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DANCE / THEORIES – Reloaded

TRH

[Journal for Performing Arts Theory]

No. 18

Eight years ago (2002) we published Vol. 4 of the *TRH*, the journal for performing arts theory under the title ‘New Dance / New Theories’. The volume was an attempt to recognise, present, and theoretically articulate the changes and new developments, discourses and practices on the international contemporary dance scene, since we realised that the postmodern dance framework had become exhausted, as well as that the European infrastructure of dance as an art was drastically changing, in terms of production and organisation, as well as in a conceptual sense. Also, we wanted to offer to our local and regional readers a conceptual-theoretical framework to think those changes in the Serbian language, as best we were able to construct that framework at that time. Back then, we were not in a position to develop a sweeping, panoramic view of the synchronic turbulences that were happening on the international scene; instead, we offered an inconsistent cross-section of the new dance and new theories of dance – ranging from dance within other, previously established performing disciplines (such as theatre or opera) to the then current ‘conceptual dance’, and from the post-structuralist theorisations of dance as text, via the philosophy of dance, to the cultural-studies approaches to dance. In addition, we tried to use the volume for a critical reading of the geopolitical positioning of the then emerging regional contemporary dance scenes in the context of a new, post-Cold War, globalised world of art, that is, dance. A huge number of collaborators contributed to the volume, from inside the *TRH* circle and the rest of Serbia, the region of the former Yugoslavia, as well as from abroad; their educational profiles, approaches, and fields of interest comprised performance studies, theatre studies, musicology, aesthetics, philosophy, dramaturgy, literary theory, etc.

A lot has changed since then.

First, ‘we’ have changed. At the time of our work on *TRH* 4, the collaborators of the *TRH* platform were mostly graduate and undergraduate students at the Belgrade University of the Arts, in their twenties, only starting their professional engagements on the theory and arts scene. We knew little about contemporary dance. We lacked ‘both practice and theory’. Then as now, contemporary dance did not exist as a field of study anywhere in Serbia and whatever sporadic and scattered knowledge we had, we got from foreign periodicals and the internet. On the other hand, in the context of the region except Slovenia, contemporary dance scenes were only then emerging and could not offer a practical frame of reference. Besides, in the early 2000s the international sanctions against Serbia had only recently been lifted and Serbia’s borders were only slowly growing more porous for travel abroad; therefore, we saw international contemporary dance mostly on video. But, that lack of everything was the very motive behind our decision to explore ‘new dance / new theories’ and the theme itself reflects a non-linear process of learning–working–learning through working–and further working... following a do-it-yourself principle. Today, the collaborators of the *TRH* platform have mostly earned or are earning their PhDs and/or are already established actors on the theory and cultural-artistic scenes, in their thirties, several of whom live and work in local as well as European contexts. Also, the *TRH* journal has itself acquired a different status and expanded its field of interest from the local, via the regional, to the international performing arts scene.

Second, over the past eight years the fortunes of *TRH* 4 have themselves been indicative. At the time of its publication, it met mostly with disinterest on the local scene, while the international scene was out of reach; therefore, the only ‘demand’ for it and engaging reception came from the circles of authors clustered

around similar journals in the region– *Frahečija* in Zagreb and *Maska* in Ljubljana. Its modest circulation was soon entirely distributed, mostly for free, to all those whom we thought might be interested, especially to public educational and cultural institutions, and we moved on to other topics. A few years later, however, as contemporary dance scenes developed in Serbia and elsewhere in the region, the demand for the volume kept growing. A large number of choreographers, dancers, and theorists, especially of the youngest generation, began approaching us asking for copies, which we were able to lift from the archive for a while longer. And then we went out of stock but the demand kept growing, additional photocopies were made and suggestions started coming that we should do a reprint. Since that was not financially feasible, we managed to improvise a .pdf file and publish it on the *TRH* website. Serbia’s Ministry of Culture – which had supported the publication of *TRH* 4 – then made us an offer to pay for a reprint with the explanation from Ms. Milena Burić that the volume had in the meantime become ‘a contemporary dance regional textbook of sorts’. However, that same Ministry, during the 2009 competition, decided not to support the volume – with no explanation. We then abandoned the idea to reprint the volume until we came in touch with the Nomad Dance Academy (NDA) and realised that ‘reviving’ it was in our common interest on the regional and international scene. Fortunately, the NDA had not only the interest and good will, but also funds that it could invest in reprinting the volume. Also, be it said that we once again, in that new, co-production arrangement, filed for the Ministry’s support in 2010 – and were once again turned down, without any explanation.

Third, we should note that over those eight years the situation of contemporary dance in the local and other regional environments has changed significantly. During the 2000s, from an initially small number of individual authors and works, entire scenes of contemporary dance have emerged in the regional context, with their own specific organisational and artistic entities, collaboration networks, systems of financing, and increasing numbers of choreographers and dancers. Besides, the geopolitical positions of the participants on the regional scenes have partly changed, too; they are now beginning to participate on the international dance scene, from residence programmes, via festivals, to co-productions.

And finally, ‘contemporary dance’ itself has changed. As we, in Eastern Europe, ‘have never been modern’ – because modern dance was a product, and henceforth a legacy, of democracy, while communism cultivated other forms of social choreography (ballet, folklore, slet, and military parades) – we could easily recognise a similar theoretical agenda in the ‘conceptual dance’ of the late 1990s. The affinity to ‘conceptual dance’ wasn’t based on reading French theory, which we shared with choreographers such as Jérôme Bel or Xavier Le Roy. It was the same operation – the discursive contestation of the *doxa* – which, for contemporary dance in Western Europe, procured a separation of choreography from a certain kind of dance–from a modern dance invested in the conjunction of the body and movement. The critical outcry against ‘conceptual dance’, which was accused of betraying the essence of dance – the dancing subject’s self-expression or the aestheticism of form – was appeased by subsequent debates of a sequence on other issues: authorship, collectivity and collaboration, the critique of spectacle and spectatorship, research and knowledge production, etc. Now, in 2010, over fifteen years after *Nom donné par l’auteur* – the performance that deflected movement from the body to thought – we can assert that the art of choreography has expanded and modified into an open, unbounded concept. Choreography today is able to write without the body and produce bodily expressions without movement. Neither the body nor movement operate any longer as the distinctive markers of

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the discipline, but as a historical residue, with which we have to deal when we say: this is choreography. The disentanglement of movement from the body has uncovered a divergence and diversity of dance practices and methods, which are no longer seeking only proper (essentialist) self-knowledge, but a bastard learning, 'humping the leg' not only of other art forms, like cinema, music and the visual arts, but also of many domains of knowledge other than specifically dance. Heteronomy is the current state of indeterminacy in the arts – in relation to their respective media as well as to the boundary between art and work or non-art – that much contemporary dance can at last admit without shame. This plurality of regimes, whereby no single regime may dominate, marks the extent of the individuation and acceleration of changes, pertaining not just to the scale of macro-movements and styles, but also to the degree of the development of an œuvre or a project. Any-body-whatever, any-movement-whatever, any-procedure-whatever, carry indetermination and hybridity, 'agencements' like choreography and film, choreography and pop culture, choreography and music, choreography and therapy, choreography and magic, choreography and TV... as if choreography were living the destiny of its (currently) favourite philosopher Gilles Deleuze, potentially being a friend of many. The dark side of these minor revolutions is the free-market imperative of novelty that voids contemporary dance of historicity. Hence, there are two tendencies critical of the situation that are worth mentioning: fast-forwarding history into the future of the past-present (constructing histories, reconstructions, re-enactments, archives, and explorations of various means of writing history in the contemporary) and acting structurally rather than individually (various initiatives of self-organization as a means of intervention in the politics of production). In 2005 Tanzquartier Wien gathered artists and theorists from Western Europe and the former Yugoslavia for a conference, the title of which – 'Taking Stock' – reflects a desire to declare a time period closed. This meeting marked a certain topological shift, whereby the East-West division had become no longer tenable. It is becoming increasingly relevant to explore the politics that made us come closer: the Marxist imperative to 'historicise' and the realisation that an individual author's autonomy is not her/his private property, but a capacity for structural thinking and political organising with others.

To reflect all those changes, TRH 17, a joint venture of the NDA and TRH, is being published not as a reprint of TRH 4, but as a (self-)reflective remake. The present volume includes many of the authors who contributed to Vol. 4 as well – including the collaborators of the TRH – but with the stipulation that they revise, rewrite, or replace their old texts. That task entails that they reflect (on) the changes on the contemporary dance scene: the new concepts, practices, authors, but also that they rethink the state of affairs back then and revise the conceptions that were current then, as well as position themselves in their (current) actualities. In addition to those authors, in the present volume we tried to 'uncover' new ones as well, especially those young writers from the region whom we consider valuable new voices on contemporary dance and whose perspectives and positions are necessarily different from those of the authors who contributed to Vol. 4. Also, in observance of the changes in the regional context, an entire section of TRH 17 is dedicated to the regional contemporary dance scenes, where we at once deliberately want to establish not only the choreographers who helped define the region's dance scenes during the 2000s, but also the writers who are starting or who have started to reflect (on) those scenes in a theoretic-critical way. Finally, another change is that the present volume is (exclusively) in English. There are many reasons for that. One of the key reasons is our intent to make the regional voices and images of contemporary dance visible and audible on the international scene, by redistributing its voices, roles and parts. Another important reason is that we recognise and respect the

fact that English is the lingua franca of contemporary dance in the European context and as such intelligible to our local as much as to our regional and international readers. And thirdly, we thereby want to highlight that, evidently, a Serbian-language TRH journal is, from the perspective of the local cultural policy, that is, police, neither needed nor desirable. Since not a single dinar was invested into this volume, its publication was funded exclusively with "foreign currencies", as well as with our apparently tireless enthusiasm and relentless unpaid work on it. A journal based in Serbia, for which there is a marked interest on the local scene and which has been both regionally (The FaMa network, the NDA co-production) and internationally recognised (from our participation at the Magazine project of the 2007 Documenta 12 in Kassel, to the co-production with Les Laboratoires d'Aubervilliers in Paris), but which is published only in English and not in Serbian is a direct result of the current cultural policing in Serbia and of our political opposition to it.

July, 2010

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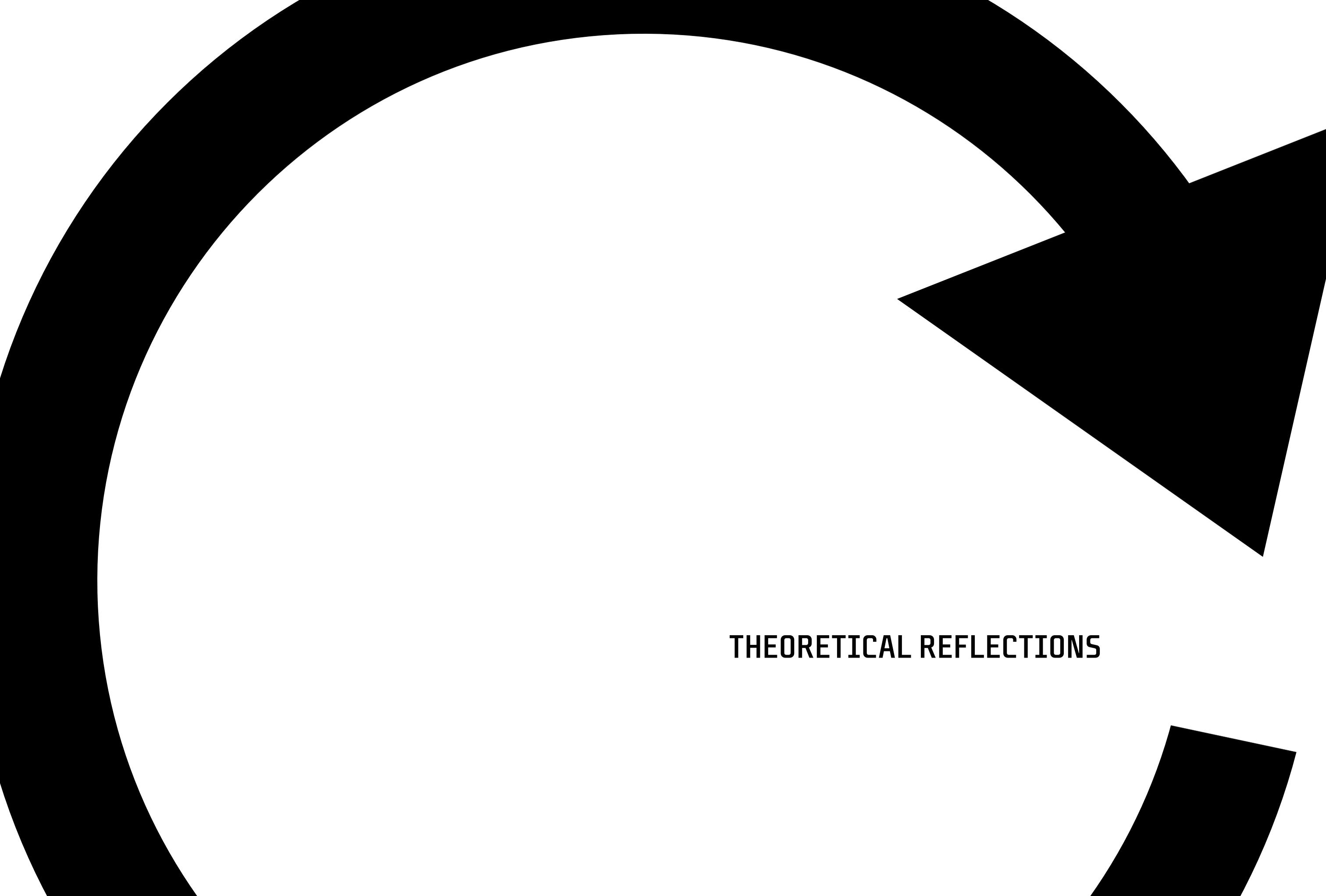
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The image features a minimalist, high-contrast design. On the left side, a large, thick white circle is partially visible, extending from the edge towards the center. On the right side, a thick black arrow points horizontally towards the left, overlapping the white circle. The background is solid black. In the lower right quadrant, the text "THEORETICAL REFLECTIONS" is written in a clean, white, sans-serif font.

THEORETICAL REFLECTIONS

INTRODUCTION

The aim of this study is to show that the practices, histories, and actualities of dance in relation to culture, society, and politics must be open² to critical and analytical debate. And that debate must be free from the ‘traps of anecdotal narratives’ and thereby theorised as a critical and analytical discourse with enough abstraction to be applied to the ‘epistemological critique’ of the knowledge of contemporary dance. That means that, under the specific conditions of a transitional culture and sociality, under which I speak and write, I am trying to derive a theorisation of dance, art, culture, society, and politics as Althusserian material theoretical practices:

So a practice of theory does exist; theory is a specific practice which acts on its own object and ends in its own product: a knowledge. Considered in itself, any theoretical work presupposes a given raw material and some ‘means of production’ (the concepts of the ‘theory’ and the way they are used: the method).³

The derivation of a ‘hardcore theorisation’ described above is contingent on realising that in the transitional society of contemporary Serbia, discourse is open to discussion in the hybrid interpretative fields of conceptualising the production, exchange, and consumption of dance.

When I speak and write of dance, a number of parallel but rival points of departure are there for me:

- dance is a performance art;
- As a performance art, dance is not necessarily posited today only as autonomous live performing, but also as media and post-media performing;
- As a performance art, dance is often no longer a function of ‘dance as art’, but of dance as a culturally intervening, that is, activist practice.

Furthermore, saying that dance is a performance art means that what is at stake is an art practice based on the structural and phenomenal articulation, de-articulation, or the appropriation of the event⁴ in the ideal ‘space’ of theatre, that is, in the un-ideal spaces of cultural and social relations, i.e. in contradictory and conflicting contexts.

As a performance art, dance may be identified as live art whenever it is set, presented, or performed by living, behavioural, mobile bodies in the contexts of art, culture, and society. As a media performance, dance signifies a living art mediated through mechanical, electronic, or digital media, as well as a ‘live’ intervening on the articulation, that is, on the choreography of moving within the media practice and system of communication and mediation (film, television, digital systems, communication networks). As a post-media practice, dance signifies an important change that leads from choreography and dance as the creating of “sensuous aesthetic value” to the conceptual field of reconsidering and researching the status of dance as an art or a material cultural practice.⁵ It is about transforming art as creating in the traditional or new

DISCOURSES AND DANCE:¹ An Introduction to the Analysis of the Resistance of Philosophy and Theory to Dance

¹ The present text is a shorter and revised version of ‘Diskursi i ples – Uvod u istoriju i teoriju plesa’ (Discourses and Dance – An Introduction to the Philosophy and Theory of Dance), TRH, No. 4: ‘Novi ples / Nove teorije’ (New Dance / New Theories) (Belgrade: 2002), 31–44

² Michael Baldwin, Charles Harrison, and Mel Ramsden: ‘Art History, Art Criticism and Explanation’, *Art History*, Vol. 4, No. 4 (Oxford: December, 1981), 432–456.

³ Louis Althusser, ‘On the Materialist Dialectic’, in *For Marx*, trans. Ben Brewster, (London: Verso, 1996), 173.

⁴ Françoise Proust, ‘Kaj je dogodek?’, *Filozofski vestnik*, No. 1: ‘Filozofija in njeni pogoji – Ob filozofiji Alaina Badiouja’ (Ljubljana: ZRC SAZU, 1998), 9–19.

⁵ Conceptual or choreographic dance is an open term for the critical examinations, de-constructive practices, and simulational production of institutions, discourses, phenomena, concepts, and procedures of choreography and dance in the Western art of the 1990s and 2000s. The idea of conceptual dance (think-dance) concerns the work of European choreographers, dancers, and performers, such as

Jérôme Bel, Boris Charmatz, Xavier le Roy, Thomas Lehmen, Tom Plischke, Tino Sehgal, Magali Deshazelle, Meg Stuart, and Gilles Touyard.

⁶ Nicolas Bourriaud, *Postproduction–Culture as Screenplay: How Art Reprograms the World* (New York: Luks & Sternberg, 2002).

media into a field of exploring new production and post-production⁶ relations with media or phenomena within social contradictions, conflicts, and paradoxes. The post-media and post-production character of contemporary dance makes it ‘ontologically’ free from the modernist conceptions of the radicalisation of the aesthetic evolution of live performance (Yvonne Rainer, Trisha Brown), as well as from the postmodernist conceptions of plural media work with dance and representation, that is, the recreation of the performance of dance by performing media models (Pina Bausch, Anne Terese de Keersmaeher). Dance thereby becomes a practice, similar to any other practice of art in the age of culture⁷ – which is not bound to the phenomenalisation of its own medium or disciplinary identity, but to the function of performance in relation to the history of dance, cultural paradigm of dance, that is, social contradiction in the altered world of the transitional globalisms of the 21st century’s first decade. On the one hand, this is about work that assumes the demand that the dancer intervene ‘apologetically’ or ‘critically’ in a given cultural or multicultural milieu, whereby dance is posited as a field of the appropriation of culture (for instance, Akram Khan’s multicultural dance, Lisa Bufano’s dance of the handicapped, etc.). By contrast, activist dance tends towards a mutation of dance as an art into a field of everyday cultural and social contradictions. Dance itself then cancels itself as an art practice and becomes an instrumental practice, which makes only limited references to the history or cultures of dance.

DANCE AND THEORY: Discourses and Apparatuses

Like any other art, dance is entirely within the domain of theory, even when choreographers and dancers ‘believe’ that they are outside of theory, outside of discourse, in the pure domain of technique, affect, or communication. This is not just about a body set in motion opposite to and outside of writing, but a body that is always covered or involved, that is, mediated by the traces of writing about dance, body, space, movement, time, performance, theatre, indirect gestural narration, mediation of sense, meaning, sign, value, the object of enjoyment, a body that is a surplus of value, meaning, and sense in relation to the everyday body.

The stimulating tensions between the body and writing – between the body-text and writing-qua-text – are always – already writing within writing, which enables something (some movement of the body) to be dance as an art in the context of culture.⁸

In addition, by writing I do not mean the act of writing itself – leaving a graphic trace that refers to language or worlds beyond language – but a generating or only relocating performance of what is on the other side of language, which at once consists of bodies that construct figures on stage or screen. But bodies also make all the possible geographically situated histories and our choices in them. That still means that the effects of language or the effects of the body relate to the language of linguistics, which is merged with the affects in the infrastructures of society, that is, with its apparatuses.⁹ Dance is therefore not any movement

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⁷ Art in the age of culture is an indeterminate indexical identification for art after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the reversal from the specific symptom retro-practices in the art of the ‘80s and the early ‘90s towards the establishment of the art of the new global epoch. The new art in the age of culture resides in its emerging from the centred autonomies of the macro-political order into an art with conspicuous cultural functions in the new reconfiguration of media and actuality. Art in the age of culture emerges with the production of global empires,

from the USA to the EU, in a post-Cold War age.

⁸ Ellen W Goellner and Jacqueline Shea Murphy (eds.), *Bodies of the Text: Dance as Theory, Literature as Dance* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1995); Janelle G. Reinelt and Joseph R. Roach (eds.), *Critical Theory and Performance* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1999); Larry Lavender, ‘Post-Historical Dance Criticism’, *Dance Research Journal*, Vol. 32, No. 2 (New York: 2000–2001), 88–107; Emil Hrvatin (ed.), *Teorije sodobnega plesa* (Ljubljana: Maska, 2001).

⁹ Giorgio Agamben, ‘What is an Apparatus?’, in *What is an Apparatus? and Other Essays* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), 1–24.

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of the body, although any movement of the body may become dance in relation to an apparatus and our positions in it (or in them), regardless of the ‘morphology (and its techniques) of that movement’. An apparatus then is a heterogeneous set that includes virtually anything, non-linguistic, bodily, kinematic, linguistic, behavioural phenomena and their ‘solid’ contexts: discourses, buildings, institutions, contracts, customs, habits, and even theoretical and philosophical propositions. The apparatuses, in which the identification of movement as dance and of dance as a social practice occurs, have concrete strategic and tactical functions, which are situated in relation to powers and the knowledge of powers.

One may derive two characteristic, directing but confronting claims about the relationship between dance and theory:

- Dance precedes theory, and
- Theory precedes dance.

The first claim. It says that beyond the verbal, dance is determined by a significantly, characteristically, and predominantly bodily movement. The body is in an artificial and specially constructed motion in relation to the music (as basis /ground/, accompaniment /guard/, or adornment /ornament/) on a defined and restricted, that is, framing stage in a defined temporal duration interval – for instance: Nijinsky, *L'Après-midi d'un faune* (1912); or Martha Graham, *Primitive Mysteries* (1931). Moreover, bodily movement springs from the choreographer or dancer’s intuitions – her feel for the music, space, and time in relation to the movements of her own body. The concept of ‘springing’ is linked to the polyvalent terms of intuition and the truth of being (Mary Wigman, Martha Graham). In dance, the bodily act (motion, gesture, moving, behaviour) emerges from its performance out of the dancer’s intuitions regarding the given space, time, and music, or other bodies (Merce Cunningham, *The Septet*, 1953). Any of those factors may be sidelined, or stressed to the degree of a rhetorical figure. In such an understanding of dance, theory comes after the fact, as a conceptualisation of technique and then it is a matter of a poetics of dance. The poetics of dance may be a stricter or a softer, descriptive or normative, pro-theoretical articulation of the techniques of the performance of dance and the mode of being of dance as an artwork (the writings of Isadora Duncan, Rudolf von Laban, Mary Wigman). The critical theory of dance emerges – still later – as description, explication, interpretation, or discussion of the dance work and its historic and geographic, or stylistic identifications, or the possibilities of interpreting the dance work in the framework of the disciplines and theories of the humanities – it is an ‘epistemological break’ that plays out in the application of poststructuralist, feminist, and cultural-studies theories to contemporary dance. The writings of Sally Banes, Johannes Biringer, Cynthia J. Novack and others are a case in point.

