacted the creator to find out the source of inspiration for the performance, which led them to study the reference poem and various interpretations of it in relevant bibliography. However, the nature of the performance required live attendance of rehearsals for a clearer picture to be shaped. As Braun (2008, 6) argues, "in audiovisual texts, signs from different modes of expression are used to create meaning jointly". The describer needed to attend more than ten rehearsals in order to build the mosaic of the performance since a) before the week of the performance rehearsals took place in a different location, whose dimensions were different to those of the stage, b) decisions on the clothes that add to the essence of movements in dance were finalised during the last week and underwent constant changes before then, c) the way the nine women spread on stage would be different when all stage props would be added on stage. On the other hand, the team was prepared so well that the core of the performance did not change during the rehearsals attended by the describer.

During the first three rehearsals, the describer focused on capturing the movements and then replicating them to grasp the movement as similarly as possible with the dancers. The describer also studied the breathing techniques of the dancers following the voice instructor's, Anna Pagalou, training on site during the rehearsals. The describer would discuss their understanding and interpretation of each art of the performance and the movement patterns with dramaturgy consultant Betina Panagiotara and the choreographer, who kindly directed the describer towards their visualisation of the performance.

3.3 *Building concepts and characters together*

Before attending the rehearsals, the audio describer re-visited basic contemporary dance terminology, a task that was facilitated by the fact that the describer has

participated in contemporary dance groups in the past and has some basic knowledge of most of the terminology used in that context. The idea was to not base the description on specialised terminology, but to be able to understand the choreographer's instructions to the dancers and transfer the essence to the audience. In the context of film productions, references are made to standard versus cinematic AD with the use of cinematic terminology. Fryer (2016, 133) explains that "access not only to the visual elements but also to the visual style of the film is essential if the AD user is to be on the same footing as members of the sighted audience", a problem for which the Fryer identifies two solutions: a) the implementation of an audio introduction, and b) the balanced use of relevant terminology.

The describer asked for the patterned movements of the dancers like aerials on stage (fig. 2) to be explained both with technical terminology and with similes. For example, explanations like "the dancer rotates like a spinning top" or "the dancer raises her hands like tree branches," were included in the description of "spinning rotations," and "opens her arms like branches around her body [trunk]." This need is also expressed by Margolies who argues that "[g]enerating new metaphors based in tactile and kinaesthetic experience, [AD scripts] reflect sustained attention to the embodied rather than the literary aspect of performance" (2015, 13).



Fig. 2. *A Clear Midnight*: Aerials (Property of Kiki Papadopoulou)

Fig. 3. *A Clear Midnight*: Cross (Property of Kiki Papadopoulou)

The describer focused on retaining a balance between the creators' intended skopos and their own interpretation as a viewer, considering that the depth of the creators' analysis of their performance is often different to those of a person watching the performance for the first time. The dynamics of the prevalence of one view over the other were managed with in-depth explanations of the audio description process and lengthy discussions on what information a blind person needs in order to enjoy the performance. The describer sent five of the eight drafts they created between the fourth and the final rehearsal asking for reviews and advice in terms of the terminology used, while interesting dilemmas occurred. On some occasions, there was a need for the describer to defend choices that were relevant to AD vocabulary and the information provided against more simplistic and artistic approaches (for example, repeated reference to the positioning of the dancers on stage which the describer also combined with their proximity to the audience, thus giving hints when the dancers' breathes were closer to them), while on others, the suggestions and explanations of the artistic team were extremely helpful and solved serious vocabulary issues (for example, determining that a dancer was raised in such a manner to form a cross helped in the description of the shape created by the dancers, see fig. 3).

One of the most interesting challenges of this performance was the identification of the nine dancers. Although their movements produced a linear result overall, each dancer had an individual pattern that was unique and created a unique dancing personality of them. However, most patterns looked similar in terms of their spinning and whirling effects. The determination of different movements was achieved through two means. The first was to ask the choreographer and the voice instructor what each dancer's breathing point and centre of their movement was, e.g. lower waist, diaphragm, back, neck. This allowed the describer to focus on the role of that body part and combine it with the description of the final movement. The second means employed towards that direction was a session with the dancers where they were asked to describe themselves as entities in the performance and their patterned movements using three to four words each. This is a technique that the describer always applies to make safe, respectful, and informed decisions when describing each artist. Based on that, when a dancer did not mention their impairments, and their impairments were not

portrayed in any way through their movements, no reference was made in the script, e.g. a dancer with sight loss. When their impairments manifested through an aid, descriptions of the individuals would only refer to the aid once and then let the audience hear the sound of the aid when in motion or when it touched a surface. When impairments manifested through the dancers' movements, the focus of the description was on the movement and no additional personal information was given. Afterall, when describing their role in the performance, all dancers focused on their feelings, their strength as characters and their movements, and the decision of what to declare was made in mutual agreement with the whole artistic team, satisfying the describers' personal views on disability and the creators' aims towards diversity and inclusion in their dance teams.