The second claim. It means that dance is always-already within a discursive grasp of bodily movement, that it is a part of the most complex possibilities of the apparatus. Dance is born in the midst of a ‘language’ or an ‘atmosphere of language’, as well as of a language that pledges the unverbalisability and unsayability of the dancing body regarding verbal language. The body is in an artificial and constructed movement in relation to the music (as the basis /ground/, accompaniment /guard/, adornment /ornament/ or as proposition /suggest/) ¹⁰ on a defined and circumscribed – framing – stage (space) in a defined time duration interval,

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¹⁰ For the representational aspects of music, see Jenifer Robinson, ‘Music as Representation Art’, in *What is Music? An Introduction to the Philosophy of Music*, ed. Philip Alperson (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1987), 165–192.

which is established, performed, and received in the specific institution of dance. There is no dance, or music, without the ‘framing’ institution and its constituent discourses, through which every individual dance begins to relate to other individual dances or meta-texts of culture. Dance and music are separate today – for instance, the practices developed by Yvonne Rainer, Trisha Brown, Robert Morris, or Bruce Nauman in the ‘60s, or Meg Stuart, Jérôme Bel, Boris Charmatz or Xavier le Roy from the late ‘90s on. They do not necessarily relate to each other. Still, the non-relationship of music and dance represents an important identity of the contemporary choreographic creating of ‘dance as an art of bodily movement’. Moreover, bodily movement does not spring from the choreographer¹¹ or dancer’s intuitions – her unverbaised ‘direct’ feel for the music, space, and time, or movement without music, but from the conceptual, poetic, and ideological horizon, in which she is found, formed, through which she developed, or which she critiques, destroys, deconstructs, or restores and appropriates anew – Mårten Spångberg has developed an example of such a strategy. The discursive practices of the institutions, through which the world of the dancer, choreographer, composer, but also spectator/hearer is constructed, is that conceptual, poetic, and ideological horizon. That ‘world’ is not an image of the real world, but an instance of an apparatus: a case of a complex situational relationship for the event. Furthermore, ‘discursive practices’ connotes the extraction of a field of objects by defining a perspective for the object of cognition, through determining the form for the development of concepts and theories. Discursive practices are not simply ways of producing discourses for or through the apparatuses. They are shaped in technical meetings, in institutions, in patterns of behaviour, in different types of transmission and diffusion, in different pedagogic forms that at once impose and maintain them.¹² In such a context of thinking, intuition labels the ‘tacit knowledge’ that practitioners, theorists, and spectators of dance adopt, share, and accept as self-explanatory. In such an understanding of dance, theory proceeds, or is at least synchronous with, the conceptualisation of technique and in that case it is a matter of a discursive and then also a theoretical framework for a poetics and practice of dance. The critical theory of dance as description, explication, interpretation, analysis, deconstruction, or discussion of a dance work and its historic and geographic identifications is a nexus of discourses that surround the dance work and its affective interactions with other theories of the world of art and culture. The theory and practice of dance are a jagged knot that is hard to untangle... because apparatuses are not just the ‘esoterics of discourses’ or ‘intensity of discourses’, but also an array, mixture, multitude that fundamentally alter the real relationship of the one to the other regarding dance.

Two cases of dance practice are discussed below:

- From the standpoint of ‘work/life’ – the theoretic-anthropological position, and
- From the standpoint of the ‘representation in culture’ / ‘representation of culture’ – the theoretic-textological position.

¹¹ For choreographic practices and poetics, see Martha Bremser and Deborah Jowitt (eds.), *Fifty Contemporary Choreographers* (London and New York: Routledge, 1999).

¹² Michel Foucault, ‘Želja za znanjem’, in *Pre-davanja [hratak sadržaj]*, 1970–1982 (Novi Sad, Serbia: IP Bratstvo-Jedinstvo, 1990), 9–10.

POLITICS AND BALLET/DANCE: The difference between the *bios politikos* and *vita activa* (an analysis of modern and postmodern dance formats)

According to Hannah Arendt,¹³ the difference between the Greek term *bios politikos* and its medieval rendition into *vita activa* is that *bios politikos* explicitly signified the domain of human relations, emphasising the acting, *praxis*, needed for its realisation, whereas *vita activa* signifies all three basic human activities: work, production, and action. If one applies this 'formula' to the understanding of the relations of politics, society, and the arts, in this case dance, one may then arrive at the following scheme:

Basic anthropological scheme one

<i>Bios politikos</i>	<i>Vita activa</i>
The order of the social relation	Work production action

This scheme is 'anthropological' because it begins with the term *life* as the basic – ontologically assumed – condition of the 'human'. The human and *life* are linked in that which may be called the *form of life*. Furthermore, according to Giorgio Agamben, *form of life* denotes a *life* that cannot be separated from its forms, in other words, a *life* that cannot be *bare life*.¹⁴ Following Arendt, 'work' in scheme one above denotes the activities that pertain to the biologic potential and process of the human body, which spontaneously grows, which is in metabolic processes, and which, ultimately, disappears. The basic condition of *life* is work. 'Production' denotes the activities that belong in the domain of the *unnaturalness of human existence*, which is not built into *life* itself in the biologic sense. Production enables and secures the 'artificial world' of objects, different from the natural environment and *life* processes in the biologic sense. Hannah Arendt stresses that every individual *life* is circumscribed by its own biologic limitations. The world in which *life*, as well as production, unfolds outlives and transcends every individual human *life*. The basic condition of production is the existence of the world and, be it added, the attainment of the alienation in the worldly. 'Action' is activity/performance that directly plays out among people, without the mediation of the *life* of objects. Action is possible as action by virtue of the fact that a certain *life* form on this planet emerges as the *life* of the human being among other people. In other words, action is the activity whereby human interrelations are established, which means 'society'. That is why action is an essential feature of the political, but also of art.

In the next step of understanding the 'political', one may introduce a rather specific relation between 'dance as art' and 'politics'. Dance is then viewed as an *event* in relation to the events of the order of human-social relations, the work of the body (the creative animatedness of the body), production of the object (work of art, dance), and action as an intervention in a singular social relation (the primary functions and meaning of dance work).

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¹³ Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958).

¹⁴ Giorgio Agamben, 'Form-of-Life', in *Theory out of Bound – A Potential Politics*, eds. Paolo Virno and Michael Hardt (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 151.

Derived structural social scheme two

The order of the social relation	Work	Production	Action in the social relation
Function of dance in society	The mode of bodily creation and perception of the dance work	The relation between the dominant production of material value in society and the mode of creating and performing the dance work in society	The potential of the intervention or engagement of dance in society

In relation to the order of the social relation, that is, politics, there emerges the question as to whether dance as an art has any functions and how those functions may be demanded, received, and executed. If human *life* is understood as a significant separation of *bios* from *zoé*, it emerges that dance always has a specific function in separating 'human *life*' from 'life in general'. On the other hand, the long process of the development of positing and therefore also interpreting ballet/dance¹⁵ as a unified, social, and aesthetically situated practice – for instance, the tradition of white ballet: Balanchine, Baryshnikov – has been establishing itself since the 'Modern Era' towards the 'Modern Age'. Those practices are devoid of any obvious function, in the field of a sensuous perception that must be without any specific practical interest if it is indeed to be an aesthetic perception of art, that is, ballet. As an aesthetic practice, dance is not supposed to have a practical function. But is it really so? In the history of Western dance, one may recognise four instances of performing the 'functions' of dance:

Derived structural scheme three: society–dance

The function of representing, that is, presenting the societal	The function of presenting the individual/singular versus societal totality	The function of performing micro- or macro-identification	The autonomy of dance or its lack of function as the function of dance
Mimesis	Catharsis and/or expression	Performance (performativity)	The immanence of singularity
Philosophic and aesthetic Platonism	Philosophic and aesthetic Aristotelianism	Cultural studies	Philosophic and aesthetic Kantianism
The political plane	The plane of the individual	The micro-political plane	The aesthetic plane

¹⁵ In this section I am addressing ballet and dance. I am using the concept of dance as a synchronic term that comprises ballet as type, species, or genre. At the same time, I view ballet diachronically, as the art of the canonically formalised staged dancing in the modern tradition, and dance as a development or revolution in regards to ballet of the long twentieth century.

In the first instance, ballet/dance has the obvious function of representing/presenting the societal. In that case, *presenting the societal* is given as a ‘generality’ (a political idea, concept, or stance) that may be presented and represented with a singular dance sample, that is, a dance work. In the discourse of traditional Western aesthetics, one might say that singularity renders generality sensuously presentable. Sensuous presentability therefore emerges as *mimesis* (mimicking, imitation) of the perceivable or real world. In this case, ballet/dance is viewed as a function of the political, which means that the truth of ballet/dance, in the Platonic sense, is the truth of a general or abstract political idea: the royalist (the dancing of Louis XIV’s France, court dances and ballet as an effect of court performance practices), the bourgeois (the late-nineteenth-century Paris opera dance school), the proletarian (the 1920s working-class and theatre associations of Weimar Germany), and the consumerist idea (the appropriation and reconstruction of avant-garde and neo-avant-garde dancing that Mikhail Baryshnikov has performed since the 1990s).

In the second instance, ballet/dance is a function of presenting the individual as the *singular event* of the human body’s moving against societal totality, that is, the generality or universality of society. In that case, universality appears as the effect of an ‘empty signifier’ that may represent entirely different singular events with their distinguishing signifieds, towards an always absent generality. A singular event that is established against sociality is a sort of *break or rupture* in sociality, which transpires in the choreographer/dancer’s creative act or the spectator/hearer’s receptive absorption into the singularity and immanence of the dance work. That break or rupture, which pertains to a singular individual or, less often, to a micro-collective group of individuals, is traditionally labelled in the Aristotelian fashion as ‘catharsis’ or/and, in more modern parlance, *expression*.¹⁶ It is an interactive event with a ballet/dance work that results in a singular individual event of perception that is not subject to the social order (custom, law, symbolical order, cliché). The breach of the custom/law in the self-realisation of perception is the fulfilment of the truth of catharsis/expression of the dance or ballet work (von Laban, Mary Wigman, Martha Graham).

In the third instance, ballet/dance has the wholly determinate function of performing the micro- or macro-identification of the choreographer/dancer or spectator/hearer with social and cultural clichés, that is, the accepted models of community and self-recognition. In the first instance, pertaining to the representation of the societal, it is a case of political idealities (ideas, abstractions, general stances, values). In the third instance, these are pragmatic representations of community or self-recognition in specific cultures and cultural practices, within historical society. Roughly speaking, one may point out that self-recognition in sensuously presentable representations of community (race, gender, class, generation) is a specific practice of performing identity in dance. The performance of identity occurs – for instance, according to cultural studies – in relation to culturally assumed or posited, sensuously presentable clichés. In certain historical periods or specific geographic and cultural localities, what we call ‘the art of dance’ has performed the function of the identification of the subject, recognition, self-declaration, and demonstrative show of belonging to a real or fictional community. There are many examples, ranging from the early-twentieth-century Russian ballet to Martha Graham’s Wild West dances and the multicultural practices of today (Pina Bausch, Akram Khan, and others).

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¹⁶ Nelson Goodman, ‘Expression’, in *Languages of Art* (London: Oxford University Press, 1969), 85–95.

In the fourth instance, dance is based in the concept of its autonomy as an art. The modern concept of art, formed in the eighteenth century era of the Enlightenment, was based in a profound reordering of social life, in other words, in the radical specialisations of human labour, production, and activity, under the pragmatic and utilitarian conditions of the advance of capitalism. A new field, ‘ostensibly free from society’, was posited in the domain of professional distinctions and labelled with the newly coined term – ‘the fine arts’ – in contrast to the Greek concept ‘*techné*’ (skill, craft). Dance, that is, ballet, was understood as a ‘fine art’. It emerged that an important quality of ballet/dance was the *aesthetic*, that is, ‘in a post-Kantian wording’: an autonomy that is disinterested with regards to utilitarian, productive, societal work. The problems inherent to the conceptions of autonomy were already observed by Adorno, for instance, in his discussions of absolute music, when he pointed out that *the function of music is to be without function*.¹⁷ If an important modern feature of art is to be autonomous, that means that in a specific society – the bourgeois capitalist society – it does not have the social function of not having a function in the pragmatic social sense. But if art has at least a single function, and if that function is not to have a social function in the everyday, then it is not autonomous. How to solve this paradox? A response that might be advanced regarding the paradox of the autonomy of art is that the function of the autonomy of ballet/dance regarding society and politics is feasible only as a political decision to grant autonomy within the social practices of interest. For anything to be autonomous art or, to put it more specifically, for ballet/dance to be autonomous regarding society and politics, ‘it’ must be politically derived as an autonomous field of action in society. Besides, the autonomy of ballet/dance in relation to culture is not the same kind of autonomy that culture has in relation to society. The autonomy of dance/ballet in relation to culture, therefore also to society, is idealised to the incontrovertible. The autonomy of culture in relation to society is relative and contingent, that is, controvertible¹⁸ and problematic in every respect.

Scheme Four presents a conception by which the relation between the autonomous and political ‘dance’ is presented and interpreted as a binary opposition of obvious opposites.¹⁹ The dance work is either a subset of the domain of autonomous art, or a subset of the domain of dance as political art (e.g. ballets from Chinese Cultural Revolution). The opposition of the dance-political and the politico-dance is posited as fundamental for the modernist development of the distinction between the status of the high, autonomous and that of the ‘low’, political art of dancing.

The derived distinction between autonomous and political art – Scheme Four

The hypothetical refocus from the dancer and spectator’s body to the dance-choreographic artwork ‘itself’	
Dance as autonomous art	Dance as political art

By contrast, Scheme Four points to the ‘hegemonic’ modernist view that all art is autonomous with regards to society and politics. Such ‘absolutely autonomous dance art’ develops by its respective genres, that is, by different thematisations or presentations of references. The genres differ. Besides, one of the substantive demands that are imposed on dance is to perform a dance, whose extra-artistic reference or theme is:

¹⁷ Theodor W. Adorno, ‘Function’, in *Introduction to the Sociology of Music* (New York: Continuum, 1989), 41.

¹⁸ Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002).

¹⁹ Charles Harrison and Fred Orton, ‘Introduction: Modernism, Explanation and Knowledge’, in *Modernism, Criticism, Realism – Alter-*

native Contexts for Art (London: Harper and Row, 1984), xi–xviii.

politics and sociality. In other words, a formalist assumption is posited, whereby certain dance works created within the context of the autonomy of art may present the 'theme of politics' or the 'theme of sociality' – in terms of their 'behavioural content', which represents their 'verbal content', they fulfil their political function, whereas in terms of their formal compositional features they realise their autonomous artistic and aesthetic values.

The analysis and discussion above reveal that the conceptions of the 'autonomy of the aesthetic' and the 'autonomy of dance as art' show and confirm some important features of the art of dance. For anything to qualify as dance art, it must be an autonomous, singular presence and phenomenality of an artwork aimed at the aesthetic distribution of sensuous perception. But this arrangement has a rather limited history, which spans across from the late eighteenth century to the mid 1960s. During that short history, the conception of the autonomy of, for instance, the art of dance, was universalised in the appropriation of different cultural 'dance artefacts' from the history of Western civilisation, ranging from the antiquity to the renaissance, and from different geographic localities [Africa, Asia, South America]. The renaming of ancient Greek or African dance artefacts into 'the art of dance' was a consequence of the hegemony of the European culture of the Enlightenment, which transpired not only in the extraordinary development of philosophic and theoretic thought, but also in the colonialist, economic-political domination of European culture. It may be pointed out, then, that Immanuel Kant's conception of 'the disinterestedness of the aesthetic judgement' became the anticipatory foundation of the modern thinking of art not only with its philosophic 'forcefulness', but also with the military, political, and economic domination of the West and its culture. It is as if it were an impact that might be metaphorically named with the expression 'the mutual action of Kant and cannon' on the modern world.

CULTURAL STUDIES AND DANCE

Dance and Cultural Texts: Issues of Identity

Cultural studies are being posited today in a number of interpretative and perspective directions regarding the strategies and tactics of contemporary dance:

- Towards opening the Western paradigm of dance to the effects and practices of non-European dance traditions—to go towards the exotic and then intercultural, multicultural, transcultural, and nomadic dance,
- Towards a theory of complex [heterogeneous, poly- or multi-centred/decentred] systems of bodily expression and presentation; in other words, the world today is viewed as a global system (an integrating, but not yet integrated system) that is plurally determined by mutually incomparable and un-co-existent geographic and historic cultures,

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- Towards a constructivist and critical theory of identities (racial, ethnic, gender, generational, political, professional, cultural, etc.) – identity is viewed not as a given necessity, but as a constructed or produced order of ideas (representations),
- Towards a dominant discourse of the world after the collapse of the Cold War division of the world, which means, in common parlance, towards the ruling globalist ideology of the world after the fall of the Berlin Wall, and/or
- Towards developing specific studies or theories of specific systems and practices of the contemporary world (women's, queer, postcolonial studies), which would offer interpretations or discussions of gender identities in dance...

In the following lines I will be relying on the assumptions of the constructivist and critical cultural studies that have been developed through the deconstruction of the sociological²⁰ studies of ballet and dance.

'The soul', 'feeling', 'the heart' are Romanticism's names for the body.²¹ But the body is not simply present here and now; it is always-already a manifold, multiplied figure (heterogeneous, polymorphic, plural, metastasised) that hides (or only promises to reveal) its corporeality in different, culturally determined identities. I would like to see, to touch, to hear, to smell, to taste, to feel THAT body itself – but every time ... every time, instead of the 'body itself' of my expectations, there is a body constructed through the workings of the mechanisms and powers of culture – in fact, I am always confronted by figures that conceal the body. The working of culture is revealed precisely in the deferral of the body by means of the mechanisms of symbolic and imaginary mediation (concealment, censorship, suppression). I can therefore think contemporary dance as a material, productive, figurative model and a model of figures-texts that are offered within complex multimedia discourses of culture (of the dynamism and tension of the global-local, marginal-central-dominant, public-private); only in some radical cases does the body burst through the figure's membrane (for instance, in Yvonne Rainer and Jérôme Bel). The dancing body is introduced into the rhetorical (mediating and reinforcing) namings or symbolically redirecting situatings of the body in and from culture. Contemporary dance shows that there is no body outside of culture, that is, outside of the constitutive procedures of the construction of identity, although there are ideological (political, poetic) mechanisms that select, name, and identify certain bodies as the precisely and uniquely ideal-bodies-themselves or as universal-abstract-bodies. Those are constructions of specific Western hegemonic cultures (the antiquity, renaissance, bourgeois realism and modernism). The dancing body is not an image of a body identity in culture, but one of the mechanisms of the constitution and performance of identity in culture, therefore also of culture itself. In other words, it is not as though the body were in culture (as a potato might be in a pot), but rather that the body and culture construct and constitute each other through their mutual relations. I can therefore think dance as an effect of strategy and tactics, that is, as a way to represent the body between 'entertainment' (the consumption of free time: Jérôme Bel), 'enjoyment' (the economy of desire/craving: Keersmaeker), and 'the construction of different identities' (ranging from Rainer, Keersmaeker, and Forsythe, to Bel, Charmatz, and Xavier), in an and/or or any, but always determinate social order of communication, expression, presentation, constitution, exchange, and change of corporeal-behavioural sense and meaning. The body's representative is the figure: a symbolic or imaginary, but always material gap between the idealised, metaphysically centred un-literality of the relationship between the meaning and expression of the body in a specific context. The dancing figure materialises the gap between the ideal and phenomenal behaviour of the dancer. Dance in contem-

²⁰ Cynthia J. Novaĥ, *Sharing the Dance: Contact Improvisation and American Culture* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1990) and Helen Thomas, *Dance, Modernity, and Culture: Explorations in the Sociology of Dance* (London: Routledge, 1995).

²¹ Roland Barthes, 'Rasch', in *The Responsibility of Forms: Critical Essays on Music, Art, and Representation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 308.

porary culture emerges as a plural order of figures-in-motion that reveal the heterogeneous and plural apparentness of their passing through different cultural identities. Every figure of contemporary dance (for instance, in Pina Bausch's *Two Cigarettes in the Dark* from 1994, or William Forsythe's *The Loss of Small Detail* from 1991, or Jérôme Bel's *The Show Must Go On!* from 2000) is, to use Jameson's terminology, a 'cognitive mapping'²² of the crossing and confronting of 'images' from the surrounding emergent social reality. Outside of behavioural performance, social reality does not exist. Cognitive mapping is a mapping that must be *unpacked* through a series of concepts that link the physical and the social in articulating the complex relations between the global and the local (the universal and the particular or marginal, which penetrates the universal), thus turning it into the specific). Pina Bausch's world is a 'model' of European late capitalism and an eclectic, quotation-collage-composite post-historical or parahistorical postmodernism. It is an eclectic post-historicism, in which dance and theatre are linked in a multilayer narrative text of incomplete behavioural stories. Forsythe's world is a 'model' of unstable and nomadic 'cynical pictures' of identity within the synchrony of ballet/dance, in the penetration of mass culture demands into the elite high-culture institutions of white ballet or the autonomous dance of modernism. Forsythe's cynicism is a slip out of the ballet fetishisation of the ballet/dance technique, in the name of a body politics and a politics of a behaviourality caught in the jaws of exceptionality and the everyday. Bel's world is a 'model' of a culture that pertains to the nomadic trans-tactics of subverting global liberalism and the high aesthetics of modernism and postmodernism. Bel works on conceptualising the performance of technique and thereby refocuses away from the poetic logic of the disinterested techniques of performing ballet/dance to the politics and the interestedness of every technique of performative behaviour. All these worlds are part of the map of late capitalism after the fall of the Berlin Wall, although they are, with their specific differences, an index of a different/dissolved position within the actuality of a great (Western) macro-paradigm of production, exchange, reception, and consumption of cultural identity. Dance conceptualism (that of Bel, Javier, Charmatz) stems not from conceptualisations of the aesthetic reductions of dance behaviourality (as in early Rainer, or Brown, or early Keersmaeker), but from the deconstruction of ballet/dance technique²³ through a reversal from 'technique', as a disinterested creative activity, to a para- or quasi-technique-politics or technique-as-economimesis, that is, as a sign of a conceptualised behaviourality in an open-media and culturally circumscribed world, in which the tactics of the design and organisation of behaviour as a symptom of social representations supplant the techniques of creativity. In other words, the realisations of Bel, Javier, and Charmatz emerge as poetically centred within ideology and its discourses of 'art in the age of culture'. By contrast, the works of Anne Terese de Keersmaeker are conceived in the doubleness of an eclectic postmodernism's elitist hyper-aestheticism (it is all in perfect technical-technological performing order) and the locating of sub-textual references towards issues of cultural identity (gender, macro-culture, production, exchange, consumption of values). In *Rosas danst Rosas*, behind a perfectly centred 'discourse' of hyper-aestheticism, there are certain offers of identity construction: (i) body speech (the construction of the dance figure(s)), which are figures after the 'death of the subject' – we are watching and listening to alienated figures outside of the domain of psychological motivations; in fact, these are figures of late capitalism's mass-culture media images, and (ii) body speech (the construction of the dance figure(s)), which are figures of the construction of an inter-figurative relation (seduction, attraction, proposal, rejection, elusion, approach, expectation) among female identities (the relation of two women, the relation within a world of women, the possibility of centring female behaviour as the 'core' of craving/desire). In other words, the dancers of *Rosas danst Rosas*

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²² Colin MacCabe, 'Preface' and Fredric Jameson, 'Introduction', in *The Geopolitical Aesthetic: Cinema and Space in the World System* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), xiv–xvi and 3.