After authoring the drafts and receiving the relevant feedback, this collaboration resulted in a description of high quality due to the extremely expressive, yet informative vocabulary and expressions used. The constant exchange of ideas between the describer and the artistic team was considered extremely essential for the specific performance, where the describer was expected to prepare a script with no verbal basis, with very little background information to start with.

### 3.4. *Describing the visuals, matching the sounds*

The describer also collaborated with members of the artistic team that were responsible for the visual outcome of the performance. They requested rehearsals with the performance clothes to measure them, touch them, take pictures, and describe them as accurately as possible. Essential information on the types of fabrics and the cuts was shared by Marios Rammos, the costume designer, while discussions with the artistic team on the rationale behind the choice of each piece of clothing helped in scripting descriptions whereby the dancers' clothes were presented for purposes of identification, always in support of the movement patterns of each dancer.

Further to that, the artistic team provided images of the settings with the exact dimensions of all props (fig. 4), while discussions followed on the colours and the materials. Finals checks were necessary on site and the description of the setting was completed during the last week.
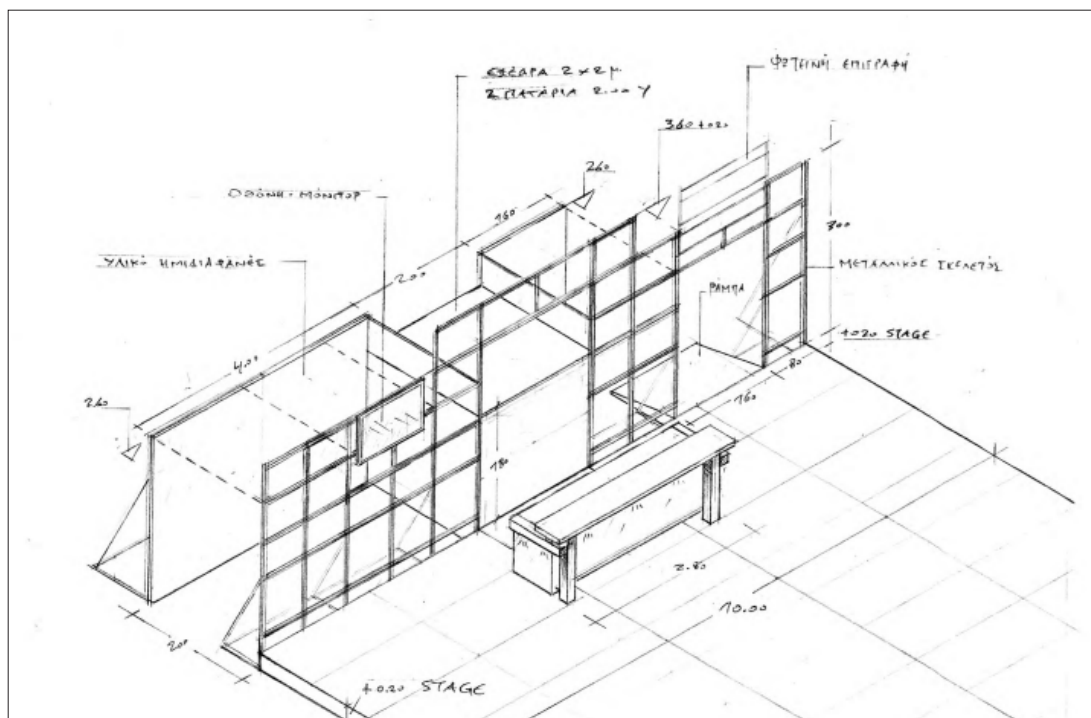
Fig. 4. *A Clear Midnight*: Setting (Property of Thodoris Artemis)

Another crucial element of the project was an added video (see fig. 2) that was projected on stage during the performance. The video included scenes from old Athens neighbourhoods playing in loop, which required description. The decision made by the describer was to match the video content with certain parts of the performance when reference to that would not cause confusion to the audience. The fact that the scenes of the video appeared in a loop allowed the describer to pick those points in action where patterned movements were repetitive on stage and no major changes took place (e.g. patterned strolling for five minutes, see fig. 5).