²³ What I mean is that in any discipline, including dance, behind technique there stands a certain conceptual (poetical, ideological, theoretical) apparatus. I am adopting this con-

clusion from theoretical psychoanalysis (Lacan: 'As far as I am concerned, I would assert that the technique cannot be understood, nor therefore correctly applied, if the concepts on which it is based are ignored') and take it into dance theory. See: Jacques Lacan, 'The Function and Field of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis', in Jacques Lacan, *Écrits: A Selection*, trans. Alan Sheridan (London and New York: Routledge, 1977), 43.

do not represent the Juliets, Ophelias, Swans, Kareninas and the like, nor any ideal ballet or dance bodies; rather, they are bodies found in the figurable contextualising of specific behaviourality, and that is dance. It is no longer about expressing identity, but constructing identity and its differentiations, shadings... Both identities (the late-capitalist and the female) are material constructions based on the procedures of performing the figure in the position of the subject (late capitalism) and of performing female behaviourality in the position of existential or psychological motivation (the female identity at the moment when the critical mass of women's labour achieves domination on the artistic and other public stages of Western cultures). *Rosas danst Rosas* is a dance construct of female identity in late capitalism, close to the construct of female identity in the novel and the 'soap-opera' *Sex and the City*. Both cases are about pointing to the establishment of the relation between the public and the private in female behaviourality of late-capitalist (mass-media, consumerist, alienated) society.²⁴

CONCLUSION: Epistemological break or the spectacularisation of the invisible

The foregoing discussion has pointed to the status and functions of dance from the standpoint of 'labour/life' (the theoretic-anthropological position) and that of 'representation in culture' / 'representation of culture' (the theoretic-textological position). However different and indeed competing on the *battle or market fields* of contemporary theory, aesthetics, and philosophy of art and culture, these two positions point to a significant symptom, which is that the meaning and value of ballet, i.e. dance, has essentially changed. The epistemological break of the potentiality of the meaning and value of dance is no longer found in 'technical skill itself', or in 'virtuosity', that is, in the direct – sincere – expressivity of the body set in motion on- or offstage, nor is it found in the desire for the 'exclusively novel' in the dance or performance experiment. The epistemological potential of the 'break' is revealed, choreographically set, and performatively executed in the political confrontations of the *liberally individualised, democratically assumed, and totalitarianly collectivised* body, as well as in apologetic, critical, and subversive contemporary myths that are indeterminately functional in terms of political correctness or cultural fascinations and obsessions: uncontrolled powers, economic crises, environmental disasters, institutional conspiracies, real or fictional human rights, open/closed markets, globalised life, cloned life, dis-alienated humanity, market-situated lives, as well as critical self-consciousness.

The art of dance-performance, aimed at subverting power, is therefore derivable as a singular event within a social relation, as a critical, engaged, activist, action practice. The art of performing is aimed at destroying or derealising the event inside sociality, whether that event concerns elite practices in high art or alternative practices in popular culture. Action practice is founded on performing a personal and direct, most often ethically, politically, existentially, or behaviourally provocative act, gesture, or form of behav-

²⁴ For the ideologies (ideological apparatuses) of late capitalism and media-mass culture, see Slavoj Žižek (ed.), *Mapping Ideology* (London: Verso, 1995) and Slavoj Žižek, *Looking Awry: An Introduction to Jacques Lacan through Popular Culture* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1998).

four in any micro- or macro-social relation whatsoever. Engaged practice entails the significant decision on the artist's part to take, with her art work or existence, an uncertain and critical role in social conflicts and confrontations with repressive power, i.e. with politics imposed from above. Activist²⁵ practice in and/or with art signifies a practice-oriented conceptualised operative project, that is, an artistic intervention in culture and society that bears political, which also means social or cultural, consequences. Engaged, activist, or action practice as subversion of social power starts from below (from the people, from the margin, from self-organised sociality, etc.), as a singular event. Those practices are aimed at hierarchical structures of power in society, at provoking, destroying, or derealising them. Provoking means a relatively 'safe' violating or challenging (taunting, problematising) of symbolic norms and discourses of political power, for instance, in a dance act and choreographic-performative stance. Destruction means a singular event-rupture-that demolishes a symbolic or concrete order of relations in society. Destruction is an activity that is established and developed in the tradition of historical avant-gardes and neo-avant-gardes – whereas in contemporaneity it has to be looked for. Derealisation signifies more complex sets of dance or cultural activities that are aimed at taking away sense/reason, legitimacy, or significance of effect in certain social practices, first and foremost in the practices of didactics and repression, that is, practices of performing everyday life in the manifestations of social power. Artistic subversions of power emerge as an exit – one might say: transcendence – of the artistic itself into the domain of the political. Therefore, these artistic practices strive for immanence in a political sense, and that means to working with sociality.

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²⁵ Aldo Milohnić, 'Artivism', *Masha*, Nos. 1–2 [90–91]: 'Performing Action, Performing Thinking' (Ljubljana, 2005), 15–25.

My need to write this text comes out of the impact that a number of performances, discussions, and texts, which constitute a new performative stratum called ‘Think Performance’, have made on me. The question I’d like to highlight here, as well as try to position some of the problems it implicates, is concerned with the fact that the stratification of ‘Think Performance’ regulates its framework via rather specific strategies of positioning: artists who think performance, how they do it, how ‘Think Performance’ is produced or how its identity is stabilised and its efficiency radicalised.

The concept of ‘Think Performance’ is undoubtedly one of the most important current developments in the performing arts, and this is something that I’d like to stress in reading this paper, but the question is how to approach it politically and not only be politicised by being approached by ‘Think Performance’. In order to be more efficient, I will only question some of the effects which cause shock to the body, while affirming the causes which have an effect in causing ‘shock to thought’,¹ in Brian Massumi’s words.

What must be excluded from the domain of ‘Think Performance’ for ‘Think Performance’ itself to proceed?

BC: Reading your text today, one gets the impression that ‘Think Performance’ is a name for a powerful paradigm, that in the act of naming itself it has polarised the scene into ‘think performance’ and its other, what is not ‘think performance’. Has the name justified or fulfilled the promise made in the proclamation of the new powerful paradigm, or did we, to put it simply, ‘get carried away’?

GSP: Think performance is one of those positive concepts that do not merely reflect the situation but by being prescriptive at the same time aim to enforce some lines of possible development or even to become formative for the entire field of action. I would say that the concept was both necessary and quite effective at its time and that its problem was not the division between ‘think’ and ‘non-think’ performance, but its limited perspective on what is thinkable. So in affirming thinking as an act, acting as a speculative procedure was very often ignored. Or, to put it differently, think performance lacked materialism, or at least a bit of realism. That is why it so easily turned into another frame of idealism – conceptual dance, which resulted in a seriously ideologised rejection of movement, especially in contexts such as Amsterdam, Berlin, Bucharest, and the former Yugoslavia. I remember being criticised for dancing too much. And even if one wanted to approach dance as an object, or as noise, or in its purely functional sense, as, for instance, labour, she would be asked to explain why she was dancing. Dancing was deemed ‘justified’ only when it was mediated and not engaged, when it was a citation, a ready-made, a critical remainder...

I used to think that this development was the outcome of a misinterpretation of the semiotic line of work by artists such as Jérôme Bel or La Ribot, but today I am sure it was pure ideologisation. At that time I was much more interested in the works of Le Roy, Vera Mantero, Mårten Spångberg, and Jonathan Burrows.

Did the limited perspective on ‘thinkability’ – which I would interpret as an equation of the thinkable with the possible, instead of conceptualising the thinkable as a virtual that must be actualised in the future, its form as yet to be differentiated or experimented upon – forbid dancing out of a fear of aesthetic formalism?

Probably, but there was another, I would say fairly justified, line of resistance to conceptualising dance as self-expression. On the one hand, it gave another complex perspective to choreography, but on the other, choreography became a metaphor in terms very similar to the conceptualisation of performance in Anglo-American theory. So, choreography became everybody’s property, it got re-dedicated to everybody, but in the mass of implicated or constructed everybodies, real people still found it more enjoyable to produce a weird movement

WHAT MUST BE EXCLUDED?*

¹ Brian Massumi (ed.), *A Shock to Thought: Expression after Deleuze and Guattari*, (London and New York: Routledge), 2002).

*This text, originally published in TRH 4 (2002), has been amended with a few questions by Bojana Cvejić and answers by its author, Goran Sergej Pristaš – eight years later. thanks to Petar and Tom

than to achieve an understanding of the procedures. It was not a thinkers’ mistake, but one of an unfortunate representation of thinking, a mistake that came from explaining the procedures in the Brechtian way instead of using them as arguments. It is funny how often I hear Le Roy’s or Ingvartsen’s fans complain that they find it difficult to shed the impression of watching a circus or pantomime in Le Roy’s or Ingvartsen’s works. I would never interpret their work through those perspectives, but the fact that they do suggests that besides the control of meaning, protocols, transformation of image, speculative objectification of movement and the body, there is something that we forgot about and that something is rhetoric, especially procedural rhetoric (as Ian Bogost calls it), the persuasive power of procedural argumentation. One of the strengths of their work is that they are able to persuade us that they’re functioning in the formally defined field of dance or choreography and that it is all about the rules of behaviour, or observing, which might shift into a wider social, political, or entertainment field.

The phrase ‘Think Performance’ outlines the traces in its formation: there is a common form assumed between thought and performance or thinking and performing. Brian Massumi, reading Deleuze and Guattari, puts it thus: ‘Formation cannot be accounted for if a common form is assumed, whether between content and expression or subject and system. If the world exhibits conformities or correspondences they are, precisely, produced. To make them the principle of production is to confuse the composing with the composed, the process with the product. A tracing approach overlays the product onto the process, on the assumption that they must be structurally homologous. The assumption is that you can conceptually superimpose them to bring out a common logical outline. When this procedure is followed, product and process appear as versions of each other: copies. Production coincides with reproduction. Any potential the process may have had of leading to a significantly different product is lost in the overlay of what already is.’²

Going through the layers of the ‘Think Performance’ stratum we will see that in some ‘Think Performances’ the tracing approach appears not as the principle of production, but resides in its relation to one of its strategic constituents – the audience. The example I will outline here is Jérôme Bel’s performance of ‘The Show Must Go On’ in Zagreb, which was followed by a kind of *jouissance* effect in the audience, who celebrated the performance as if it were ‘the last spectacle on Earth’. The performance, in which, as Mårten Spångberg emphasises, ‘interpretation becomes painfully visible as the foreground, the surface’,³ produced a pleasure in coming close to a ‘cul-de-sac’, to a dead end of representation, but also to a dead end of discussion. In the flatness of its surface, the product, covered by the process, shows the power of performance. The easiness that comes out of the technique of revealing, in Heidegger’s words, ‘Gelassenheit’, ‘releasment’, ‘letting be’ mimicked in a form of ‘just do it’, but also ‘setting free’, ‘presencing of something that presences’, ‘lying before and lying ready’, turns Jérôme Bel into someone who is responsible, guilty, and tragic, and thus into a kind of a secondary cause in a complete causality, but nevertheless leaves him identified enough to be a subject.

On the other hand, Xavier Le Roy’s ‘Self Unfinished’, performed in the same context, produced in the audience a kind of desire confronted with a body that is projecting a force, a body that is not embodied but incarnated and, therefore, not a body anymore. In this respect an indicative comment was made by a five-year-old child when she asked her mother for a ‘toy like that’. Venturing into the field of interpretation, I would just like to remark that in finding, or experiencing Xavier Le Roy’s body as disconnected from the world and losing sight of it in its environment, the same child asked: ‘Where does he live?’

It seems that ‘The Show Must Go On’ and ‘Self Unfinished’ are two performances that are paradigmatic of what we call ‘Think Performance’, being examples of its stratification and destratification.

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² Brian Massumi, ‘Introduction Like a Thought’, in *A Shock to Thought*, xviii.

³ Mårten Spångberg, *Something Like a Phenomenon*, forthcoming.

If we ask ourselves what must be excluded from the domain of ‘Think Performance’ so that ‘Think Performance’ itself may proceed, we’ll see two lines of its materialisation: one that forms its principle of intelligibility by corresponding to the other, which is a domain of radical unintelligibility. One can easily see that ‘Think Performance’ theory very often refers to what has to be excluded from the economies of discursive intelligibility so that those economies may continue to operate as self-sustaining systems (I’m paraphrasing Judith Butler here). Or to quote her, let’s ask the question: ‘To what extent is materialization governed by the principles of intelligibility that require and institute a domain of radical unintelligibility that resists materialization altogether or that remains radically dematerialized?’⁴

The formation of ‘Think Performance’ follows the path of every other paradigm that came before it, but in different onto-historical circumstances. While the formation of a spectacular performance discipline and technique in ballet resulted in the appearance of an accomplished easiness in its performance and representation of dramatic character, ‘Think Performance’ exhibits easiness as a result of a speculative labour that creates an ideology of a non-ideal performer. Everybody is performing, everybody could perform it, everybody perform – or else!⁵ Repudiating the formation of a disciplined subject, the process of becoming takes two routes: first, the objectification of the body as an entity, which is a matter of testing, redundancy, and taking things at face value, since ‘we don’t know what a body can do’ and second, which is the more interesting and resistant way, the incarnation of a thought which is, significantly and I would add, wrongly described as the dematerialisation of the body, as in Xavier Le Roy’s case, where we likewise don’t know what the body can do.

What is actually dematerialised, left behind, but not criticised, is obviously the spectacle and its techniques.

The surface of representation is replaced by the flatness of interpretation, which is placed on the body of the performance; or, it is replaced by the flesh, the surface of being. But what emerges as the difference between those two paradigms of ‘Think Performance’, the flatness and the ‘fleshness’, is the fact that the former still operates with successive correct forms, whereas the latter de-stratifies them by agrammatical expression.⁶ This expression might be traced by correct forms, but still, being the atypical expression, it is the one ‘which produces the placing-in-variation of correct forms’,⁷ as Deleuze and Guattari would point out. It is quite clear that atypical expressions have become a commodity; however, we cannot simply ignore that, just because they seem unintelligible. This kind of exclusion produces oversimplification by identifying compressive shock with spectacle and expressional momentum with signs and objects whose effect coincides with their visuality. ‘Self Unfinished’ is unfinished because of its ‘incorporeal materialism’.⁸ This performance is rooted in the ‘Think Performance’ stratum: there is the role-swapping between the director and the producer or performance manager, between the audience and the new employees, and the changing role of the performer who takes the position of the audience’s trade-union representative. It is an escalation of the performative system of theatre in its efficiency.

But what de-stratifies those layers of bodies and subjects is a refocusing of uninteresting questions such as ‘who am I’, ‘what am I’, ‘how am I produced’, or ‘how is my identity stabilised’ – although these aren’t irrelevant questions. The more interesting question, as Elisabeth Grosz puts it, is how do I act, what enables me to do this, what acts in me when I act?⁹

Or, to play a little rhizome game paraphrasing Deleuze’s quantify writing with quantify performing:¹⁰ ‘There is no difference between what a performance talks about and how it is made. Therefore, a performance also has no object as an assemblage, a performance has only itself, in connection with other assemblages

and in relation to other bodies without organs. We will never ask what a performance means, as signified or signifier; we will not look for anything to understand in it. We will ask what it functions with, in connection with what other things it does or does not transmit intensities, in which other multiplicities its own are inserted and metamorphosed, and with what bodies without organs it makes its own converge. A performance exists only through the outside and on the outside. A performance itself is a little machine; what is the relation (also measurable) of this performative machine to a war machine, love machine, revolutionary machine, etc. – and an abstract machine that sweeps them along? We have been criticized for overquoting performance authors. But when one performs, the only question is which other machine the performative machine can be plugged into, must be plugged into in order to work?’

BC: Could you please elaborate on your provocative claim about the transfer from the object of identification or subject of expression within the semiotic production of performance, onto the process that covers the product, in the sense that performance keeps redirecting our attention to what it’s doing, what it’s enabling, what it’s producing in the performer him/herself, in the observer, etc.? Would that be a line of research for BADco?

GSP: That is definitely one of the predominant lines of our research at the moment, but our foci have shifted over time: from understanding our shows as performance machines, through a diagrammatic complexification of sets of relations and operations between performers, spectators, and spatial givens. For the last three years we have been trying to think performance not only as an object that is shown to an audience, but as an object watching itself as such, as spectators-watching-the-show-as-another-object etc. That might be another way to think performance: to construct a third perspective for observing from aside, something like a camera or an airplane black box. This is important for us because it might be a way to objectify some aspects of the emergence of the visceral, or unintelligibility.

BC: This seems to me like a shift from Bergsonian attentive recognition to automatic recognition. The performers are thereby not actors, or modern subjects, who are instrumental to the action and who expose their inner compulsion to move, but perceivers, whose observation and affection must also mediate or further frame the process of reception in the audience.

GSP: I would totally agree. To describe them idealistically, they are the contours of observing agents on whom the audience can project their own role in the act of observing and that is what we call operation on the micro-event horizon, modes and skills of effecting the micro-event horizon of the performance, not only its totality.

‘The Show Must Go On’ and the social machine

I would like to discuss this performance with reference to the author who, by creating the idea of the fourth wall as the objectifying but also formational principle of incorporation, solidified the gap between the performers and the audience; that author was Denis Diderot.

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⁴ Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of ‘Sex’* (New York and London: Routledge, 1993), 35.

⁵ Jon McKenzie, *Perform or Else: From Discipline to Performance* (New York and London: Routledge, 2001).

⁶ Massumi, ‘Introduction Like a Thought’, *xxii*.

⁷ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* (London, The Athlone Press, 1988), 99.

⁸ Michel Foucault, Znanje i moć, eds. Hotimir Burger i Rade Kalanj (Zagreb: Globus, 1994), 134.

⁹ Cf. Robert Ausch, Randal Doane, and Laura Perez, ‘Interview with Elisabeth Grosz’, http://web.cc.cuny.edu/csctw/found_object/text/grosz.htm.

¹⁰ Cf. Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 4.

3-4

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In his study *Absorption and Theatricality: Painting and Beholder in the Age of Diderot*, Michael Fried demonstrates how Diderot's idea of the unity of the scene (including subjects outside the painting) tends towards the creation of an extreme fiction that is supposed to establish the impression of a complete exclusion of the beholder's presence from any aspect of the painting. Other than the inevitable single viewpoint for the beholder to insert him/herself into, the painting must not have any other intentions towards him/her. Any kind of presentation that intends to initiate a direct contact with the beholder or acknowledge the beholder's presence in the scene (or in front of the scene), ruins the integrity and unity of the painting. 'A scene represented on canvas or onstage does not suppose witnesses.'¹¹ In his criticism of expression, Diderot points out the fact that this presence can often be seen in the physics of the performers' or characters' facial expressions portrayed in the painting, while a performance manner that was most often criticised was the grimace, a pulling of the face. Grimace, exaggeration, caricature, and refinement were seen as the main problems of every tasteless painting, not because of their own character but because of 'the awareness of audience, of being beheld'¹² that they implied. 'If you lose your feeling for the difference between a man who presents himself in society and a man engaged in an action, [...] throw your brushes into the fire. You will academicise all your figures, you will make them stiff and unnatural.'¹³ Opposite to that manner is the naïve, 'the thing itself, without the least alteration'.¹⁴ Because 'all that is true is not naïve, but all that is naïve is true, but with a truth that is alluring, original and rare'.¹⁵

However, naïvety and truthfulness are established within the painting and not in relation to the outside world or the beholder. Thus Diderot's was an attempt to separate theatre from the spectator as much as possible.¹⁶ But such a separation was not merely illusory. Forming the idea of a pregnant moment as a constitutive fact of a "well-composed scene", Diderot also promotes its regulations: the law of energies and interests. It appears as a matter of *inter-esse*, of being in-between. In such a setting, there is room for a certain parallelism in the perception of human beings and objects or, in other words, a thorough objectification. The relation between the scene and the viewer becomes that between the object and the viewer. In this context, Diderot's orientation towards *tableau vivant* as opposed to the *coup de théâtre* becomes clearer and more pragmatic.

The performance space, which is a network of relations of the space of the body and the space outside of it, is determined by the action within; it is in fact the field of the action. However, Diderot's theatre is a *phenomenological theatre* in which, as with Artaud later, the scene becomes the *site of passage*¹⁷ of ideas into objects. Everything has equal importance, but has yet to gain that importance 'as it does in dreams'.¹⁸ Theatre considered as a field of action and a *site of passage* is first a *place of integration*, but that integration is one of different sources of memory, knowledge, and sensations, without any priorities or hierarchies. The circumstances and characters of a performance are inseparable from each other and the characters may exist outside the performance only under similar circumstances since, as Bert O. States asserts, Hamlet or Hamletism could not exist without Claudius nor could they exist without a 'certain relational equation, or closed field, between the man and the world, or between a capacity and demand'.¹⁹ Maybe we could point out here that Bel or the empire of Belism could not exist without Le Roy.

Since it is traced, named, and inscribed, the event outlines in the situation – in the "there is" – both a before and an after', Alain Badiou writes.²⁰ In that (non)time (in between the before and the after) 'the event "works" through a situation as the truth of that situation'.²¹ As the 'event is precisely what remains undecided between the taking place and the non-place – in the guise of an emergence that is indiscernible from

its own disappearance. The event adds itself onto what there is, but as soon as this supplement is pointed out, the "there is" reclaims its rights, laying hold of everything. Obviously, the only way of fixing an event is to give it a name, to inscribe it within the "there is" as a supernumerary name. [...] The name is what decides upon the having taken place'.²² The situation is therefore that the 'truth' of the event is its name – as it is in 'Tonight', 'Let's Dance', 'Private Dancer', and 'The Show Must Go On'.

The conflict between different beings-in-between is in fact an integrational conflict and in it the characters cannot be separated from the circumstances, the circumstances from the relations, etc. The objectivity of all integrational phenomena in theatre is what keeps theatre between 'a dream and the event', as Artaud would say. Not illusion understood as a string of perception tricks, but illusion as integration, the impression of a different style of existence, illusion as vibrations (*illudere*) of events and as a test of reality. This specific quality is manifested in an increased openness of people towards things, as well as in their enfolded-ness, their inter-being. For Diderot says that theatre is just like 'society, in which everyone sacrifices some of their rights for the good of the community and for the entity'.²³ This human trait – opening one's body to the world of objects or other bodies, including propositions – we shall find in the radical realism of Stanislavski, who counts on 'the circumstances' to revive 'self-awareness in part on the stage',²⁴ as well as in the works of a lower potential of theatricality, in which the performer's body gives extension to the flatness of signs authorised by, for example, Jérôme Bel, or produced under the authority of accident. From Diderot and Stanislavski, via Artaud and the modernists, through today, the issue is always about different degrees of the performer's sensibility to the circumstances, towards the world of objects.

What are the predispositions, what is that something that allows the body to enfold in a world of objects? Let us first turn to Merleau-Ponty's theory that the body is not an object.²⁵ But the body is never identical to the subject either. 'The body I touch never coincides with the body that touches [...] As a corollary to this non-coincidence, perception is also characterized by a presubjective level of involvement with the world of things, an entanglement with the "nonself" that subjectivity presupposes and on which it is contingent'.²⁶ The body is what we share with the world, but it is also that, with which we are buried into it. We must not forget that the body never becomes completely factitious, never a total object, as Barthes already demonstrated. The body will be decomposed and put together again in a new, artificial body. 'Artificial, but not factitious', Barthes concludes.²⁷ This artificiality is different from the one we find in stage sets or furniture. Its corporeality is accentuated, even its dispersal on things is accentuated, and so is its co-extensiveness with the world, with the curtain on the stage; however, it is separated from the world by that otherness of a theatre production, the otherness coming out of the attempt to understand the body and its control. The body enters into the mechanism of physicality, but also into an 'incorporeal materialism', to which I shall return a bit later. Such a body is ready to enter the picture, to resemble, and theatre exactly is the taking place of different techniques of the accentuation of the body and the technologies of incorporeality.