The video was shared with the describer by the creator, Yannis Isidorou, who kindly explained the logic of implementing those scenes in the performance. An interesting characteristic of the video is that it was distorted with parasites, and the describer made sure this information was mentioned during the audience. The lighting design was also of particular importance in the performance. Further to its on-stage functionality, it served in the prioritisation of information when moving from one dancer to the other, as well as to transfer the visual effect shaped between highlights and shadows on stage.

Fig. 5. *A Clear Midnight*: Stroll (Property of Kiki Papadopoulou)

Sound played a key role in the performance and the describer needed to make sure to pause when sounds had a meaning to the content, as well as to allow the audience to identify the dancers based on their body sounds and their breathes. Sounds made by wheelchairs and canes were allowed to be heard, which also helped in referencing and identification (see previous section). Breathing synchronies among dancers were also offered the describer's silence to help achieve a haunting and immersive experience. All movements that resulted in sound produced by body parts, e.g. fast steps, rotations, hands banging on a dancer's waist, falls on the ground, and the like, were allowed to be heard clearly, and were accompanied by a clarifying descriptions, e.g. "[the wheelchair stops] she turns to the dancer standing next to her [pause for turn], pauses for a while [pause for silence], [wheelchair break] and starts approaching her slowly from the left". Pauses were considered necessary as the fact that a performance does not have a script should not mean that the describer needs to speak constantly. The performance should 'breathe' and allow for all elements of the content to reach the audience. The music of the performance was studied carefully, and when strong effects were heard through the music, the describer tried to create pauses, to allow the music atmosphere to reach the audience.

For that portion of the audience that needs audio description to equally access a dance performance, another important auditory element is the describer's voice. Voicing plays an extremely significant role in the way the audience realises the play. If the voice tone and positioning are out of context, that could form an alienating factor, thus not promoting engagement of the audience. The describer identified the essence of the play as dark, mystic, often intense, and at times calming, and changed the volume and the intensity of their voice accordingly, with annotations indicating those changes in the script in the form of reminders. Having studied voice positioning and orthophony, the describer also asked the voice tutor of the performance to show them the breathing point of the dancers, which acted as the centre for their dancing patterns, and voiced the AD with the same voice positioning. Interestingly, acquaintances of the describer did not recognise the describer's voice who was later asked who did the voicing of the AD, as it sounded like an actor specifically trained to a dark delivery for the performance.

## 3.5 *Timing with no scenes*

Timing AD for the cinema may be a process whereby describers face a restrictive parameter in terms of expression and coverage, yet in dance it can be both a blessing and a curse. On one hand, the absence of a script and a series of scenes gives the describer the space to offer a longer description and provide information a little later if there are various visual elements that need to be described throughout the performance, thus avoiding massive condensation of the AD script. The negative side to that is that the describer can get lost if something changes in the performance, and they need to be alert and change the order of their description chunks instantly or describe the performance without textual references. In essence, when describing dance performances with many dancers on stage, the script acts as a safety net, in case the describer gets stuck or stressed or in case of a technical issue, because close attention to what is happening on stage is needed and reading from a script is neither advisable nor possible if one wants to be precise and immersed in the performance they are describing. Hermosa-Ramírez (2020) lists this preparedness as one of the advantages of live AD as opposed to automated and recorded AD. Further to the above, as Holland (2009) puts it, the AD script should not be reduced to a series of actions. It needs to be more than that.

To achieve good timing, the describer of the performance under discussion transformed visual and audio elements into anchors. Massive changes in lighting, i.e. lights on and lights out or changing lighting colour, alteration of areas of the stage that are lightened up and highlights or darkening of people and spots indicated a 'change' for the AD and allowed the describer to identify three major parts of the performance, and several other thematic areas. For example, "[LIGHTS ON, 1, 2, 3...]" indicates that once the lights are on, the describer will count to three and then start the description of new positioning of the dancers on stage, or "[LET THEM BREATH]" indicates a purposeful pause to listen to a specific sound live and then move on with the description, while "[VIDEO]" indicates that it is time to combine the video content with the description. Within the AD script, it was useful to apply a variety of colours and fonts to highlight these anchors and to easily locate them. One important note relevant to the synchrony between the video and the AD script is that the describer noticed that there was a technical issue during the rehearsals, which could easily be repeated during the live performance, and thus decided to keep

the video script on a different file, so every time the "[VIDEO]" indication was seen in the AD script, they turned to the video AD script to link the most suitable information to the performance.