To talk about how this inter-materialness of theatre, that existence between two worlds, the existence between objects and ideas would actually be an existence in the world of signs is equally blasphemous as would be a reduction of dreams to the world of realised signs and symbols, which would sacrifice the dreamer's right to a 'real' experience and the sense of being enfolded in the dream. Neither in dreams nor in theatre can our experiences be reduced by any other interpretations, although interpretation is inherent to their very existence, as it is in 'The Show Must Go On'. That is why we ask ourselves whether theatre might only be a medium even for the flattest of signs.

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¹¹ Michael Fried, *Absorption and Theatricality: Painting and Beholder in the Age of Diderot* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1980), 97.

¹² *Ibid.*, 99.

¹³ Denis Diderot, 'Essais sur la peinture', in *Umetnost* (Belgrade: Kultura, 1954), 224.

¹⁴ Quoted in Fried, *Absorption and Theatricality*, 100.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 101.

¹⁶ On the relationships of Diderot's theory of painting and theatre see Roland Barthes, 'Diderot, Brecht, Eisenstein', *Maska*, Vol. 1-2 (winter 1999), 8.

¹⁷ Bert O. States, *Great Reconings in Little Rooms: On the Phenomenology of Theater* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1985), 109.

¹⁸ Antonin Artaud: 'Teatar ohrutnosti (Prvi manifest)', *Mogućnosti*, Vols. 11–12 (1970), 1379.

¹⁹ States, *Great Reconings in Little Rooms*, 149.

²⁰ Alain Badiou, 'Dance as a Metaphor for Thought', in *Handbook of Inaesthetics* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), 61.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 63.

²² *Ibid.*, 61.

²³ Denis Diderot, 'Paradoxe sur le comédien' in *Umetnost*, 50.

²⁴ Constantin Sergejevich Stanislavski, 'Rad glumca na ulozu' ['The Actor's Work on the Role'], in *Rad glumca na sebi*, II (Zagreb: Cehade, 1989), Vol. II, 261.

²⁵ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, 'The Body as Expression, and Speech', in *Phenomenology of*

Perception (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), 202–32.

²⁶ Stanton B. Garner, *Bodied Spaces: Phenomenology and Performance in Contemporary Drama* (Ithaca, NY, and London, UK: Cornell University Press, 1994), 30.

²⁷ Roland Barthes, 'Baudelaire's Theatre', in *Critical Essays* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1972), 27.

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BC: This long note on Diderot's theory of presentation – which is something of a 'distinct but obscure idea' of the problems that are driving you to think – reminds me of a concept that we have, perhaps, neglected, and that is composition... In theatre today – and not only in formal-abstract dancing – how much may we seek that a world posit itself, that it give rise to itself, without at once communicating with the observer? I'm thinking of 'Diderot's Nephew' and the density and opacity of the scenes, in which the performance acts were self-referential as well as differentiating from themselves, whereas relations among the performers and the objects, the space, were not formally or semantically predetermined. The performance did not count on us, the spectators, and yet it did commit us to watch it again and again, to observe it, explore it, to 'enter' it unnoticed.

GSP: That is one of the things that 'Think Performances' didn't consider thinkable – the correspondences, the relatedness through a composition. As Barthes would say, the initial data is always of a gesticular order. The creation of fiction comes as an aftertaste. Diderot was important for me because he understood theatre as a kind of machine for experimenting with continuities, correspondences, interests, circumstances, and compositions. He was one of the first thinkers to dismiss the antagonism between the characters in favour of contrasts involving situations, circumstances and interests. So, the act may exist outside of the combination of actors' functions, the act (of watching, of distracting, of confronting...) is also an actor, just like the circumstances are (being exposed, being watched, etc.), just like the interests are. If we could make the agency of situation, the agency of relations and circumstances, intelligible, we would be able to achieve a moment of a new kind of thinking, thinking through correspondences instead of contrasts. That would make us very happy thinkers.

BC: Following the evolution of an entire set, indeed a 'series' of performances that carry in the title the name of the performer ['Véronique Doisnot', 'Pichet Klunchun and Myself', etc], after the cynical imperative of 'the show must go on', how would you evaluate the significance of J. Bel today? I'm asking this because for me, the subsequent performances from that series have re-signified the work of J. Bel. What I used to appreciate as a discursive probing of the conventions of theatrical presentation, turned out to be the pleasure of recognition and stopped there. May we speak of an epilogue to a tendency, misrecognised as radical or critical?

GSP: I don't think that the tendencies of Jérôme Bel's work were ever misrecognised; instead, I would say that the only things that were misrecognised were his political tendencies and critiques of the market. His early performances, especially 'Nom donné par l'auteur', are classic. And that would probably be my answer to the question of the ideologisation of 'Think Performance'. None of his shows ever left open any possibility of thinking, they were always conclusions. I never had any need to think after his shows because he was very good in summing up all the possibilities of interpretation. These shows were virtuosic with a single idea. But as soon as that idea becomes somebody's truth, it turns into ideology, as his master Roland Barthes would say. That is why it becomes disastrous when others try to make more art on the basis of Jérôme Bel's work; even Bel's own piece 'Pichet Klunchun & Myself' clearly attests to that. There is that moment of contemporaneity becoming the self, or, more precisely, the self becoming contemporaneity. And I would say that all of his late works are basically the self taking over a totality of history, of contemporaneity and the expectations of the market. So, he

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is the master again but in compressing time in relation to his own self. So, the change that was crucial for him was probably the moment when the self replaced the idea, but I would still say that the strength of the belief has remained the same.

'Self Unfinished' and the religious machine

In a very inspiring take on Pasolini and Saint Paul, Michael Hardt points out that '[a]bandonment to the flesh is a form of freedom. Exposed, the passions of the flesh are released from any normative structures or organic functioning'.²⁸ Here, as in 'Self Unfinished', the term 'body' seems insufficient. Such a construct is far too detached from other things and bodies, too implicated in its coupling with consciousness, but also sacrificing. It is affected and afflicted by sad passions, because any embodiment is a construct of the unification of an imaginable mind with the matter. By contrast, incarnation is all about abandonment – the abandonment and emptying out to the flesh. In 'Self Unfinished' we are witnessing the fullness of the surface of being, the affirmation of the plenitude of the material, the incarnation. But that material is evident in the shock of compression. The flesh becomes the flash of Nietzsche's lightning strike. Here, thought strikes like a lightning bolt, it is felt. 'The highest operation of thought', according to Massumi, 'is not to choose, but to harbour and convey that felt force, repotentialized'.²⁹ The thinking is not contained in the designations, manifestations, and significations – these are only pale reflections of the flash. 'The thinking is all along the line. It is the process: its own event.'³⁰ To conclude: the freedom which 'Self Unfinished' offers is in the ability to create a problem, a problem of a body that is not objectified, but is flesh in desire, flesh which radiates its materiality instead of a materialisation of a signifying situation. To destratify 'Think Performance' and to think it in its resistant forms, we have to abandon any transcendentalism in favour of believing in the reality which we live in. In search of the continuity of life and community we have to sacrifice our gift. Cynical flatness could be shaken by joyous irony. To continue in a Deleuzian way, we need reasons to believe in this world, and 'becoming flesh will be our joy'.³¹

BC: 'In search of the continuity of life and community we have to sacrifice our gift' – I'm intrigued by this statement: have we been invested all along into intellectual showing off in our performances, demanding from the audience that they nod their heads in compliance? It seems that one needs wisdom – and not the fear that grips those who feel inferior when they're intellectually challenged – to be made flesh... Have you ever encountered that dilemma in your work at BADco?

GSP: I would rather say that this is my constant preoccupation, this negotiating between the desire to understand and recognition, between joy and pleasure. I am not sure if I could say that one has to be more or less smart, more or less hermetic. I would be happy if I could share those doubts with people in a way that would make them understand that their expectations are much more fiction than what we do and that our attentiveness is much more real than they realise. As long as we discuss how things work instead of what they mean, there is no fear that there might be an infinite series of designators behind anything we do.

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²⁸ Michael Hardt, 'Pasolini in the Flesh', in *A Shock to Thought*, ed. Brian Massumi, 82.

²⁹ Massumi, 'Introduction Like a Thought', 111.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ Hardt, 'Pasolini in the Flesh', 79.

In this paper I explore different discursive practices in the field of contemporary dance in France. This is inevitably going to be an in-exhaustive mapping, mostly focused on a few key agents; by analysing them I will try to understand the conditions of the emergence and shaping of discourses. A discourse is formed as a combination of written and spoken language, diverse signs and forms of communication that are organised in ideas, attitudes, actions, beliefs, and so on. Creating a complete map would thus entail creating a vast corpus, particularly in relation to those practices that generate little or no written record, in order to obtain a full scope of practices that make up systems of thought, which we call discourses. Since that would exceed the scope of this article, my goal instead is to analyse the conditions of the emergence of language production in a few select cases and to offer a typology of those production practices without engaging systematically in a critical analysis of discourse as a proper theoretical category.

Right at the outset, some clarification is perhaps necessary concerning the use of the terms ‘dance’ and ‘performance’, the latter of which is becoming more and more common in the field of European contemporary dance. The ‘performing arts’ designation would be equivalent to the French ‘arts du spectacle’. According to Pavis, ‘spectacle’ is a generic term and may refer to any object that is offered to the gaze: theatre, dance, opera, mime, circus, cinema, etc., as well as to other forms, such as parades, manifestations, and public events.¹ ‘Arts de la scène’ and/or ‘arts de la représentation’ are live, unmediated stage performances and are defined as forms of ‘spectacle’. The interchangeability of the terms ‘scène’, ‘représentation’, and ‘spectacle’ might cause some confusion, but Pavis’s aim is quite clearly to denaturalise these notions from the theatrical (dramatic) tradition, using ‘scène’ and ‘représentation’ as broad concepts and insisting that theatre is only one among many different kinds of ‘spectacles’.² ‘Arts du spectacle’ is then accepted as the most comprehensive term in everyday use, as predominant and mostly referring to live and/or stage productions, being the closest to the English ‘performing arts’ (itself not to be confused with performance art). Also, the institutional categorisation and administration of the arts corresponds mostly to this definition.

Artistic practices are here defined on the one hand by their respective regimes of visibility, i.e. by reference to spectacle as a larger denominator and more specifically, to the stage. On the other hand, they are subdivided according to their (traditional) media. While this is problematic when confronted with the dynamic of contemporary productions, where artistic practices have themselves challenged media-defined denominations, on which the entire institutional framework rests, these denominations nonetheless inevitably frame the field within which I choose to explore discursive formations relative to contemporary dance. Therefore I discuss dance within the domains of the academia, professional production, and criticism, as well as what constitutes discourses in the artistic production of dance. Only in this specific focus does it become possible to note the processes of deconstruction that artistic and discursive practices effect within an art field, striving to un-cluster and de-compartmentalise the existing frameworks.

However, one can encounter quite a few paradoxes when contemporary dance is concerned, because it is an art that has enjoyed a very belated institutional recognition compared to the other arts. This is why seemingly contradictory processes are happening. For example, there is an ongoing effort to validate dance as an autonomous research area (the opening of the CND in Pantin provided the first ever ‘médiathèque’ dedicated to dance alone and not as in most libraries to dance as a sub-sub-category of theatre with one shelf-worthy of generic books and a few monographs). At the same time, a specialised magazine such as the

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¹ Patrice Pavis, *Dictionary of the Theatre: Terms, Concepts and Analysis* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), 346. (des arts de la scène et/ou des arts de la représentation [...]).

² Patrice Pavis, *Vers une théorie de la pratique théâtrale: voix et images de la scène* (Villeneuve-d’Ascq, France: Presses Universitaires du Septentrion, 2007), 441: ‘[...] le théâtre n’existe aujourd’hui que dans l’ensemble des spectacle

Mouvement, started some fifteen years ago to alleviate the lack of critical writing in dance and accompany the shifts that the field was undergoing at that time, is opening to the other arts and renaming itself ‘indisciplinaire’. I’ll return to this later.

Academic Discourse and the Dancing Body

Perhaps a few lines are in order on the research in dance and the existence of dance scholarship in France. Dance started entering French universities only some twenty years ago. While this may seem like an achievement compared to some other European countries where there is still no such thing as free-standing dance studies, it looks meagre compared to the tradition and weight of the American academia. Due to the French universities’ continuing faith in the traditional disciplines of philosophy, literature, and the social sciences, the very idea of dance research provoked frowning in academic circles.

The first dance department was created in 1989, by philosopher Michel Bernard at Paris 8.³ Bernard gave a strong philosophical mark to the research performed there, with the ambition to build a discourse of dance aesthetics not according to the traditional criteria of aesthetic judgement, but based on the specificity of the experience and perception of dance, both in its sensible production (dancer) and in its reception (viewer). Although necessarily pluralistic in nature, this project was, however, heavily influenced by phenomenology of perception (Merleau-Ponty), which allowed for a critique of conventional aesthetics based on the relation between the sensible and the intelligible, as well as the elaboration of the critique of the concepts of the body and organism, or attempts at conceptualising the temporality of the dance event. Compared to the dance studies existing at that time (mostly British and American), one of the most important aspects of Bernard’s approach was its topographic displacement of the researcher out of the spectator’s seat (as in aesthetic, historic, and semiotic discourses), into the process of the making of dance. Right from its founding, the department admitted dancers and choreographers alongside researchers trained in the humanities, in an effort to conceptualise what is at stake in choreographic and dance practice. With the appointment of Hubert Godard, a former dancer, movement analyst, researcher, and roller, as head of the department, somatic practices became one of the central objects of research.⁴ This allowed for the developing of tools that articulate the analysis of gesture as central to the poetics and aesthetics of dance. Radically transdisciplinary, Godard’s work on movement analysis goes beyond the biomechanic and proprioceptive schemes, and creates complex transverse grids of reading, from purely mechanical, to neurological, perceptive and phenomenological, and finally symbolical (psychoanalytic and philosophical) aspects of movement. The main focus is to produce a discourse of movement proper, specific to the experience of moving the body as systematically articulated with other discursive communities.

This focus on corporeality, on the intricacies of the dancer’s work, aesthetics, poetics and politics of dance techniques and diverse body practices contributed to the breaking of the production-reception dichotomy, commonly reproduced in so much writing on dance.

This line of thinking clearly advocates a non-binary approach to theory and practice and insists on theorising dance from within. In this case, theorising from within means refusing to inscribe dance in already existing theoretical frameworks, such as philosophy, anthropology, performance studies, and so on. Such a

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³ In fact, the University of Nice was the first to open a chair in dance at its Art Department and today has a ‘dance section’ that confers graduate and postgraduate degrees. The Paris 8 department of dance seems to have had a greater impact on the development of dance studies and the professional milieu. Today the two universities collaborate and carry out common research programmes.

⁴ The department is now co-directed by Isabelle Ginot and Isabelle Launay.

demand not only touches upon the necessity of (re)defining dance as a practice and as an art, but also has an institutional agenda of its own, as it interrogates the notion of discipline in an emergent academic area of study.

In this way, the emerging dance scholarship in France looked to strike a distance from the already much more systematised American (or Anglo-American) dance scholarship, which relied on semiotic readings of dance and borrowed its theoretical methodologies and concepts from cultural and other 'studies'.

What is at stake in this mild antagonism is quite clearly summarised in a recent publication edited by M. Nordera: 'Scholars who had been trained within the broad scope of cultural studies found it exciting and stimulating to bring in theoretical concepts and methodological instruments from other disciplinary contexts and apply them to the "subject of dance". Other visions, on the contrary, emphasized the need to find methods and instruments of analysis within the dance itself. The former perceived an interdisciplinary approach as a preliminary and unavoidable condition, while the latter saw it as a sort of colonization of a terrain, still considered marginal and thus constitutionally fragile, endowed with its own and "original" identity that only a gaze from within could make known'.⁵

Where might one find the resources, tools, and theories that are inherent to dance? One could refer to Laban, a handful of choreographers who reflect on their practice, and the slow development of the concept of kinaesthesia. What we find is that as soon as dance leaves the traditionally thorny ground of conversing with philosophy and the social sciences, it indeed proposes another ground for discussion: for example, theories of movement and perception. But this change of perspective mostly happens through a change of allies. Most theories of motion, perception, sensation, and the relations between the mind and the body, which surely constitute an extremely rich pool of knowledge in every dancer's experience, find their elaboration and legitimisation in contemporary scientific discourses. For example, as soon as neuroscience, experimental psychology, and some of contemporary philosophy got busier with these questions, their presence in dance discourses increased.

In this sense, the 'originality' or idiosyncrasy of dance is not just a question of its theoretical framework, but even more so a political one. Dance may be used as a metaphor or an example in theoretical discourses in any theory, be it a disciplinary, trans-, or a post-disciplinary theory. Those frequently mentioned authors, the few that wrote about dance, such as Valéry or Nietzsche, did nothing but that. And I could only add that the same strategies are used in English-speaking scholarship as well, only within contemporary theoretical frameworks.

In a text published in 2004, Michel Bernard identifies the idiosyncrasy of the phenomenon of dance as the source of the deficiency of discourse in dance.⁶ Taken strictly in its historical terms, which would include the almost mythical birth of modern dance at the end of the nineteenth century, its specific modes of production, the specific modes of constructing experience through the dancing body, and the ambivalent social and cultural status of dance, it is a valid hypothesis. Unfortunately, the 'idiosyncrasy' of dance is still too often married to the lingering notion that dance cannot be 'discoursed', since it is a form of expression outside of language. The project of thinking the conditions of the possibility of 'dance' as an art, as an art institution and a cultural and social phenomenon, is of a somewhat more recent date in French academia and may be recognised as a theorisation of the changes that are happening in professional art-making.

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⁵ Susanne Franco and Marina Nordera (eds.), *Dance Discourses: Keywords in Dance Research* (London and New York: Routledge, 2007), iv.

⁶ Michel Bernard, 'Parler, penser la danse', *Rue Descartes*, No. 44 (2004), 110–15.

Talking from Within

On the art scene of the 1990s, 'Talking from within' became talking not (only) from within one's bodily experience or specific knowledge of perceptive and sensory processes, but (also) from within the production of art, taken as a cultural, social, economical, and political system. Or, in aesthetic terms, it meant talking critically about the body from within dance, rather than talking about the dancing body.

This 'critical turn' in dance is commonly identified with two French authors, Xavier Le Roy and Jérôme Bel, in particular, and also with a larger list of authors including such diverse artists as Alain Buffard, Boris Charmatz, Emmanuelle Huynh, Latifa Laâbissi, Claudia Triozzi, Christian Rizzo, among others. Identified by Isabelle Ginot as a reaction to the saturated and homogenised scene of the 1980s France,⁷ this 'turn' introduced the critique of aesthetic, economical, and political modes of functioning, leading to the creation of new spaces for working and presenting and generating new modes of production. According to Ginot, this shift not only deregulated the traditional hierarchies of the world of dance (the relations among dancers, choreographers, curators, critics, etc.), but also deeply upset the public triangulation between creation, the audience, and the critics. In other words, numerous projects, in which choreographers guest-performed in each other's works, theorists performed onstage, and artists co-authored theoretical elaborations of their works, produced dance-works that no longer had the contours of an 'œuvre' and a field where the material and the immaterial, the cognitive and the sensible, the inside and the outside, production and execution all lost their traditionally delineated domains. Further to corroborate her diagnosis, Ginot applies to this newly organised field of dance the concept of the 'common-place', developed by philosopher Anne Cauquelin.⁸ Theorising the world of contemporary art, Cauquelin talks about a specific register of knowledge that enables the being-together, a kind of envelope that surrounds us (that is, the totality of the actors in the world of art); in other words, a fluid discourse-knowledge that impregnates and generates our actions. According to Cauquelin, this common-place, or *doha*, may be described as coexistence and mixture of the existing theories of art, circulated and used at different junctures inside the 'site of art'. Hence Ginot proposes to engage in new ways of thinking the field of dance: instead of analysing individual artworks and authors, it becomes necessary to distinguish between the different functions that are present in the network and to analyse the forces and movements that operate within it. But it also follows from Ginot's argument that as soon as the field of dance got engaged in critical reflection, using different theoretical apparatuses for that purpose, it found itself in a space of generalised theoretical rumour. This seems like an inconsistent conclusion, since Cauquelin's 'common-place' refers not just to any discourse whatsoever, or to the changes in the texture of the art world, which is indeed becoming an ever smoother network. In other words, any *doha* entails the existence of major aesthetic theories that can perform the role of a common discourse. Dance has never disposed of such theories. The 'common-places' in the oral tradition of dance cannot be analogous to Cauquelin's *doha*, because the latter refers specifically to the use of philosophical discourses in the world of art. In that sense, the critical and theoretical turn in dance had to operate through an appropriation and transformation of the existing, 'foreign' discourses, and only later to engage in its own production of referential theories. Or, alternatively, we might have to reach a better understanding of what makes up a *doha* in the world of contemporary dance.

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⁷ Isabelle Ginot, 'Un lieu commun', *Repères*, No. 11 (March, 2003), 5–8.

⁸ See Anne Cauquelin, *L'art du lieu commun: du bon usage de la doxa* (Paris: Seuil, 1999).

Here is a short digression: without going into much historical detail, it is worth noting that modern dance gained momentum in France during the late 1960s, with the arrival of modern dance techniques mainly from the United States, which brought new practices, a new aesthetic of the body, and new teachings.⁹ Marginalised and mostly condemned to amateurism at the time, modern dancers and choreographers engaged in demanding recognition, both in terms of a legitimisation through the arts institutions and as workers, in terms of their social rights. Such a context foments affirmative, legitimising, justifying discourses with the aim to enter the institutions, and partly adapt the existing institutional infrastructure to the new demands and needs. Indeed, the 1980s saw a consolidation of the institutional network and a dance world dominated by companies, productions organised in repertoires, and theatre stage representations taken as a given. In that sense, if there was any radicalisation and mobilisation in the dance world at all, it was mostly a movement towards an integration of the institutional structures. The opening of National Choreographic Centres (CCN) with choreographers as directors was considered a big victory in that sense. But on the other hand, by 1990 artistic production in dance had become rather homogenised and unconcerned with its socio-political context. As is well known, the above-mentioned changes that took place in the 1990s dismantled stable companies and introduced project-based work, collaborations, networking, research, etc.

These changes, however, should not be understood as a univocal paradigm shift. There is a general tendency to perceive a causal relation between structural changes and shifts in the discourses of and around artworks.

It is easy to note that in practice different forms of more or less regulated discourses and practices respond to different demands, needs, and questions. In this sense, choreographer Latifa Laâbissi may engage in explorations of the relations between theory and practice by experimenting with theorist Isabelle Launay,¹⁰ or explore the relations of the contemporary body with the historical dance avant-garde by performing Mary Wigman's *Witch Dance*, or make a dance performance into a strong political commentary influenced by post-colonial studies.¹¹ Nathalie Collantes, active throughout the 1990s in various collective events that challenged the very notion of dance performance as a commodifiable work, has recently presented a performance in which she subjected the process of dance composition to a rigorous examination.¹² Similarly, François Chaignaud experiments with the history of the dancing body taking on the early-twentieth-century experiment with 'dances libres', whilst also choreographing 'Les Sylphides' with Cecilia Bengolea, a performance of excitable surfaces, which could be traced both to gender studies and to speculative and process philosophy.

If we take the popular notions of self-reflection and criticality, we will see that their understanding is at best plural, at worst ambivalent. For example, self-reflection may be equally engaged in the project of theorising tools, techniques, artistic references, etc., approximating the autonomy of dance as an art form in quite a modernist fashion, and in already abandoning the position of autonomy to perform dance as a social and/or critical practice. The same goes for those critical practices and politics that range from the-matising politics in their poetic work, to militant actions such as the CIP,¹³ in which artists create new forms of political subjectivity by associating themselves with the precariat.