As mentioned above, sound played a vital role to the feelings that the creators wanted to cause to their audience and was thus respected as much as possible around the script. Music was also used as an anchoring device since the dancers were tuned to it, consciously changing patterns, and subconsciously altering dynamics in their movements based on the music and the sound effects. An example of such anchors is "[PAUSE TO HEAR BANG] – [SPEED UP]", which informs the describer of the pause as well as the effect the pause should have on their narration. After the banging effect, the dancers would speed up, so the describer decided to match their narration speed to their movement.

## 4. *Audio Introduction: Sharing the context*

Audio Introductions (AIs) are usually short pieces of prose that offer information about the content, i.e. details about characters, costumes, cast, filmic language or even the plot and the creative team (Fryer and Romero-Fresco 2014). In the context of a contemporary dance performance and based on the aesthetics of the performance and the AD, as described above, it was considered wrong to provide information about the dancers ahead of their entrance to the stage, as that would affect the order of information as the creators wanted it to be delivered. That was the describers' suggestion, and it was applied in agreement with the creators. At the same time, the cryptic nature of the content left a lot of room for specifications as to 'what to expect', and AI was thus used towards that direction, and to balance the visual effects that can be lost during an audio-described performance, or those that may be left out to avoid overloading the audience with interpretations. It was decided that interpretations will only be available through the vocabulary and the expressions used to describe movements and facial expressions. So, the AI was implemented to enhance understanding of the plot.

The AI consisted of three parts: a. description of the setting, b. introduction to the performance, and c. link to the main reference of the performance, the poem. In the first part, with reporting tone, the describer introduced the festival, the theatre, and the whole setting with all on-stage props, saving time by only

mentioning them in the form of reference later in the AD. In the second part, with narrative tone, the describer decided to include the choreographer's note, along with information about the poem where it took its name from. That way, the audience had equal access to the creators' inspiration. In the last part of the AD, with prose tone, the describer read a translation of the poem in slow speed, and then paused before the lights turned on and AD began. The choice to leave any reference to the dancers out of the AI was also enhanced by the fact that the first part of the performance included a solo performance of one of the dancers, with only her back visible in the darkness. The describer thought that any reference to the dancers that would only appear on stage following the solo would be forgotten by the time the dancers got on stage, since there is no script and no actors' voice to link their delivery to.


## 5. *Further steps and concluding remarks*

The preparation and the delivery of the AD for *A Clear Midnight* proved to be one of the toughest AD ventures for the describer, requiring a substantial amount of time at the preparation stage, more than ten rehearsals, good physical preparation, and open discussions and collaborations with the artistic team. Despite the challenges, the feeling such a project leaves to all those participating in it cannot be less than rewarding. Discussions with the team indicated appreciation on everyone's dedication to the project, while the dancers expressed great satisfaction that their views were taken into consideration. Mutual respect was expressed between the describer and the choreographer and the dramaturgy consultant who were actively involved in the revisions of the AD draft and affected the outcome of the AD. The choreographer and the dramaturgy consultant massively contributed to the integration of the service in the performance, by making successful suggestions regarding terminology and vocabulary, style, and prioritisation of information, which helped the describer understand the plot as well as create a script that would allow the audience to understand the performance the way the creators intended for the people who would attend their performance.

Revisiting the definition of IAD cited in the first section of the article, taking this contemporary dance performance as an example, it could be said that IAD is achieved when a balanced collaboration between everyone

involved in a performance and the audio describer is agreed. Based on the definition, IAD needs to also satisfy the condition of being provided in open mode, and heard by all, yet the current paper does not discuss this parameter. Although out-of-scope here, a relevant article by the same audio describer aims to address this parameter too (Patiniotaki 2022), and further discuss the case of AD as a role, i.e. the application of the describer-as-character approach (Fryer, 2018) in a contemporary performance, and in particular how the sighted audience receives AD in this context. The latter is considered particularly important for the constant revision and improvement of AD for the author of this paper and, despite the fact that the conditions of delivery of the currently discussed performance did not allow the collection of formal feedback for the AD, due to measures taken for the COVID-19 pandemic in Greece, a questionnaire designed for all users has been used in performances following *A Clear Midnight*.

Finally, apart from the reception of AD by the audience, "participatory accessibility", as Di Giovanni (2018) calls it, could be another interesting way to approach contemporary dance performances, allowing the audience to actively contribute to techniques for AD that would work best according to the context.

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