Here we see that if there is a *dōka* at all, it is not a perfectly smooth discursive surface, but rather a network that emerges between different points of tension. One extreme would be the interdisciplinary murmur of post-structuralism, cultural theory, gender studies, theoretical psychoanalysis, political theory, etc., as

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⁹ See Jacqueline Robinson, *L'Aventure de la danse moderne en France: 1920–1970* (Paris: Bougé, 1996).

¹⁰ See Latifa Laâbissi and Isabelle Launay 'Distraction: être détourné', in *Rencontres, Revues – Les langages de la danse 13–16 novembre 2006* (Nantes: Erban and Le Lieu Unique, 2006), 4.

¹¹ Performance *Self Portrait Camouflage*, 2006.

¹² Performance *Made d'Emploi*, 2010.

¹³ The Coordination des Intermittents et Précaires is an activist organisation, founded in 2003 to protest the new regime of unemployment benefits in the arts. The mobilisation has continued through the critical work and self-education at the 'Open University', for example, where neo-liberal forms of governability are studied.

non-specific, but already inherent to dance; the other (less and less present, be it said) would be the lore of the irreducibility of dance to language, which I would not identify as a *dōka*, because it is only a consequence of the philosophical exclusion of dance from the aesthetic regimes and thereby a sign of an utter lack of theorisation of dance as an art.

Artists Talking

Let's look at an example of a critical discourse generated by artists, more precisely by a heterogeneous group of dancers, choreographers, and theorists. The 'Signataires du 20 août'¹⁴ came together in 1997. Their first public manifestation was an open letter to Catherine Trautmann, minister of culture at the time, which expressed concern regarding the programme of 'déconcentration'¹⁵ that failed to envisage positions for expert advisors in the choreographic arts in the process of attributing funding. While this letter was only a trigger, the 'Signataires' quickly engaged in much broader action, criticising and contesting the French cultural system and its retrograde institutionalisation of the choreographic arts through binary demarcations of research and creation, experimentation and performance (spectacle), art and education, definitions of choreographic works as circumscribed spectacular objects, and so on.

Their activities gained visibility through the press, namely *Le Monde* and *La Croix*, and more consistently through the *Mouvement* magazine, which published most of the texts and open letters by the 'Signataires'. Between 1997 and 2000, over the course of a three-year period, the group constituted a non-institutional force (their collective activities have no legal status) and gradually became an interlocutor to the ministry of culture. Isabelle Launay explains that the group were united by their common political concerns and were not defined by the logic of affirmation and control that would have put them in a better position to secure funding. It is therefore a riposte to the polarisation of the choreographic field since the mid 1980s into structures that have created a global system where those in the positions of power and responsibility (such as directors of the CCNs) were unconcerned with creating artistic projects that could reach beyond their own work. Launay writes: 'Missing the political dimensions of their work and artistic responsibility [...] the choreography field refrained from re-thinking its tools and modes of functioning. While some artists do take political stands, seldom does this have actual repercussions on the functioning of the companies, on the education, or even on the choreographic works themselves'.¹⁶

The group's collective mode of functioning also allowed them to practise some of their regularly voiced demands. The 'Signataires' engaged in collaborations, process-oriented projects, research, theory-practice events, etc. Their activities not only epitomise the shift in the choreography milieu discussed earlier, but may also be considered one of its driving forces, since the years 2000–2005 indeed saw the founding of independent companies,¹⁷ the attribution of subsidies to independent companies and artistic projects, changes in the choreographic centres', and the opening of new and the consolidating of existing alternative spaces.¹⁸

For the most part, the Signataires are now established, either as directors of various arts institutions [Emmanuelle Huynh, Boris Charmatz, Christophe Wavelet, Fattoumi-Lamoureux], or with regular appearances at prestigious theatres, as, for instance, Latifa Laâbissi, Loïc Touzé, Christian Rizzo, and Julie Nioche, to name a few. On the one hand, they got established thanks to the significant changes that occurred in certain institutions of the state and, on the other hand, due to the institutionalisation (in the broad sense of the word) of new modes of working and thinking dance.

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¹⁴ The signatories included: M. Bae Mortureux, P. Barthès, L. Bonicel, C. Bourigault, C. Burgos, H. Cathala, D. Chamblas, B. Charmatz, J. Cima, N. Collantes, F. Compet, C. Contour, J. Dumeix, D. D'urso, L. De Nercy, M. Doze, F. Dugied, H. Fattoumi, O. Gelpe, O. Granville, E. Huynh, D. Jégou, L. Laabissi, E. Lamoureux, I. Launay, C. Legrand, A.K.Lescoop, S. Letellier, B. Lombard, A. Michard, J. Nioche, V. Nolténius, A. Normand, R. Ouramdane, P. Paoli, L. Pichaud, A. Pietsch, M. Pisani,

C. Proust, S. Pruneneq, A. Pulcini, P. Queneau, F. Ramaligom, D. Rebaud, C. Rizzo, L. Touzé, C. Van Maerrem, M. Vincent, and C. Wavelet.

¹⁵ 'Déconcentration' is a form of decentralisation.

¹⁶ Isabelle Launay, 'Etat de grève à Kerguéhenec', *Mouvement*, No. 3 (Winter, 1998–99), 16–17.

¹⁷ Edna [B.Charmatz and D. Chamblas], Mûa [E.Huynh], 391 [Loïc Touzé], etc.

¹⁸ La Ménagerie, Les Mains d'Oeuvre, La Fonderie, Les Laboratoires, Les Substances, etc.

In order to see how this ‘representative’ group of artists figure in a more general view of the field, to understand how discourses are shaped and further to elaborate on the points of tension in the quasi-dōka I mentioned above, it might be interesting to look at the state and status of dance criticism. Looking at criticism shows more clearly the link between the political demands and transformations that I just described, and the shift in understanding dance in terms of aesthetics (evaluating criteria), ontology (what is dance?), art history (when does something qualify as dance?), etc.

The following are some of the common statements that accompany the demand for a transformation of the landscape of choreography in France, often asserted as problems by the critics: the ‘New generation of artists’ engaged in 1) substituting the work *qua* the materiality of ‘œuvre’, with discourse; 2) touring one’s work within the same network that one engages in criticizing; and 3) submerging dance practices in foreign discourses.

This may be read as a form of resistance to a view of the dance world as a system similar to the world of art in the sense that dance world 1) forms a community of discourses that produce artworks; 2) engages in an institutional critique from inside the institution; and 3) understands contemporary dance as an offspring of different artistic genealogies, including theatre, the visual arts, and dance proper, as well as the corresponding theories and practices.¹⁹

The first statement is clearly exemplified in the endless battle between the critic Dominique Frétard and the contributors to the *Mouvement* magazine, over the term ‘non-dance’ coined by Frétard.²⁰ I will not recount the debate here, because it consists of elements that are thoroughly theorised in many European publications, which use ‘conceptual dance’ more often than ‘non-dance’. Considered strictly within its French context, ‘non-dance’, this essentialising, media-bound term, quite clearly shows the imprint of the normative classification of dance that governed its understanding in France. Frétard’s infamous term only illustrates the difficulty to perceive at which level artistic discourse and practice ‘reponsible’ for ‘non-dance’ operates. In other words, the shift in understanding the aesthetic and ontological status of dance is inherent to its institutional critique, be it exercised in the form of an artwork or as a militant action in the world of art.²¹

Disturbances are also noticeable as a consequence of the emerging ‘artist discourse’. In a recently published essay, critic Philippe Varrièle points to the lack of critical writing about dance.²² Quite surprisingly, Varrièle restates the slippery nature of the phenomenon of dance as the main source of its perceived resistance to text and, based on this premise, he (yet again) elaborates on the hostility of dancers to critics: ‘One should remember what the famous rejoinder – but do you dance yourself? – to the critic presupposes’, Varrièle writes. By criticising the fetishism of ‘doing’, Varrièle defends critical theorising, but on the wrong premises: whereas dance belongs to bodily expertise, critique belongs to verbal expertise. According to Varrièle, the artist’s inability to accept the difference or even confrontation between the critique and making of art is the cause of the dearth of criticism in dance. It is almost needless to say that Varrièle overlooks the new distribution of discourses that is at stake today. The anti-intellectualism he denounces is rather persistent in France, but it cannot be so easily attributed to the ‘slipperiness of the phenomenon of dance’. There are multiple factors in play, such as the education of dancers, the difference between the social status of the dancers and that of the choreographers, to name but a few. Varrièle’s simplified phenomenology only ends up reinstating the very anti-intellectualism it denounces, at best by being apologetic of it, at worst by enclosing dancers into the hierarchic binary of doing and thinking.

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¹⁹ I’d like to stress that I concentrate here on the debates involving dance critics for the simple reason that they are documented, but the problematics is by no means exclusive to the critics.

²⁰ Dominique Frétard, ‘La fin annoncé de la non-danse’, *Le Monde* [6 May 2003], 25; D. Frétard, *Danse et non-danse* (Paris: Cercle d’art, 2004); Jean-Marc Adolphe and Gérard Mayen,

‘La non-danse danse encore’, *Mouvement*, No. 28 (May–June, 2004); 72–74; Gérard Mayen Décroutes, ‘La non-danse de présences en marche’, *Rue Descartes*, No. 44 (2004), 116–120.

²¹ See, for example, the interview with Loïc Touzé: ‘One sees how much this word [choreographer] is institutionalised. The institution gives money to a “choreographic creation”. This is bothering us because we are trying to

redefine what choreographic is. And the institution establishes the criteria about what is choreographic and what is outside the choreographic’, quoted by Céline Roux in *Danse(s) performative(s)* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 2007), 112.

²² Philippe Varrièle, ‘Les Maux pour le dire. Danse Française contre sa critique’, in *À la rencontre de la danse contemporaine: porosités*

If we were to look for a reason for the poverty of critical production today, saying that ‘dancers resist text’ would be little more than an excuse. If there is a reason at all, it is to be found in a (general) resistance towards the displacement of discursive production (from the critics to the artistic milieu) and the failure to produce theoretical frameworks that would address this displacement outside the binary divide mentioned by Varrièle. To put it simply: dance critics manifest a weariness and resistance similar to the weariness and resistance that film critics showed towards Pasolini, for example, whose theoretical production was perceived as cannibalising towards their own. Or, even further: this displacement demands that critics become theoretical, a prerequisite that fifteen years ago did not exist.

In that sense, few and far between are attempts of cross-referenced critical reading, where different strata of artistic production are analysed. One scholarly example is the rather sharp analysis of Alain Buffard’s *Dispositif 3.1* (2001) by Héléne Marquié.²³ Through the prism of material feminism, Marquié dissects both the performance and the discourse around it, presenting the work through the theories of queering the body. In a constant back and forth between the essays printed in the programme²⁴ and her detailed description of the stage work, Marquié points out that the masquerading strategies used in the performance pre-occupy the audience’s gaze mostly with the performers’ biological sex, for the most part failing to operate through queering strategies.

Marquié’s choice of theoretical tools with which she analyses the framework proposed by the performance is not the issue here. Her writing is perhaps too busy with its own militant feminist agenda to go beyond the failure of the performance to correspond to its own theoretical premises as they are laid out in its programme notes, which is a reductive view for any artwork. But at the same time, the target of Marquié’s irritation is an important issue: the way Buffard uses theory as a tool of interpretation is an example of wishful thinking, to put it bluntly. In other words, when discursive production is not deployed in dramaturgical procedures, *qua* theory produced in the materiality of performance, the parallel theoretical production is little more than just that: parallel and justifying.

Again, my purpose here is not to agree or disagree with Marquié on her analysis of Buffard’s work. Rather, I am pointing out her effort to engage in a theoretical discussion with the work’s multiple strata of discursive production.

Being inherent to the production of art, theoretical, interpretative, critical discourse certainly makes for a more complex network of ideologies, concepts, problems, and theories. But this does not mean that the production of discourse as part of an artwork precludes the study of the material phenomena of performance and dance. It only invites actors in the field to develop more rigorous theoretical platforms that will be capable of a systemic approach; or, in other words, that would be capable of a discursive production arising from, and relevant to, the different points in the system.

The problem arising from Marquié’s analysis concerns not only the use of theory as a justification, which is a well known issue; it also hints at the fact that the import of cultural theory, performance studies, gender studies, postcolonial theory, etc. seriously lacks problematisation, whereby problematising their effects would lead to transformative practices on the one hand and to pertinent theorisations on the other. It is in examples like this that we see the overlapping of processes of self-referentiality, where dance works bring their history and the genealogy of dance into critical reflection, and the processes where dance looks at itself as a cultural, social, and political phenomenon, in order to open up to the issues that are outside of its sole aesthetic domain.

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et résistances, ed. Paule Guiffredi (Paris: L’Harmattan, 2009).

²³ Héléne Marquié, ‘Dispositif trouble: When what is said is not what is shown’, in *Dance Discourses: Keywords in Dance Research* (London and New York: Routledge, 2007), 236–250.

²⁴ Contributions by Laurence Louppe and Sabine Prokhoris.

In lieu of a Conclusion

At this point, it seems counterproductive to attempt a conclusive categorisation of discursive practices and productions that I discuss here. However, one may attempt a schematic analogy with the existing classification of the discourses (theory) relative to the performing arts, albeit with one important caveat: the comparison is purely conjectural, because, strictly speaking, we cannot treat the ‘performing arts’ and ‘dance’ as distinct areas. Nor is dance simply a sub-category of the performing arts. These categories are deregulated and reregulated depending on the context (the academia, the arts market, education etc.) and the agenda or agency of the regulators.

I am referring to the analytic categorisation of 1) the theory of the performing arts, 2) theory from the performing arts, and 3) theory in the performing arts.²⁵ I will restrict my analogy to the first two categories. Translating the third one, ‘theory in the performing arts’, onto the dance-world cartography that I’m mapping out here would entail an extensive perusal and pose an entirely different set of questions. Theory in the performing arts refers to the ways in which an artwork founds and incorporates different theoretical postulates. In my view, one cannot converse strictly within the choreographic tradition without 1) asking what choreography and dance are and 2) without theorising the relation between language and the dancing body.

If we compare ‘theory of the performing arts’ to dance theory (or the theory of dance) as discussed above, we see that the latter resembles the former only in its ‘non-disciplined’ aspects. In other words, as it is not (yet) an established, recognised academic field, dance theory has a similar status to those aspects of the theories of the performing arts that, instead of pretending to constitute a consistent theoretical framework, make an eclectic use of different insights from other existing theoretical platforms.²⁶ In France, dance theory is in a particularly marginal position and as such neither can nor aspires to reach the status of a dominant overarching discourse or a meta-discourse on artistic theories and practices. Instead, dance theory develops theories of dance phenomena, dance history, choreographic work and processes, in close relation to the professional field and its needs, and participates in creating conditions for a theory of dance in the academia as much as in the artistic field.

In many ways, the academic discourse that would be hierarchically expected to produce a ‘theory of’ is not radically distinguishable from ‘the theory from the performing arts’ (dance) that can emerge from the field, inasmuch as it can be described as a ‘theory that is closely connected with artistic production and directly engaged in its problematics, as well as being acclimatised to the surrounding discourses in the arts, culture, and society’.²⁷

In return, what emerges from the field, i.e. the theorising produced by the artists (choreographers, dancers, etc.), does not systematically correspond to a production of theory or theoretical practice understood as an inter-textual, self-reflexive institutionalised practice. As suggested above, since the 1990s the French dance milieu has picked up on the questions, problematics, and practices laid out by the American Post-modern dance of the 1960s and ’70s, which may be described in short as fully achieving the autonomy of ‘dance’ and establishing the possibility of an artist’s discourse in dance.

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²⁵ This categorisation is proposed by Ana Vujanović in Ana Vujanović and Aleksandra Jovičević, *Uvod u studije performansa* (Belgrade: Fabrika knjiga, 2007), 48–50.

²⁶ See *Uvod u studije performansa*, 50.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 52.

Since such a moment never happened in the history of French dance, the project has been carried out since the 1990s, often benefiting from the heritage of American post-modern dance, whilst simultaneously being transposed into contemporary forms of theoretical practice, i.e. borrowing, transforming, appropriating different disciplinary and discursive fields, their procedures and concepts.

But since the world of dance still suffers from a meagre, historically under-determined and -contextualised discursive and theoretical production, this analogy does not offer a conclusive picture.

Certain activities in the field may be closer to what Josette Féral calls ‘production theory’: theories that develop the means and tools for art-making, being a specific kind of theorising practice. However, here, too, there are no pure categories or examples that would correspond to those found in theatre (Grotowsky, Stanislavski, Brecht, etc.). Glimpses of ‘production theory’ can be found morphed in other kinds of artist’s discourse and scattered in short texts, interviews, programme notes, and so on.

Finally, it is worth noting that following the high activity of the late 1990s and early 2000s, in the wake of the institutional adjustment and stabilisation of new practices and discourses, the presence of an artist’s discourse has again somewhat diminished, since we seem to be having difficulties in escaping opportunistic modes of doing in response to market pressures.

If there is one overarching question regarding the different contexts participating in the production of discourses in French contemporary dance, it is whether there are conditions for a *doxa* to be identified. Dance and choreographic practices always seem to slip through the nets of the paradigms laid out by the historiography of art and major aesthetic theories, because it is rarely a perfect fit with the way aesthetics, poetics, and technique are usually theorised. At the same time, the tidal wave of ‘theory’ that has engulfed the dance world over the past twenty years or so, seems to allow for the constitution of a *doxa*. But I would qualify the *doxa* only as a tendency, or a horizon. This tendency might seem a threat if we consider the ‘dance theory’ project incomplete, as a not-yet that is already something else; but a tendency towards a *doxa*, or a not-yet *doxa* of the dance world, with all its inherent contradictions, theoretical anachronisms, and challenges coming from the practice, might be precisely that which will enable new and increasingly rigorous discourses to emerge.

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The Press

I will focus on the three publications that I consider important either for the visibility they have or the type of reflections they propose.

The *Mouvement* is probably the most widely known French performing arts magazine. Founded in 1993 by Jean-Marc Adolphe as a periodical solely dedicated to choreography, in 1998 the *Mouvement* was rededicated as a quarterly magazine for contemporary performing arts sold at newsstands. From that moment on, with the subtitle ‘Indisciplinaire des arts vivants’, its editorial policy has had a pronounced political agenda,

understood both as inherent to artistic practices and as the editorship's public duty. With its critical and sometimes alarmist analysis of culture and politics in France and Europe the magazine has never shied away from its ideological positioning and political engagement.

The *Mouvement* was and still is a companion to the shifts that are redefining the understanding and functioning of the choreographic field, offering writers (critics, scholars, artists) regular support in writing concerned with redefining the conceptual, aesthetic, and institutional frameworks of their practices. Two examples that readily come to mind are Christophe Wavelet's oft-cited 'Ici et maintenant. Coalitions temporaires', which discusses the new collaborative dynamics of work, and Gérard Mayen's spirited argument against Frétard's 'non-danse' in 'La non-danse danse encore'.

As the largest publication dedicated to the performing arts, covering current production and events and regularly publishing reviews of recent works, the *Mouvement* is also in a position to regulate the 'scene' by lending visibility and legitimacy to the artists featured on its pages. If some ten years ago it had to share this role with the *Art Press* with regards to the avant-garde performing-arts scene and with *Les Saisons de la danse* concerning the more conventional dance scene, today the *Mouvement* has a monopoly over both domains.

The *Repères* is a quarterly published by the Val de Marne Biennial. It is a good example of one's willingness to think dance with tools of its own. An important segment of the journal is dedicated to the words of the practitioners of dance, particularly to those who typically remain in the shadows: the dancers, the teachers, and the researchers of movement. Every issue has a special topic, but without going into a discursive analysis of it or a theoretical discussion of the given keywords. In a certain sense, the journal is multidisciplinary, since it invites contributions by authors from different fields, such as sociology, philosophy, and history, who, however, quite clearly stay within the bounds of their respective disciplines.

This editorial policy corresponds to the idea that dance studies are still a discipline in the making, so the journal maintains a clear contrast between those different methodologies and discourses. The journal's issues on the body image or body norms in contemporary dance are examples of such an approach.

The *Repères* constitutes a valuable archive of dancers' interviews and testimonies, from which emerges a pool of knowledge of a practice articulated by those who haven't necessarily made their authorial mark in the history of dance. These contributions are close to the aforementioned 'production theory' inasmuch as they elaborate on the technical (broadly speaking) aspects of dance work. Historical studies, such as the one on the reception of Cunningham's aesthetics and body technique in France, are also interesting insofar as they divert from the usual historiographic and topographic discourse in dance.

The recently discontinued *Quant à la danse* was published by the Mas de la Danse, an association founded and directed by Françoise and Dominique Dupuy. It was probably the only journal that was dedicated to philosophical writing in dance. Operating on the margins of the arts market, the journal was invested in a slow and long-term research dynamic, with a permanent group of six contributors who mostly published essays related to their academic and extra-academic research. The journal maintained a pluralistic theoretical platform, which ranged from contemporary phenomenology and philosophy of the mind, via an interdisciplinary analysis of movement, the cultural history of dance, ontological studies of the work concept in dance, to philosophical meditations with dance as their starting point and not an object of analysis.

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Dance and Philosophy

The last five years have seen philosophy take a considerable interest in dance. Under Véronique Fabbri's directorship, the Collège international de philosophie developed between 2001 and 2007 a five-year programme on philosophy and dance, in collaboration with Claire Rousier and the Centre national de la danse. Each semester was organised around a theme, often through readings cross-referenced from contemporary dance and philosophy, such as, *Dance and Cinema* (after Deleuze), *Dance and the Unconscious* (after Freud and Lacan), *Rudolph Laban and Translation*, *Dance and Music* (after Nietzsche), and so on. Each block featured a series of lectures given by guest speakers. The entire programme is available in the audio archive of the CND.

Véronique Fabbri remains one of the most active authors who problematise dance through philosophy and philosophy through dance. In her book *Danse et philosophie: une pensée en construction* she theorises dance as a field of thought production, or, more precisely, conceives of dance and philosophy as two practices that are based on the work of construction, comparable to an architectural process of a constant readjusting of its own materials as a condition to produce new meanings and significations. The book also offers a very interesting reading of Deleuze's concepts of image, sense, and temporality, whereby Fabbri produces not only a Deleuzian reading of dance, after the philosopher's own meagre contribution to the problem, but opens a possibility to historicise Deleuze's somewhat under-contextualised concepts, mainly through a cross-reading of Walter Benjamin. It is an important study, addressed, however, primarily to the philosophical community, where it indeed raises the stakes concerning both aesthetics and epistemology.

Fabbri has also edited an issue of the *Rue Descartes* philosophical journal dedicated to contemporary dance and recently published a study on Paul Valéry.

Frédéric Pouillaude's *Le Désœuvrement chorégraphique* is a study of the work-concept's (*œuvre*) status in choreography, or, in his words, the incapacity of philosophy to consider choreographic art under the common regime of the *œuvre*. It is a rigorous historical and theoretical study of the status of dance and the work-concept in general, as well as of performance (spectacle), transmission, writing, social and cultural conditions of art. The book's impressive scope incorporates analyses of systematic philosophical aesthetics such as Hegel's, 'marginal' philosophers that did write on dance (Strauss, Valéry), historical dance treaties (such as Noverre's), notational systems, as well as contemporary analytic theories of art (e.g. Goodman), and finally, through a series of original proposals, a deconstruction of the ideas of the impossibility of *œuvre* in dance and of its absence and disappearance. Pouillaude makes a number of new insights into the status of contemporary dance.

I will also mention several collective editions that more or less directly theorise contemporary dance:

La Part de l'Œil is a Belgian philosophical review that has recently published an issue dedicated to dance, with contributions by a number of by-and-large French philosophers, such as F. Pouillaude, V. Fabbri, Barbara Formis, Paule Gioffredi, and Georges Didi Hubermann.

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Approche philosophique du geste dansé, edited by Catherine Kintzler and Anne Boissière, gathered six philosophers and three choreographers on the question of the possibility of dance as the aesthetic paradigm of the twentieth century, a paradigm that would demand, with its various forms ranging from improvisation to performance, a re-thinking of the notion of art.

Ceste à l'œuvre, edited by Barbara Formis, gathered an interdisciplinary group of authors with backgrounds in philosophy, the visual arts, and dance, around the problematics of different 'gestural' activities in art and philosophy and their status in relation to the activity of work *qua* œuvre and *qua* faire (doing).

À la rencontre de la danse contemporaine: porosités et résistances, edited by Paule Gioffredi and based on a seminar held in 2007 at Paris 10, invited philosophers and artists to re-problematise the identification of artworks, practices, and processes as 'dance'.

Programmers, Curators

The discourse of programmers and curators is something that is rarely accessible to the public, including the audience and the public debates with the artists. In the 1990s, the Val de Marne Biennial made a significant effort to publish the reactions of the curators who participated in the *Plateaux* event.²⁸ The published reactions make it clear that the programmers shared the artists' desire to carry out structural as well as programming changes.²⁹ Hence most of the talks were directed towards the existing public institutions and their traditional hierarchies and criteria. Surprisingly, very little attention was given to the international aspect of programming.

Ten years later I had an opportunity to participate in the same event and witness that commonplace discourses often repeat themselves. In my view, a bigger problem still is that in recent years, the politics of programming have often been left undisclosed to the public, wrapped up in talks of affinity, friendship, and fidelity to everyone's 'first loves', and everybody's dedication to discovering young talents, often treated in slightly patronising ways.

Institutions

The Centre national de la danse (CND) merits a full-length study of its own for the sheer scope of its activities and the impact it has made through its support for, and production of, artistic and academic research, editorial activities, archiving, organising conferences and other encounters. The CND's role is somewhat a synthesising one, because it is a rare institution that strives to put different schools of thought in conversation. Its editorial activities bring together thinkers from the Anglo-American and French schools, as well as theorists and critics active in Germany and Belgium. Its publications comprise studies in anthropological, social, cultural, aesthetic, and other aspects of dance practice, dance history and education, monographs, writings by artists, and conference reports and proceedings from gatherings held at the CND.

Artists

Writings by artists are still rather rare and most commonly come in the form of interviews.³⁰ The few exceptions include Boris Charmatz's book *Entretien*, co-authored with Isabelle Launay, as well as his recently published *Je suis une école*, an account of *Bocal*, his 2003–2004 experimental project. Jérôme Bel's

Catalogue raisonné (released in video and print by the *Journal des laboratoires – Les Laboratoires d'Aubervilliers*) is another example, exhibiting a somewhat patrimonial quality in its covering of Bel's entire work, piece by piece, through interviews and talks with his collaborators (theorists, performers, authors) and Bel's own presentations.

The writings of Dominique Dupuy are perhaps less well-known outside of France; although somewhat peripheral with regards to the arts market in its current state, they are precious documents of a lifelong research in movement and the body. Co-written with Françoise Dupuy, *Une Danse à l'œuvre* appeared in 2002. More recently, Dupuy published *Danse contemporaine, pratique et théorie: Marsyas écrits pour la danse* (Édition Images en Manœuvres, 2008). Written in collaboration with Laurence Louppe and Daniel Dobbels, it is a reviewed re-publication of the entire corpus of texts published between 1991 and 1995 in the journal *Marsyas*.

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²⁸ *Les Plateaux* is a platform for professionals, where emerging choreographers are given a chance to showcase their work to curators over a period of three days. It was first organised in 1993.

²⁹ See *Adage*, No. 9 (September, 1995).

³⁰ In the early 2000s, alongside the *Mouvement*, the *Art Press* was an important window, with regular contributions by authors such as

Laurence Louppe, Laurent Goumarre, Yvane Chapuis and their interviews with contemporary choreographers. Nowadays, the *Mouvement* figures as the only regular platform for this kind of discourse.

Recently, I have witness to quite a few seminars, workshops and all sorts of meetings on ‘dance dramaturgy’ recently. Why the topic draws so much curatorial attention today, however, has less to do with an entirely new than with a more recently accredited one, and perhaps even with profession whose role in the creation of dance hasn’t been sufficiently analysed before. Most of these occasions have forced the question ‘what is dance dramaturgy?’ and my knee-jerk reflex is always to deviate from the essentialist ‘what’ to a plurality of questions.

By whom, forwhom and who with? Where and when? How, in which case and how much? Multiplying questions makes dance-dramaturgy a minor – of a minority (*minoritaire*) – and, hence, a plural affair. Studying many cases one by one, we would discover how the work of dramaturgy reinvents itself ever differently, whenever it is truly a matter of a new creation as opposed to repeating a ‘success-formula’. The temptation of unfolding a great number of dramaturgies hides the danger of arbitrary relativisation – everything and nothing is or can be (considered) dramaturgy – and one loses a position to defend. Therefore, I’ll promptly set out my position and task here: I will contest dance dramaturgy in a specific condition of project-based freelance work – something we used to refer to as ‘independent’. If there should be a dramaturg, she shouldn’t be a staff member of a company or of a repertoire theater – someone who occupies a position of the know-how, craft, or *métier* dramaturg. The dramaturg’s appearance in contemporary dance from 2000 on is all the more curious for the fact that choreographers themselves have never been more articulate and self-reflexive about their working methods and concepts. So, why a dramaturg then? My assumption is that we can begin to talk about dance dramaturgy, and try to make this notion thicker, only when we accept that it isn’t a necessity, that a dance dramaturg isn’t necessary. Rather than establish a normative definition here, I would like to explore the functions, roles and activities of dramaturgy in experiment, how the dramaturg becomes a constitutive supplement in a method of experimental creation – a co-creator of a problem.

But before that, I would like to share my confusion about the ambiguous spelling of this word, which in the international business of dramaturgy appears most often in English: ‘dramaturg’, or ‘dramaturge’? The additional ‘e’ at the end appears as the French feminine ending – to be taken, with a smile, as a playful warning against the feminisation of work. Gendering the profession doesn’t have to reveal a woman-dramaturge sitting next to a man-choreographer – feminisation, according to Toni Negri and Michael Hardt,¹ presupposes a transformation of labour from manufacturing objects to producing services. In order to clear the ground of norm and necessity, let me unsettle a few assumptions about the services that the dance-dramaturg is meant to provide.

1. A dance-dramaturg has the linguistic skills that place her on the reflexive pole of the tedious mind-body split. This assumption entails a binary division of labor by faculties: choreographers are the mute doers, and dramaturgs the bodiless thinkers and writers. I will show how the boundaries of these faculties are blurred and constantly shifting.

2. Dance-dramaturg observes the process from the distance of an outside perspective. She is expected to keep a critical eye against the self-indulgence or solipsism of the choreographer. But what if the choreographer’s job, as Jonathan Burrows writes, is to ‘stay close enough to what we’re doing to feel it, and at the same time use strategies to distance ourselves enough to grasp momentarily what someone else might perceive’. He goes on to affirm that choreography might be ‘something that helps you step back for a moment, enough to see what someone else might see’.² So again, the division between the doers and the observers won’t do when choreographer and the dramaturg are both exercising their outside-eye. My task will be to discern the more subtle nature of this complicity and affinity in the shared faculties of seeing and reflecting.

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¹ Negri, Antonio and Hardt, Michael, ‘Post-modernization, or The Informatization of Production’, in *Empire* (Cambridge, MA & London, UK: Harvard University Press), 280–303.

² Burrows, Jonathan, *A Choreographer’s Handbook* (London: Routledge, forthcoming), 39.

3. The previous might be argued against with the following point: the special duty of the dramaturg’s critical eye is to stand in between the choreographer and the audience, in order to mediate between them and make sure that communication work on both sides. But this turns dramaturgy into a pedagogy, where the dramaturg puts herself in the priestly or masterly position of the one who knows better, who can predict what the audience see, think, feel, like or dislike. We, makers and theorists alike, are all obsessing far too much about spectatorship, instead of wisely relaxing, as Jacques Rancière wrote in *The Emancipated Spectator*³, and trusting that spectators are more active and smart than we allow ourselves to admit. My position would be to fiercely object to the stultification of this kind – the patronising presupposition that the audience won’t understand if they aren’t properly – dramaturgically – guided. Instead of giving in to the pressure of accessibility we’re living in this neoliberal age, dramaturgs could be concerned about how the performance is made public. This is to do with more than just publicity; it is an effort to articulate, find new appropriate formats, in order to make public, indeed, the specific ideas, processes and practices – the immaterial envelope of labour and knowledge sustaining the work itself. I’m not saying that we need dramaturgs to sensiblise those hostile and ignorant spectators... it’s more a challenge to combat hermeticism – to think how to make knowledge about performance-making available – and perhaps interesting – outside of its own discipline.

4. The last hurdle to overcome is the notorious function of the dramaturg a.k.a. company psychotherapist. This dark and shameful side of dramaturgy is worth mentioning only to make crystal-clear that the moment the dramaturg is relegated to the role of a ‘caretaker’ of the moods and tensions in the work process – for instance, as a filter between the choreographer, the performers and other collaborators – she loses the power of creation, and perhaps, even joy. We dramaturgs probably recall having at least one such dark experience to forget. Now that we’ve relieved our dance-dramaturg from these traditional services, are our hands unburdened enough for another undertaking?

Dutch theatre-maker Jan Ritsema’s definition of the dramaturg as a co-thinker in the process seems un-specific. I choose to depart from this, albeit generic, view, to enquire: if the dramaturg is a sparring partner in thinking, is she then as little or as much as a collaborator? Yes, but a very special collaborator: the dramaturg is the problem’s best friend. Or more precisely, she is the choreographer’s closest friend in producing the problem: a friend in advocating every experiment, and an enemy to complacency. The dramaturg is there to make sure that the process don’t compromise in experiment. What makes her a friend is her proximity in being with and standing under (which doesn’t always equal understanding) the drama of ideas. Giorgio Agamben recently wrote: ‘calling someone “friend” is not the same as calling him “white”, “Italian”, or “hot”, since friendship is neither a property nor a quality of a subject... To recognize someone as a friend means not being able to recognize him as something’.⁴

I’m using the figure of the friend in order to do away with the instrumentality and specialisation of the role and relationship of the dramaturg and the choreographer. The kind of friendship I’m invoking here begins with ignorance – not about what the two can exchange between them or be useful for, because there already must be some shared affinity to even contemplate working together – but the ignorance about the work to be made. Thereby I’m referring to the ‘ignorance’ of Jacques Rancière’s parable *The Ignorant Schoolmaster: Five Lessons in Intellectual Emancipation*.⁵ Emancipation is the pedagogy that Rancière opposes to instruction, because it’s a situation of learning something of which both the master and the student are ignorant. Learning then rests on the assumption of intellectual equality, as well as on the existence of a third mediating term between the master and the student – represented in Rancière by the book that the master and the student read in two different languages. The dramaturg and the choreographer establish a relationship of equals

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³ Rancière, Jacques. ‘The Emancipated Spectator’, notes to the lecture held at the opening of the International Theatre Academy in Mousonturm, Frankfurt, 2004, courtesy of the author.

⁴ Giorgio Agamben, *What is an Apparatus? and Other Essays*, trans. David Kishik and Stefan Pedatella (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), 25–37.

⁵ Jacques Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster: Five Lessons in Intellectual Emancipation*, trans. Kristin Ross (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991).

similar to the relation between two ignorant people confronting the book they don't know how to read. The 'book' is the work of research, that something, which binds them by a radical form of effort that both invest into the process of defining what is at stake and how. The work is the thing, the 'book' that the choreographer and the dramaturg won't read but write together – that third link which guarantees the rule of materiality. Whatever is done, thought or felt can be shown, discussed, and confronted on the work itself with two pairs of eyes or more.

Now that we've placed the dramaturg on a par with the choreographer, we must ask: what does this work of construction they are both dedicated to have to do with producing a problem? When I say a problem, I actually mean an approach or a method which forces the work on a performance to deviate from the possible, i.e. familiar operations with: 'the theme' or what the work claims to be about, 'the language' or means of expression, signature or aesthetic preferences, process or the dynamic in which the work develops, 'the dispositive' or that which composes the spectators' attention. Listing all these categories already shows a certain stability in a pool of options, possibilities recognisable because: 'we know what works, and what doesn't'. The production of a problem doesn't begin with possibilities – they are a matter of knowledge that we account for as the limits to be pushed – but with ideas that diverge and differentiate the conditions of the new. Gilles Deleuze qualifies creation as virtual. To explain the notion of the virtual, he often cites Proust's description of his states of experience: 'real without being actual, ideal without being abstract'.⁶ The content of an idea is virtual, because it is differentiation, a differential relation between elements drawn by a problem, a question. The problem lies in the idea itself, or rather, the idea exists only in the form of questions. As questioning nowadays is a domesticated and worn out truism about almost any intellectual activity, questions whereby a problem is posed are distinguished by answers that they give rise to. So the problem is measured by the solution it merits – if this solution is an invention that lends being to something new, to something that did not exist before, or might never have happened otherwise. Stating a problem isn't about uncovering an already existing question or concern, something that was certain to emerge sooner or later. Neither is it a rhetorical question that can't be answered. On the contrary, to raise a problem implies constructing terms in which it will be stated, and conditions it will be solved in. The solution entails constructing a procedure and working situation. To orchestrate in practical terms what I coin here as the methodology of the problem I will take up the dramaturgy of the performance And then by Eszter Salamon.

The project began with the discovery of homonymy – hundreds of women all over Europe and the U.S. having what the choreographer – and eventually her namesakes as well – considered a rare and unusual name because it comes from a relatively small culture – Hungary. After *Magyar Tancóh* (2006), a lecture performance about her own becoming a dancer in Hungary, Salamon was interested to pursue further the relationship between cultural contingency and individual agency in her own biography. But after considering how arbitrary and insignificant the results of exploring the fact of having a name were, 'what's in a name?' appeared a trivial question, a pseudo-problem. Interviewing over a dozen of Eszter Salamons, the choreographer Salamon and myself were facing a myriad of stories from and about ordinary people: individual, singular, and incomparable. Our initial speculation – that this material could feed yet another solo that voids the identity of a singular by multiple subjects – proved uninteresting, it meant stating the obvious knowledge about identity construction and performative self-determination. The question shifted to challenging the concept of self-identification itself. What does it mean to meet another person whose being doesn't concern you in any particular way? Isn't it strange, and rather uncanny, to peer into another person's life when one has come across it by pure chance? What makes these women speak like everyone else, as a singular but

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⁶ Gilles Deleuze, 'The Method of Dramatization', in *Desert Islands and Other Texts, 1953–1974*, trans. Michael Taormina (Los Angeles and New York: Semiotext(e), 2004), 101.



Story-boarding media by Eszter Salamon ←

not a particular person? What makes the expression of each one seem whatever, and yet being such that it always matters? Our documentary departure gave way to fabulation, using the trigger of homonymy 'as the minimum criterion for the choice, the connection, and the confrontation of exactly those different life experiences. "What's in a name" became a matter of arbitrariness and coincidence that condition the performance, while the name "Eszter Salamon" functioned metonymically – not as a sign of the congruence of the Salamons, but exactly as a sign for individuation among singular homonyms'.⁷

A considerable part of the solution consisted in constructing a procedure which would choreograph the fabulation of singularities. And the methodology of the problem involves exactly that: an invention of constraints that will act as enabling conditions. As hiring dozens of Salamons from all over the world to perform on stage wasn't an option, we decided to ask them to re-enact their spontaneous answers, gestures and presence from the interviews. Then we filmed their 'restored behavior' (R. Schechner) in a particular studio setting, a *mise-en-cadre*, in which they moved in a space the audience sees in total, while the camera shoots the figures off center in provisional shots, simulating the gaze of the theatre viewer'.⁸ Thus the screen

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⁷ Ana Vujanović, 'The Choreography of Singularity and Difference: And then by Eszter Salamon', *Performance Research: A Journal of the Performing Arts*, Vol. 13, No. 1 (2008), 123–130.

could extend into the stage, and vice versa, blurring their boundaries. Performers – Eszter Salamon’s namesakes and their doubles as a kind of visual namesakes – circulated between the screen and the stage as in one continuous space, split between the past and the present, documentary and fiction, original statement and self-reflexive comment, non-theatrical imaginary space and bare theatre stage. It should be mentioned that apart from the assistance of a professional film-maker,⁹ the choreographer and the dramaturg were dilettantes of the medium they hijacked into the performance. Constructing such a hybrid between theatre and cinema meant questioning choreography as well – and when I say that it could have been done only by dilettantes, I’m rhetorically distinguishing a dilettante approach that contests and strives to expand its discipline and medium from an essentialist view of professional craftsmanship. Dilettantes are those who ask questions beyond the specialist truth about the medium.

Discerning dramaturgy from choreography would be difficult here, because they both mutated into a composition of movement in text, in camera shots, light simulating-cinema, montage between the screen and the stage, soundtrack, performing modes, gestures and, the least of all, dance. Composing each of those elements, and, moreover, their relations, Vujanović called a choreography of the Deleuzian ‘concept of difference which through repetition transforms the elements introduced into a process of abolishing self-identity’.¹⁰

So what does the methodology of the problem generate? It generates questions that will clear the ground and slowly eliminate the known possibilities to enable producing a qualitatively new problem. This could be likened to the unburdening of your hands, which I mentioned before. Burrows laconically calls it ‘relaxing one’s grip’,¹¹ and I would say letting go of habits that make the mind lazy and the hands routine. The problem will distinguish itself insofar as it demands constructing its own – different, singular or new, but impure and heterogeneous perhaps, even hybrid – operation. The operation is defined by the specific constraints which secure its consistency. The result is a new dispositive – not an architectural arrangement but a reconfiguration of attention, meaning that spectators will also have to experience how differently they see, think, feel, instead of leaning back into recognition. The problem will also have the consequence of problematising or unsettling views and opinions about either what’s being represented or how dance, choreography or performance are treated. Now it will be the spectators who will no longer ask themselves the essentialist question ‘what is this?’ but will receive the gift of a problem in a plural of minoritarian questions ‘who, how and when, where and in which case’ is this about, is this a performance etc.

The next series of points concerns the dramaturg in the type of dramaturgy that I conceive as the methodology of the problem. How does the dramaturg implicate herself in the production of the problem, and since she is such a close friend to it, how can her position be discerned from that of the choreographer? It’s important that the dramaturg do not enter the process because the process is in need of a dramaturg; problems can be created only out of a desire, freed from need, duty or obligation. For one’s friendship to the problem to emerge, two notions need to marry. Affinity will not just mean being close, similar, akin to, fond or understanding of something, but having this feeling move forward or toward an end – I’m here deploying the French etymology à + fin as a sense of finality. So affinity in a desiring production will provide a built-in constraint – limiting the amount of choice – and will drive the process with a ‘terminus’ that yet doesn’t entirely predetermine the process from its beginning.

If affinity is what the dramaturg and the choreographer share, what is it that they don’t share? The motivation of the choreographer, which might be personal – the place where the work affects the maker. But this place isn’t essentially the origin of the work, however often it is claimed as such. Affinity can help the choreographer abandon the personal as a source of solipsistic defence reflected in statements ‘because I think

so, I like it, it means to me personally...’ and take an external position, constitutive of the work of performance itself, social, political or conceptual, but in all cases, a self-reflected position. Affinity then grows into affiliation – connecting both the choreographer and the dramaturg to a framework of meanings larger than their individual artistic fantasies and achievements. The problem’s friends are also allies who don’t defend a personal ego or mythology of the great artist but certain views, assumptions, questions and criteria. These [views, assumptions, questions and criteria] make them partial and hence complicit – sharing the responsibility for affecting a context that is always larger than the performance itself. Again, the relationship’s personal aspect is evacuated to make room for a commitment to a certain politics, so we can never speak of a dramaturg’s loyalty to her choreographer, but only of her fidelity to a political position.

What about the dramaturg’s criticality and her critical distance, which are regarded as that which makes the dramaturg relatively autonomous in her work? Indeed, we now have to reverse the question: what is it that the dramaturg doesn’t share with the choreographer? What motivates her apart from her interest in the specific problematic of the work? To observe how thought arises in expression, and is its material act. This is quite different from the common assumption that dramaturgs come with their concepts and theories



from a shooting of
And Then,
photo by Arne
Hector, 2007
←

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⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Minze Tummenscheit, who contributed the cinematography and camerawork.

¹⁰ Vujanović, *op.cit.*

¹¹ Burrows, J. *op.cit.*, 112.

Solo, Nike, Madonna, Marina, Xavier, Jérôme, Mercedes, and, of course, Deborah Hay

Putting these names together might seem random, confusing, unnecessary. However, if we take a look at how recognisable they are, from the perspective of a contemporary dance artist, we will see that each functions with the same potency of familiarity and reception. None of them is just a name, they are all well-known, recognisable, present. Of course, I am not suggesting that everyone, or for that matter anyone, knows or should know which Jérôme I am referring to, but almost everyone who is likely to read this essay will know the Jérôme from the list above. What is that saying? Of course, it is a fact that Mercedes is a brand known to a much larger number of people, but still, inside the network of people that this essay is targeting, it is possible to state that ‘Mercedes’ says as much as ‘Jérôme’ does.

To raise the stakes, one could ask: which of those two names is the more expensive?

But it would hardly be possible to answer that question and it would entail an examination of the parameters of making a value judgment. We are not going to discuss and haggle over prices here. However, there is something to be said about the possible implications of listing the above names together. Their interconnectivity and modes of existence within their respective markets is the topic of this paper.

More precisely, the essay is an attempt to situate the concepts of the solo, dance, and authorship with respect to the ruling conditions of production and the current socio-political context, which art cannot escape. When the existing modes of production in contemporary dance and their history are taken into consideration, several questions emerge. Is solo still/even possible? How did it exist before and how does it sustain itself now, in production modes based on collaboration, at a time when the notions of stable figures are being lost, and amidst a high fluidity of artistic practices and authorships?

I will consider how the concept of the solo originated in relation to the idea of ‘genius’ as a tool for the introduction of new value systems and how this relates to the philosophy of individualism; how this practice translated into the centralisation of branding as a tool of capitalist economy, which is also evident in the contemporary economy of the art market. By putting the contemporary modes of production in relation to these tendencies on the art market, I will be considering them outside of the dichotomy that juxtaposes collaborative work with the solo. Why do we still need to affirm the singular name? Why do we need a singular figure to bring people to the theatre? Instead of answering, I will offer a possible interpretation from the perspective of the demands of the neo-liberal society, where the need to identify practices with artists’ names relates to the economy of branding, selling, and purchasing.

The solo is a form that stays present in its representation. What is behind it is coloured by rather dynamic relations of collaboration, but what stays is what we see, the final product called a solo, which was some time ago identified and defined as ‘a single body performing on stage (or in any space)’.¹

It might be hard to discuss solo dancing without reflecting on its historical background and evolution in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, when dance claimed its own territory and isolated itself from other artistic disciplines. Modern dance brought a change by giving rise to solo dance, and the shift whereby movement acquired its own worth by becoming more important than the staging. The emergence of solo dance then became strongly related to the emancipation of the individual, the discovery of the singular body and notions of freedom. The artist’s intention then became to reveal and express his/her own uniqueness and individuality.

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¹ Rebecca Schneider, ‘Solo, Solo, Solo’ in *After Criticism*, ed. Gavin Butt (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), 32.

This shift brought a change in the perception of the role of the choreographer (author), whereby the soloist and the choreographer were now becoming the same person. It is not surprising, then, that simultaneously with the modern discovery of the singular subject, a gifted individual’s self-expression became enough of a reason to act. In this sense, the solo dance as a form (or genre) has proved to be very suitable for Western philosophy and its ideology of individualism.

In order to discuss the presence of the ideology of individualism in the history of solo dance, I will point to the artistic tradition of modern European (Western) societies. According to the members of the Deschooling Classroom:

[F]rom the 18th century onwards, [the subject] was based on an intuitivist approach, derived from romanticist and expressionist theories of the genius, accounting for art as self-expression of a gifted individual’s exceptionalism. Foundations of such conception of art were addressed by Giorgio Agamben, who wrote that since the 18th, and especially throughout the 19th century, the philosophical notion of praxis transformed. [Agamben: ‘Poiesis and Praxis’, in “The Man Without Content”] Praxis came to be conceived as the ‘expression of the will’ of an individual, and art itself was increasingly being defined as practice, and less as poiesis.²

In other words, the border between poiesis and praxis becomes blurred, and the new status of practice, now altered to the ‘expression of the will’ of an individual, puts the autonomous genius, or singular subject, at the centre of modern, democratic societies.

The notion of the singular subject was increasingly empowered during the 1960s, when, due to late-capitalist commodification of art, the art object lost its ‘aura’ and the ‘aura’ shifted to the solo artist him/herself. In her essay ‘Solo, Solo, Solo’ Rebecca Schneider notes: ‘The artist stepped (or danced) into the place of the object and rescued origin, originality, and authenticity in the very unrepeatable and unapproachable nature of his precise and human gesture – his solo act’.³ Therefore, the solo begins to be perceived as a practice of ‘the self’. Once ‘the self’ is identified with a practice in the modern sense of the word, it becomes transferable and sellable, but still remains identifiable to ‘the self’ that has created it, ‘in the way that a Graham dance danced by another dancer remains a Graham dance’.⁴ Thus, the objectified self becomes equivalent to a trademark. Choosing to inscribe our dancing bodies with Graham or Cunningham by training under their technical programmes might be equivalent to inscribing our images with brands such as Nike or Reebok.

If we assume the idea that capitalism absorbs everything, that everything would certainly include the arts. This is creating conditions in which even artists themselves recognise that it is the context that needs to ‘single out’ one person as the genius. Further down in her essay, Schneider refers to Trio A and Yvonne Rainer, who was singled out even though she herself was questioning the status of the solo; she was aware ‘that she was not so much being singled out because of something she did, but because she “existed in a world that felt the need to single out one person out of a group of peers as a ‘star’ or a ‘genius’”’.⁵

Even when the protagonists themselves challenge the author-centric conditions of production in their acts, those conditions hardly ever change. For instance, even though Pina Bausch herself recognises dancers as producers of knowledge, thereby ‘changing [the] entire epistemological stability of dance’,⁶ her genius singularity is still emphasised, acknowledged, and inscribed in history – despite herself.

The capitalist countries pursued this ideological-theoretical pattern. Capitalism manipulates art while conceiving its discursive realms, setting the price for an artwork. The author’s genius is observed as a market value. It is, therefore, sufficient to be recognized as a gifted individual; as a genius whose talent translates into specific units that may be expressed in numeric, that is, monetary terms – as an equivalent of all other values.⁷

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Dragana Bulut

² Members of the Deschooling Classroom include (in alphabetical order): Milena Bogavac, Dragana Bulut, Bojan Đorđev, Anđela Ćirović, Siniša Ilić, Milan Marković, Katarina Popović and Ljiljana Tasić; ‘Contextual Art in the Countries of Eastern Europe: Approaches, Diagnoses and Treatments of the Problems’ <<http://www.antihargon.thh-generator.net/2010/06/09/contextualart/>>

³ Schneider, ‘Solo, Solo, Solo’, 33.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid., 36.

⁶ Andre Lepecki, ‘Dance without Distance’, Ballet International/ Tanz Aktell (2001). <http://www.sarma.be/text.asp?id=860>

⁷ Deschooling Classroom Members, ‘Contextual Art in the Countries of Eastern Europe’, 1.

By taking their places on the market, solo artists become a market value whose products are usually highly economical. Easily transported and practical, they are always more affordable to book than others. This might explain the large numbers of solo dance festivals and solo works. In her essay 'Going Solo', Sally Banes provides a very simple explanation: 'it is wrong to think that solos are purely economic solutions. But of course, ultimately, everything is an economic response. You don't live in a huge house, because you can't afford it'.⁸ While we cannot claim that those are the only reasons for the presence and existence of solo works, living in a global market where making profit is the purpose of every product makes this particular kind of product much more desirable.

Despite its insistence on individuality, it would be misleading not to think of the solo form as always-already relational. Every solo, though reliant on individualism, exists in a social context. The questioning of the autonomous genius and the crisis of the singular subject puts the context at the centre of attention. According to Roland Barthes, 'we know now that a text is not a line of words releasing a single "theological" meaning (the "message" of the Author-God) but a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash. The text is a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture'.⁹ The resulting shift from the autonomous genius to a 'scriptor', who is a socially and historically contingent subject, brings 'the death of the author' as we knew before, and in this case it could mean the birth of the awareness of the importance of the context. Even in the close, direct context of the solo performance situation (although, as Cumming would say, 'there's something about solo choreography process that's centering'),¹⁰ the solo in fact always happens in relation to the audience, in relation to what is outside of its centre, outside of its producer. Ric Allsopp also addresses the issue of the relationality of the solo, by referring to Brandstetter who says: 'A solo does not exist for itself alone. Not even when authorship and performance are embodied in one person. A soloist exists through others and for others'.¹¹

Therefore, its relationship to its other, to the 'non-self' that remains outside of 'the self', is something that constitutes the self and that the self itself produces. It is in a constant state of flux, not a stable self, not a knowable subject, but always in becoming with respect to its social-historical context. The singularity of a product is supported by rather complex relations between the subject and the subject's close performative context (the audience), the general context of production, and social, historical, and political contexts.

In a performance production context where all stable figures are being lost, as well as professional divisions blurred, does the role of the solo artist sustain her/his autonomy and, if yes, how? The solo artist's role grows ever more fluid and in conditions where as Jeroen Peeters writes, 'choreographers develop theoretical propositions, theoreticians are expected to perform their answer, a critic is curator of the festival in which there is room for this dialogue, and a dramaturge writes a review of all of this in the newspaper',¹² the solo artist becomes a part of this fluid network of production. The status of solo dancing as an emancipator of dance from its indebtedness to the other arts is changing under the new conditions, because the separation of dance is not an issue anymore; rather, the focus is on multidisciplinary and fluidity. According to Lepecki, the barriers between the disciplines have collapsed and 'the ideal of aesthetic autonomy'¹³ is challenged. The question emerges whether this challenge includes the autonomy of the solo form and, if yes, in what way, taking into account the fact that its modes of production are increasingly relying on interconnectivity and collaborative processes. One could question if the solo still deserves its name.

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⁸ Sally Banes, 'Going Solo', in *Writing Dancing in the Age of Postmodernism* (Hanover, NH: Wesleyan University Press, 1994), 348–52.

⁹ Roland Barthes, 'The Death of The Author', in *Image, Music, Text* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), 3.

¹⁰ Banes, 'Going Solo', 348–52.

¹¹ Gabriele Brandstetter, 'History of Solo Dance' (unpublished lectures).

¹² Jeroen Peeters, 'Dance Critic: Profession, Role, Personage, Performance?', *Stationen* (2004), <http://www.sarma.be/text.asp?id=1263>

¹³ Lepecki, 'Dance without Distance', <http://www.sarma.be/text.asp?id=860>

In that sense, a paradigm shift in production modes results in an increased presence of collaborative works, seemingly contrary to the singularity of the solo form. As Bojana Kunst writes:

Collaboration is a key issue, not only in politics, but also in contemporary economy and culture. Collaboration places people into the present (time); it is only through collaboration, on the constantly changing map of places, that people can actually become visible in the present time, where they constantly add to the contemporary flow of money, capital and signs.¹⁴

Interaction, exchange, networking, speed, mobility have all become attributes of the dance labour force. As living art objects, artists are circling through collaborations, always carrying their capital with them, in themselves. Their capital is being invested into collaborations and networks, which must recognise their own commonality and interdependency. These contemporary cultural capitalists have become their own capital and are navigating their ways by networking, in a constant state of producing and promoting themselves. Marina Gržinić claims that the theory of private property as a constitutive element of capitalism is connected to the affirmation of an individual and his/her rights to property: 'One of the consequences is that in neoliberal capitalism, fundamentally the individual is an owner of himself, or more precisely of his or her conscience'.¹⁵

Following that line of thought, I would stress the rather dynamic relation between the solo and collaboration, which do not exclude or contradict each other but coexist in a complex relationship. Rather than rely on some romantic notions, 'collaboration is driven by complex realities', as Florian Schneider writes.¹⁶ In his essay 'Collaboration' Schneider points out that even though it implies mutuality, collaboration is made of individuals who 'rely on one another the more they chase their own interests, their mutual dependence arising through the pursuit of their own agendas. Exchange then becomes an effect of necessity rather than one of mutuality, identification or desire'.¹⁷ In other words, while it may seem contradictory, the fact remains that even in collaborative creating it is individuality and the empowerment of its capital that are supported. Here we may conclude that the individual still stays at the centre and that his/her interconnectivity becomes not much more than an economic value by which his/her subjectivity is empowered. According to Paolo Virno, 'Post-Fordism features a form of subjective collaboration',¹⁸ which suggests that such a subject is still valid. In the contemporary production of art, subjectivity is still at the centre, as a vehicle for capitalist exploitation. It is constructed in a neoliberal framework, where collaboration, based on the benefit of a singular unit, still leaves room for the presence of the solo form. In other words, we could say that under those conditions 'one' is always solo.

Art and culture are constitutive to the functioning of late capitalism; through its practice of aestheticizing excess, art is the most developed form of capitalist commodity—a total brand'.¹⁹ Following Gržinić's assessment, the contemporary artist is especially well-suited to this type of commodification. Thinking along the same lines, Goran Sergej Pristaš writes that the contemporary artist is in a mimetic relation to capital, 'he is like a capitalist, especially the conceptual artist – he is the appropriator, he selects, combines, transports, resituates'.²⁰ The contemporary artist's mimetic relation to capital could be a result of his/her inseparability from his/her social-political context and the conditions of capitalist neoliberal society, where artists are inevitably engaged in developing and promoting themselves as recognisable products.

Where does the solo artist stand when it comes to branding? Whether we like it or not, branding does operate in the fields of art and cultural industry. We could say that branding comes more from the arts

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¹⁴ Bojana Kunst, 'Prognosis on Collaboration', *Prognosen über Bewegungen*, eds. Gabriele Brandstetter, Kai van Eikels, Sybille Peters (Berlin: B-Books, 2009), 5.

¹⁵ Marina Gržinić, 'Subjectivization, Biopolitics and Necropolitics: Where Do We Stand?', *Reartikulacija*, No. 6 (2009), http://www.reartikulacija.org/?p=596&langswitch_lang=sl

¹⁶ Florian Schneider, 'Collaboration', 3, <http://summit.bein.org/node/190>

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Paolo Virno, 'The Dismasure of Art. An Interview with Paolo Virno', *Open*, No. 17: 'A Precarious Existence: Vulnerability in the Public Domain', <http://www.skorni/article-4178-en.html>

¹⁹ Gržinić, 'Subjectivization, Biopolitics and Necropolitics'

institutions, but the artist him/herself is inevitably a part of it. The artist as an object becomes a product in this economy. Relying on Santiago López Petit, Marina Gržinić contends that 'conscience is constituted as a brand, and the brands – that are not so much material as immaterial and subjective – compete among them'.²¹ She argues that the self 'is not in relation to itself, because there exists no interiority. The interiority is exteriority: it is my brand'.²² Individuals are present as part of a global mobilisation and solo artists are especially well-placed to take part in this economy. As was already mentioned above, once an artistic subject is identified as a result of practice (as an expression of an individual will), it becomes transferrable and sellable, but still identifiable to 'the self' that has practised it. Thus the conditions are ready for the creation of cultural icons or iconic brands. In her master's thesis Zhanna Vilpponen argues that 'Art sales are often enhanced by the image of the artist as a whole. Customers aren't buying a piece; they are buying a piece of an artist'.²³ Since artistic practice has become identified with the artist, it becomes a part of the individual artist's personality-brand. 'The Brand as a person perspective provides the brand with human characteristics. The brand identity can then be described like an individual personality'.²⁴ Whether solo artists are aware of it or not, whether they willingly participate in it or not, branding is a part of cultural industry and solo artists are very suitable to it due to their relations to authenticity. James G. Gilmore and B. Joseph Pine point to the value of authenticity on the market and in the economy of experience, where 'authenticity has become the primary concern in customers purchasing decisions'.²⁵ One might say that on the arts market, the solo has kept its attribute of authenticity.

It might be that the changes in the understanding of the figure of the author and the changes in the conditions of artistic production haven't affected the neoliberal capitalist society's need to single out individual artists and that the art market still relies on the idea of the singularity of the artist-genius. Despite the disciplinary, conceptual, and symbolic separation of art from business, in today's conditions, when 'Life becomes the true market',²⁶ we are all taking part in it. We legitimise ourselves by relating to brand names as signifiers of value. By associating ourselves with brand names, whether in our CVs or by purchasing workshops at dance festivals, we acquiesce to pay for our validation, by supporting the economy of the stars. No matter how good they are, we purchase and commodify our experiences, in exchange for validation. It is therefore hard to conclude anything other than what we already know, that we, the solo, dance, authorship, Nike, Madonna, Marina, Jérôme, all operate inside social, political, economic, historical constructions 'where emotions and imagination are as real as labour and capital, creating and connecting are as real as manufacture and sales, and beauty and meaning are as real as fast and cheap'.²⁷ Rather than concluding with such a cynical echo, I would like to share my desire, possibly utopian, for a new value system, which overcomes commodification and offers more room for emancipation.

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²⁰ Goran Sergej Pristaš, 'Why do We Produce Ourselves, Promote Ourselves, Distribute Ourselves, Explain Ourselves and Why Are We "as well" Around?', *Maska*, Nos. 3–4 (92–93) (2005)

²¹ Gržinić, 'Subjectivization, Biopolitics and Necropolitics', http://www.reartihulacija.org/?p=59&langswitch_lang=sl

²² Ibid.

²³ Zhanna Vilpponen, 'Branding Artist and Arts organizations', master's thesis submitted at the Sibelius Academy, Helsinki in 2009, 15 <<http://ethesis.siba.fi/ethesis/files/nbnfi200905081605.pdf>>

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ James G. Gilmore and B. Joseph Pine, *Arts and Business, Beyond Experience: Culture, Consumer and Brand*, <http://www.artsandbusiness.org.uk/Media%20Library/Files/Research/aandb_be_usingarttorenderauthenticity.pdf>.

²⁶ Gržinić, 'Subjectivization, Biopolitics and Necropolitics'.

²⁷ Gilmore and Pine, *Arts and Business, Beyond Experience*

The future is not related to the past as an actualisation of its becoming, but finds itself in a rupture between something which has not happened and something which has yet to happen. This is a temporal rupture which is intrinsic to the mode of potentiality, to the revealing of the ways that life comes into being. When reflecting upon potentiality we have to be aware of the paradox that for Giorgio Agamben is an inevitable paradox of this peculiar philosophical concept. One can namely become aware of his or her potential to exist, create and spring forth from oneself only when this potential is not realised. Potentiality is then a temporal constellation, which is divided from the action itself, it is not translated into the action at all. Potentiality can come to light only when not being actualised: when the potential of a thing or a person is not realised. A certain failure, an impossibility of actualisation, is then an intrinsic part of potentiality. At the same time, only when the potential is not being actualised, one is opened to one's being in time, to one's eventness. In this openness one experiences the plurality of ways that life comes into being and is exposed to the plurality of possible actions.¹

To clarify this paradox inherent to that temporal concept, I will help myself with three different examples.

I

The first example comes from my private recollection of a short discussion, which I coincidentally heard some years ago. It happened in a Manhattan subway, at rush hour, when I was squeezed among many 'business professionals' going home from work. Listening to people talking and chatting, I overheard the following discussion between two young employees. It looked as if they were talking about an unsuccessful candidature for a new job, and the one who applied for the position said in one moment to the other: 'It seems that they just didn't realise "my potential." His colleague answered him: 'Don't be sad, you just have to show it more, one day for sure they will.' If the young businessman were to use the word 'potential' in Agamben's sense of potentiality, the employers would never realise it. Nevertheless that doesn't mean that the guy would stay forever undiscovered and would not get the job, either. What they were talking about was not potentiality, but possibility, something which is offered for exchange, a process of transaction. The potential cannot be disclosed in the process of transaction, it is not the goal to be discovered, shown, recognised and actualised. Otherwise our existence would be only understood as a permanent and ruthless actualisation of our present, where the form, temporality itself (the way that the human becomes a human) would be totally conditioned by its finalisation.

II

I would like to present now a second example, which can help us to understand potentiality as a concept which is deeply related to the human dimension of temporality – how the human comes into being. The second example comes from an old book, written by Al-Jahiz, an Iraqi scholar from the 8th century. In the tradition of great Arabian philosophers, he wrote a monumental tome in which he wanted to explain the essence of all living beings called *Book of Living Things*. Besides being a philosopher, Al-Jahiz was a great admirer of ani-

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¹ Giorgio Agamben, *The Coming Community* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993).

* First published in *It Takes Place When It Doesn't*, eds. Martina Hochmuth, Krassimira Kruschkova, Georg Schöllhamer (Berlin: Revoolver, 2009).

mals and he dedicated many chapters of his book to the comparison between animals and humans. Animals are glorified as beings of perfection, with perfect physical capabilities. In relation to other animals, human animals can become highly educated, they can train, they can discipline themselves, they can achieve many skills, but irrespective of their discipline and despite all the education – for Al-Jahiz – humans are still unable to accomplish spontaneously what other animals achieve naturally. For Al-Jahiz and for his interpreter, philosopher Daniel Heller-Roazen, in whose text I found the reference of this old treatise, humans therefore remain the lesser animal among living beings. In his treatise, doing less is brought into the discussion with the intention that it would trigger us to think about it, so that doing less would mean a distinctive capability of a human, the essence of a human being in the relation to the animal. Or as Al-Jahiz said, 'man is made in such a way that when he accomplishes an act that is difficult to carry out, he has the ability to do one that is less difficult'.²

Heller-Roazen explains that capability to do less as the description of the essence of a human being, which lies in this possibility of reduction. However small or great, the human being owes its consistency to its capacity to be less than itself. 'To grasp a human action as such, one must look to the shadows of the more minor acts it inevitably projects around it: to those unaccomplished acts that are less than it and that could always have been performed in its stead, or, alternately, to those unaccomplished acts with respect to which it itself is less than it could have been.'³ That not only means that every actualisation of the human being is always in relation to other unaccomplished acts, or that every actualisation of the human being is related to the potentiality of unaccomplished acts. It namely also means that actualisation of a human being is always less than it could have been. There is always a kind of rupture in the ways that the human being becomes oneself. Actuality namely always surpasses itself; there are always some moves left that weren't realised. The conclusion, then, could be that, wherever we have actuality, we also find potentiality. The example of Al-Jahiz should not be read as a celebration of human failure or an affirmation of one's freedom of doing less; at the same time this is also not a confirmation of one's idleness. If this were so, then human failure would be actualised as a perfect act for itself and the relation between humans and animals would be reduced to a simple difference between the perfection of nature and human freedom to fail. The consequence of Al-Jahiz's definition of the human being is more profound. Since there is no human act that is not at the same time less than it could be, we cannot understand any work of man on its own, but every work of man can be followed in relation to the other unaccomplished acts. The consequence that comes out of being a lesser animal is connected to the temporal dimension of a human being, where human acts are always intertwined with other human acts, operating in the mode of what has not happened yet. Doing less opens the human being to one's historical being, to the time itself, where actuality is always surpassed, never fulfilled. However the time of the human being is the time of ruins and fragments, something that has not yet been accomplished. The essence of the human act is deeply entangled with something that did not happen, has not been accomplished and completed, something that has not been fully actualised. In this sense, 'doing less' is another description of the paradox of potentiality, which can come to light only when potential has not been realised, when man is understood as a lesser animal. The acts of man reveal the temporal dimension of the human being, the historical constellation of the human being. The human being is opened to the continuity of acts, made from the remains of that which has not yet been accomplished.

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² Al Jahiz, *Book of Living Things*, (Paris, Sinbad, 1988), quoted from: Daniel Heller-Roazen, *Echolalias, On the Forgetting of Language*, Zone Books, New York, 2005, p. 131.

³ *Book of Living Things* (Paris: Sinbad, 1988), quoted in: Daniel Heller-Roazen, *Echolalias: On the Forgetting of Language* (New York: Zone Books, 2005), 132.

The Al-Jahiz example, especially the intrinsic relation of unaccomplished acts and potentiality, which reveal the human being as a historical one (a being in time), brings us close to the philosopher Walter Benjamin. His reflection on history, as can be read in his fragments *On the Concept of History*, written in 1940, is of great importance to understanding the concept of potentiality. He wrote these fragments when he was already experiencing and anticipating the horrible events of the Second World War. Written shortly after his release from an internment camp and before his tragic attempt to flee Europe, Benjamin wrote about the revolutionary experience of time and history. In his reflections he introduces a messianic approach, where historical materialism works hand in hand with theology, as presented in his famous example of a chess-player machine. Benjamin argues that traditional historians wish to relive an era, aspire to ‘blot out everything they know about the later course of history’ and they want to empathetically re-experience the past as it unfolded. Benjamin rejects this hermeneutical desire to bracket off the present, regarding it as the ‘heaviness of heart, the acedia, which despairs of mastering the genuine historical image which so fleetingly flashes by’.⁴ Instead of that clinging approach, Benjamin proposes a materialistic historical approach to the past, which is described in the well-known fourth fragment:

To articulate what is past does not mean to recognise ‘how it really was’. It means to take control of a memory, as it flashes in a moment of danger. For historical materialism it is a question of holding fast to a picture of the past, just as if it had unexpectedly thrust itself, in a moment of danger, on the historical subject. The danger threatens the stock of tradition as much as its recipients. For both it is one and the same: handing itself over as the tool of the ruling classes. In every epoch, the attempt must be made to deliver tradition anew from the conformism which is on the point of overwhelming it.⁵

This part is related to what Slavoj Žižek describes as one of the key theoretical insights of Benjamin. With Benjamin’s proposition of historical materialism, the present, not the past, is relativised and remains open for future rewriting. As Žižek argues: ‘what the proper historical stance (as opposed to historicism) relativises is not the past (always distorted by our present point of view) but, paradoxically, the present itself – our present can be conceived only as the outcome (not of what actually happened in the past, but also) of the crushed potentials for the future that were contained in the past’.⁶ To take control of the memory which flashes in the moment of danger can disclose for us those crushed potentials for the future from the past. Benjamin writes that the present explodes the continuum of history, and maybe this explosion of continuity is related to the fragments of those lesser and unaccomplished acts, about which Al-Jahiz is meditating in his old treatise. In the moment of danger, the remains of what has not yet happened are disclosed with all their potentiality. The potential is then relativising our present exactly because it was not actualised and always stayed as an act that was less than itself. Russian philosopher Artiom Magun also describes potential as something that happened in the past. Benjamin’s demand that we have to look back in order to see the future is related to that which hasn’t happened yet. Magun writes that his understanding of potentiality is different from Badiou’s approach from the past, where the event of the past is a positive event. Badiou’s proposal is that we find something important in the past and move on from there. For Benjamin, the event of the past is the event of the now.⁷ The event or rather the eventness of the human being is namely happening right now and it is only reawakened as something that has not happened yet, it is a present reawakened as a remain of time: ‘The true picture of the past whizzes by’.⁸

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⁴ Walter Benjamin: *On the concept of history*, fragment VII, trans. by Dennis Redmon, quoted from: <http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/benjamin/1940/history.htm>

⁵ *Ibid*, fragment IV.

⁶ Slavoj Žižek, *Fragile Absolute, Or Why is the Christian Legacy Worth Fighting For* (London: Verso, 2000), 90. Relativity of the past could be also described as postmodernist multiplicity

of views – a banal historical relativism, a refusal to make definitive value judgments about the past on the grounds that its truths are ultimately unknowable. Such a refusal amounts to a de facto acceptance of the dominant historical narrative, written from the perspective of the ruling class. Similarly, for Žižek, it produces a posthistorical impasse beneficial to the capitalist status quo: an ‘eternal present of multi-

ple narrativizations’ in which ‘total dynamism [and] frantic activity’ coincide with a ‘deeper immobility’. Slavoj Žižek, *The Puppet and the Dwarf* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003), 134.

⁷ Artiom Magun, Alexander Shidan, Dmitry Vilensky, ‘A Conversation about possibilities, about power and powerlessness’, in: *Potentialities, Beyond Political Sadness*, the CHTO DELAT platform bulletin (March 16th, 2007).

The paradox of potentiality springs from the intriguing relation between refusal and urgency of actualisation, which are both part of the timely dimension of the human being. Even if the potentiality can only come to light when not being actualised, the non-fulfilled attempt to act is continuously opening human being to time and history. The disclosure of potentiality is somehow enabled with the urgency of our present time, or as Benjamin would say, with the moment of danger in which we can take control of our memory. How can we then relate this demand for actualisation with the fragile disclosure of ‘what it could become’? The disclosure of the potentiality is namely always enabled with the urgency of our present time, which can be personal, collective, communal, etc. The time of the present comes still (*stillstellen*) to reveal the past, or as Benjamin would write: ‘in every epoch, the attempt must be made to deliver tradition anew from the conformism which is on the point of overwhelming it’.⁹ So the disclosure of potentiality is tightly linked to the moment of present stillness, to a certain urgency conditioned by danger. What is that moment of danger today in which the past only whizzes by, but nevertheless can hit the present as an explosion? It is clear that for Benjamin this was the outbreak of WW2 and the horrifying blindness of the Left, which didn’t realise what had already arrived. The urgency of the present moment is then tightly related to the present moment of co-existence, cohabitation and collaborative modes of human action, to the cohabitative moment of contemporaneity. The moment of danger reveals itself for Benjamin when the dominant modes of actualisation are closing down human potentiality to the totalitarian exclusion of all other modes of human becoming.

How can we relate that moment of danger to our present time, in which we would like to formulate our thoughts about the future? I would describe this danger of today as a ruthless appropriation and exploitation of human potentiality. Our present time is experienced through the actualisation of all potentials, where human beings are continuously – as our two young professionals from the first example – displaying their potential. The actualisation of potential has become a primary force of the value on the contemporary cultural, artistic and economic market. To put it differently: with the rise of immaterial work, human language, imagination and creativity have become primary capitalistic sources of value. That transition has happened in many different ways and it can be very clearly seen by example in the constant re-questioning of the conditions to produce which produce new conditions to produce. The present time of permanent actualisation is also deeply changing the ways that we perceive and experience time, where the present is perceived as the only (more and more contracted) time we have, the past is transferred into the nostalgia of remembering and the future deprived of its imaginative potentiality.

Performance itself has to refuse the contemporary processes of actualisation and not participate in the exploitation of the totality of experience. In that sense the performance in the future has to resist the actualisation of experience, the experience without remains, which was one of the key aesthetic and political notions of contemporary performance in the 20th century (resulting in more or less radical aesthetics). Even if performance is most of the time experienced as an event in present time, where the co-presence of dancers / actors / performers and audience is of essential importance, that doesn’t mean that performance

⁸ Walter Benjamin: *On the concept of history*, fragment V.

⁹ *Ibid*, fragment IV.

is fully about actualisation of the present moment. Performance practitioners know very well how strong the work on performance is related to the paradox of potentiality, how much it has to deal with actuality, which always surpasses itself and with anticipation of what has yet to come. The moment of our present danger reveals itself exactly through the violence of constant actualisation, where the process of actualisation is tightly related to the notion of contemporariness, of making the work in present time, a contemporary work. Therefore I imagine the performance as a field of potentiality, a certain rupture in time, as another time frame where there is no difference between the possible and the impossible event. To imagine something like that doesn't mean that I suppose such a practice doesn't exist already. However, I don't want to actualise this practice, I don't want to reveal it as the only finality of the present practice of performance, a so-called 'contemporary practice'. Quite the opposite, to allow ourselves to imagine a potentiality of performance we have to first erase the notion of the contemporary, we should strongly stand against its affective and emotional implications which are also infiltrating our own collaborative practice. We have to invent and give a voice to our ongoing practice, which would not conform to the affirmative exclusivity of our own time in which we live and create. It is important to recognise and analyse the anxiety and crisis implied in the common notion of the contemporary. This notion implies the ruthless exploitation of the creative potentiality of our own present time, as it implies and appropriates the ways of becoming and working together. Instead of opening up the collaborative and creative processes as potentialities, our inventive collaborative forces have been constantly actualised and appropriated as economic and cultural processes of producing and adding value to the market.

In the core of a performance there is a resistance to actualisation, a kind of working together which resists the presupposed 'now' of performance. A performance is a result of a creative process that is interrelated around what it could be and tracing what has yet to come. A performance deals with the rupture between that which has yet to come and that which has not yet happened, a kind of exposure of time of another becoming. I imagine a performance then as a kind of experiential and inventive field of working together, which paradoxically can come to light with all its transformative power when it is not actualised. It is a continuation and disclosure of lesser acts, acts which don't end in their own finalisation, a kind of active present that is intertwined with the unrealised thought of the real. I can then imagine a performance as a kind of a perceptive state, with no total experience and burning out. A performance that would enable a bodily state of intensities, but would also give us the licence to daydream. A performance which could be an experiential field of affective and perceptive modes of becoming. An event which would also allow itself not to happen, which would be always, interrupted in mid-sentence.

ON POTENTIALITY AND FUTURE OF PERFORMANCE

Alain Badiou's 'Dance as a Metaphor for Thought' is probably one of the most controversial contemporary philosophical texts on dance. It's already been awhile since its first presentation, at the Dance and Thought conference of 1992;¹ it was later published in the 1998 *Handbook of Inaesthetics* (*Petit manuel d'inaesthétique*). Nevertheless, its many interpretations and applications started appearing only after the English translation of the *Handbook* in 2005.²

During the research I undertook to approach the text today, I came across a variety of interpretations, which may be grouped under three general headings:

1. Philosophical texts that expand on Alain Badiou's thought in the domain of philosophy, with occasional references to dance as a case in point, viz., metaphor;
2. Theoretical texts that criticise and argue against Badiou's claims from within the concerns and interests of dance and performance arts studies; and
3. Artistic-poetic texts, which embrace Badiou's philosophy and aspire to apply it thoroughly to the praxis of dance.

Might such a diverse web of, at times, even incommensurable interpretations suggest that there might've been a big misunderstanding about Badiou's text? I'm going to look back a few years. I first came across 'Dance as a Metaphor for Thought' in 2001, when we chose it to be included in the fourth issue of *THH*, 'New Dance – New Theories'. The text made a deep but not entirely clear impression on me: it provoked a mix of admiration and horror, a feeling that I had to think things over and face my genuine incomprehension. How does that text relate to contemporary dance? What is it saying about it? What kind of dance is it talking about? What is this meta-meta level of speech? What ever happened there to the discourses of theory and philosophy, those contemporary references familiar to me? Is all that remains only the issue of 'the truth in dance'? Who and from what sort of position can talk about truth? What are the consequences of that disturbing thought? What are the practical consequences of abstract thought at all? Who will take responsibility for it? How could one un-metaphorically dance that thought? ... So hazy was my thinking back then... My task now, with the present issue's theme in mind, is to offer a theoretical discussion of Badiou's philosophical text to the contemporary dance scene. I am avoiding saying 'a theoretical critique', because that is not what I will try to do here anyway. In a way, refuting the text theoretically would be pretty easy now, but more importantly, I believe that if I did that, I'd be wide off the topic. And the topic, as I see it, is to show the relations, differences, similarities, appropriations, relocations, and incommensurabilities of theory and philosophy in the field of the (performance) arts. I am not trying to deny thereby the significance of philosophy in art, or to advocate a total dominance of theory. What I want, at this time of a philosophy revival, is to demonstrate the necessity and indispensability of theory, whose place no other discourse of art can fill. An artworld where theory is disqualified is one that deprives art of its political dimensions. Accordingly, I view the current expansion of philosophy in the light of politico-economic macro-processes, which profit from dropping that characteristically theoretical move: situating art among social practices, which foregrounds its virtual ability to intervene in the public space. A society where this potentiality of art is not recognised – recognised as significant and even vitally important – where art is put on the pedestal of supra-social transcendence and self-sufficiency is a society that... has something to hide, something to keep quiet about... it is a society that... – why beat about the bush? – basically and practically stinks. Basically, because it is deeply divided and conflicted at its social basis; practically, because it attempts by means of its arts policies as well as arts

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¹ This was *Danse et pensée, une autre scène pour la danse*, the international conference on dance and explorations in choreography that was held at Paris in January of 1992. The conference proceedings were published in 1993 by 'Germs' of Samron. I here use Ljubiša Matic's Serbian translation of the Badiou text, published in *THH*, No. 4 (Belgrade, 2002), 138–46. [Translator's note: the present translation of

Ana Vujanović's text uses Alberto Toscano's English translation of the *Handbook* – see the footnote below.]

² Alain Badiou, *Petit manuel d'inaesthétique* (Paris: Seuil, 1998); *Handbook of Inaesthetics*, trans. Alberto Toscano (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2004).

politics to establish its imaginary 'totality of totalities' that could cover up its social conflicts and, to put it in an Althusserian way, might not be established in any other way but through ideology.³

Alain Badiou's 'Dance as a Metaphor for Thought' is a philosophical text on dance. It should be grasped within the wider context of Badiou's engagement with art and also his philosophical and political work. In the 1960s and '70s, Badiou was significantly influenced by his teachers, the anti-humanist theorists Lacan and Althusser, as well as by his involvement in leftist activism and student organisations. In the '80s, he turned more to 'pure philosophy', which culminated in *Being and Event* and the *Manifesto for Philosophy*. With these books and with the many that have followed, Badiou has been carrying out his politico-philosophical project: the preservation of philosophy in the age of (postmodern) theory, and at that a philosophy that many have called anti-philosophy, because it opposes not only postmodern theory, but also the tradition of analytical philosophy. Badiou is an original contemporary philosopher, one who forms concepts and throws new ideas in the public arena; finally, he is a philosopher followed by his adherents amongst his fellow philosophers and theorists as well as artists, and even political activists. It is therefore important to comprehend that Badiou's basic, central, if not the only real interest is – philosophy, the viability of philosophy, the conditions for philosophy, and the tasks of philosophical thought today. This applies whether he be writing on film, dance, theatre, event, St. Paul, the subject, or Semitism.

What I'd like to posit at the outset of my discussion follows from the above: even though it talks about dance and only about dance throughout, 'Dance as a Metaphor for Thought' is not a text about dance at all. It is a text about philosophy. This is not one of Badiou's occasional metaphors, whereby he would be rhetorically addressing philosophy by talking about dance, as contemporary theorists often did. No, his engagement with dance is neither metaphoric nor sporadic; it is central to his philosophical endeavour, but in a special way. When dealing with dance, Badiou is really probing one of the four chief conditions of philosophy, which, according to him, include: art, science, politics, and love. As generic procedures, they are the only loci of 'truth', positions that offer and generate truth, whereas the task of philosophy – which by itself establishes no truths – is to shape those procedures, to determine their significance, to create the conceptual space needed to conceive of the truth that they establish:

The specific role of philosophy is to propose a unified conceptual space in which naming takes place of events that serve as the point of departure for truth procedures. Philosophy seeks to gather together all the additional names.⁴

This gets us to the important concept of the 'event'. For Badiou, it is the origin of truth, it is what enables it. The event is what emerges within a certain situation, at its edges, which situation it significantly changes with its emergence, its redundancy and impress into it as an 'additional signifier'. It is what is nameless, what is before its name, what requires naming anew. Badiou solves the issue of the manifoldness of the event in the following way. The event is a singularity, connected neither to other events nor to the situation and its manifold agents. It emerges as a One, as a rupture, as an exception from its own world, which sets off the manifoldness. These independent but manifold event locations perform the perpetual decomposition of the world as it is given. Badiou's concept of the event obviously follows from Deleuze, and the direct break with the Deleuzean event from the *Logic of Sense* (*Logique du sens*) occurs in the *Logics of Worlds* (*Logiques des mondes*). Some interpretations cite the analogy between Badiou's notion of event and T. Kuhn's concept

³ On this, see 'Umetnost, družba/tekst', an old hardcore-theoretical text by Slavoj Žižek, Mladen Dolar, Rastko Močnik, Danijel Levski, and Jure Mikuž, published in *Problemi-Razprave*, Nos. 3–5 (Ljubljana, 1975).

⁴ Alain Badiou, *Manifesto for Philosophy*; followed by *Two Essays: 'The [Re]turn of Philosophy Itself' and 'Definition of Philosophy'*, trans. Norman Madarasz (Albany, NY: State University of New York, 1992), 37.

of ‘scientific revolutions’ in the philosophy of science. This is because a scientific revolution, like the event, brings forth a new truth, requiring a radical change and the replacement of the current paradigm that has dominated the serene state of science. In this regard, Badiou’s concept of event is also linked to r/Revolution in the social sphere and political practice, so various political activists today resort to Badiou’s philosophical arsenal in their struggle to change the current social relations through direct action. In relation to truth and event, another important concept emerges in Badiou—that of the ‘subject’. For truth to come out, to succeed and have an effect, it must create its subjects. In Badiou, the subject is that which stems from the event itself; the event is therefore not an ‘expression’ of an existing subject. The subject is that body which is liable to the event’s truth, the body that, in other words, bears its consequences.

And now another few words on Badiou’s understanding of art. In many of his texts, Badiou has engaged the arts directly (literature, theatre, dance, film, as well as the visual arts); besides, he has also authored several dramas and novels. The best known writings in this body of works are *The Handbook of Inaesthetics* and the *Fifteen Theses on Contemporary Art*.⁵ *The Handbook* comprises ten of Badiou’s earlier essays, mostly on literature and theatre, whereas the *Fifteen Theses* are a more recent lecture (2003) that sets off directly from Lombardi’s map of the Bush dynasty and the global oil mob (George W. Bush, Harken Energy and Jackson Stephens c. 1979–90, 1999). On the other hand, it is important to note Badiou’s frequent insisting that he does not know about the arts, in terms of their specific histories, discourses, and inherent sets of problems. This kind of disinclination from artistic (dance) practice is emphasised several times both in ‘Dance as a Metaphor for Thought’ and the conversation with the audience after the talk.⁶ In addition to his own ‘confession’, Badiou’s readers and interpreters often note this problem, too; on the one hand, they acknowledge his creative, provocative, and lucid readings of art from the perspectives of art and art theory, but are, on the other hand, faced with unbridgeable approximations and misperceptions of the real state of the praxis he writes about.⁷ A solution was finally offered by Badiou himself, when he included the following in his *Handbook* as a prefatory note:

By ‘inaesthetics’ I understand a relation of philosophy to art that, maintaining that art is itself a producer of truths, makes no claim to turn art into an object for philosophy. Against aesthetic speculation, inaesthetics describes the strictly intraphilosophical effects produced by the independent existence of some works of art.⁸

It is clear here that Badiou’s confession that he is not familiar with art is not ‘waffling’ before the reality of the referent, but an explanation of what that referent is: the ‘intraphilosophical effects’ of art, not art itself. In that sense, bearing in mind my own interests, referents, as well as the context of *TRH*, I could begin and end my discussion of the Badiou text in one move: if that is the matter, then Badiou’s aesthetic reduction of dance to an event thought is a purely philosophical problem, with which I, like anyone else who deals with dance and the theory of dance, have nothing to do. ... I would say that that would not be an exaggerated conclusion. Still, it would be a direct expression of my (theoretical) instinct in approaching the text. It would be, in Badiou’s words, ‘a thought that does not dance’. Vulgar and coarse. And I, of course, want my thought to ‘dance’, too, like his does. I will therefore try to do something else: adopting his method, I will develop an ‘a-theoretical discourse’ on his text. I will use it to try to examine the ‘intra-theoretical effects’ of this kind of philosophical writing about dance, a writing that I thus do not turn into an object of theory (theoretical criticism thereby being an inadequate approach) but view as an independent field for establishing the truth of dance.⁹

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⁵ Alain Badiou, ‘Fifteen Theses on Contemporary Art’, lecture given in December of 2003, published in *Lacanian Ink*, No. 23 (2004) <www.lacanian.com/frameHHVII17.htm>

⁶ See ‘Debate i mišljenja’ accompanying the text in *TRH*, No. 4, 144–146.

⁷ See the author and art theorist John Lowther’s review of the *Handbook* in *Big Bridge*, Vol. 3, No. 2 (10), <www.bigbridge.org/issue10/fctjlowther.htm>.

⁸ Badiou, *Handbook of Inaesthetics*, xii.

⁹ I’m clearly making a slippage here. Badiou claims that philosophy establishes no truths. But that does not concern me here, because I am dealing with the intra-theoretical effects

of philosophy, not with philosophy itself. Dance itself never claimed it was establishing any truths either, however much truth Badiou sees in it when he surveys its intra-philosophical effects.

Taking his cue from Nietzsche, Badiou opens ‘Dance as a Metaphor for Thought’ with the thesis that dance is an unavoidable metaphor for thought. In that metaphor, dance emerges as the opposite of the spirit of weight (gravity), as a thought that has been rendered weightless. Badiou lists a number of images of that subtraction, which weave the dense metaphorical network of dance: taking off, flying, lightness (the bird); innocence, oblivion, a new beginning, play, a wheel that turns itself, the original cause, affirmative telling (the child); source; breath, breathing (the air). But even though these images suggest it, dance in Badiou is still not bound up with nature. On the contrary, Badiou’s key dance link is the one with thought, whose opposite is not culture but the submission of the body to external force, ‘obedience and long legs’, in a word, the ‘military parade’. I will explain these relations gradually, in two steps.

1. Dance = thought ≠ military parade

Badiou’s adoption of Nietzsche’s position that thought is the ‘intensification’ that comes from one’s own self is opposed to the general thesis that thought is an idea that is carried out on the outside. Badiou thereby makes room to give dance a metaphorical meaning, not by tying it to nature, but by separating it from choreography:

In fact, the metaphor works only if we put aside every representation of dance that depicts it as an external constraint imposed upon a supple body or as the gymnastics of a dancing body controlled from the outside. ... After all, one could imagine that dance exposes an obedient and muscled body to our gaze, a body simultaneously capable and submitted. In other words, a regime of the body in which the body is exerted for the sake of its subjection to choreography. But for Nietzsche such a body is the opposite of the dancing body, of the body that internally exchanges the earth with the air.¹⁰

Hereby we reach two important points in Badiou’s thinking. First, dance is not wholly realised through the embodiment of choreography, but in its own self. If dance were the embodiment of choreography, that would mean that the performance of dance would have to be preceded by a specific thought (in choreography), realised in an external way (through dance as the embodiment of choreography). But with Badiou leaning on Nietzsche, dance is not an idea that receives its external realisation. There is thus no thought that precedes dance; dance is performed as thought itself, with its own inherent worth and power, a thought that sets itself in motion and accomplishes itself on the spot, in its own performance, that is, self-performance. This essential importance of dance’s inherent power, on the other hand, has radical consequences for one’s understanding of choreography. Badiou posits choreography among the categories that are restricting for the dancing body, such as obedience, skill, subjection, the military parade. This suggests that choreography is not merely secondary or marginal to dance, but its opposite, its enemy. In Badiou’s words: a body subjected to choreography is the opposite of a body that dances. Such a dismissal of choreography does not merely suggest that choreography is an abstract prescription that performance should transcend in the materiality of the dancing body to attain its full power.¹¹ Badiou’s reasons for dismissing choreography should be sought further afield, in his attempt to use the event to refer to, and reach, what is beyond language and thus also beyond any and every writing. As, basically, the inscription of movement, choreo-graphy thus logically reaches the exact place that Badiou ‘attacks’ with the event: the status quo within language, the given order of the signifier. And in this constellation, dance movement is the locus of rupture, raid, radical incursion, and a per-

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¹⁰ Alain Badiou, ‘Dance as a Metaphor for Thought’, in *Handbook of Inaesthetics*, 59.

¹¹ Cf. Michael Klien and Steve Valk, ‘Lead Article: Dance as a Metaphor for Thought’ (June 2008), <<http://choreograph.net/articles/lead-article-dance-as-a-metaphor-for-thought>> for such an interpretation.

manent change in the inscription of movement, that is, language. It is that supernumerary signifier that has no name in that script/language, but which with its additional name radically reconfigures the given order.

2. Dance = thought ≠ nature

According to Badiou, the whole conception of dance as a metaphor for thought stands opposite the conception of dance as a metaphor for nature, a dance that is freed from impulse, from all natural spontaneity and the body's wild energy. To be a metaphor for thought, moreover, dance must break with nature as a force that impacts the body and causes it to react to it. Dance is movement stripped of vulgarity, because it represents the body's very ability to restrain its entreaties. According to Nietzsche, unrestrained entreaties and bodies that fail to resist satisfying and directly manifesting its impulses belong in the category of 'vulgarity'. And, according to Badiou:

Dance is no way the liberated bodily impulse, the wild energy of the body. On the contrary, it is the bodily manifestation of the disobedience to an impulse. ... We are miles away from any doctrine of dance as a primitive ecstasy or as the forgetful pulsation of the body.¹²

Accordingly, dance is defined as the movement of a body subtracted from all vulgarity.¹³

Therefore the essence of dance movement and body emerges in the power of the pause, which is identified with defiance and opposed to the obedience of the impulse. Dance leaves the impulse inside movement, exposing it as futile force, and thereby becomes a metaphor for thought as lightness (of being unconstrained) and purification ('Dance is thought as purification').

From these connections and opposites we get to Badiou's next important aspect of dance, which is that dance is a virtual rather than actual movement. Dance shows the impulse in its actual bodily restraint, the secret slowness of movement at its actual speed, all the way to the ultimate instance where gesture and non-gesture, that is, the actual existence of movement and its virtual nonexistence, are equated in the un-decided gesture. Badiou thereby expands the Nietzschean 'scene of thoughts' that serves as grounds for developing this metaphor, and concludes: 'Dance would provide the metaphor for the fact that every genuine thought depends upon an event.'¹⁴ The new metaphor is of dance as a (thought) event. If event is what remains un-decided between being and nonbeing, dance effects thought as an event, and at that before that thought has received a name. The important moment is when time is interrupted, when dance performs the event before it is named, because as soon as the event acquires a name, it is fixed into the situation, whereby it's lost (as an event). In that sense, Badiou establishes that dance is a metaphor not for real thought, but for the as yet un-decided thought, or 'thought event'. In the continuous redistributions and alternations of virtuality and actuality (or, as Badiou calls them, vertigoes and exactitudes), it emerges that there is no 'one and only truth'; the history of dance is thus written as a history of manifold truths, perennially new truths and thought events that dance establishes.

Citing Mallarmé, Badiou deduces six axioms of dance from these basic theses. These are: 1) the obligation of space; 2) the anonymity of the body; 3) the effaced omnipresence of the sexes; 4) the subtraction from self; 5) nakedness; and 6) the absolute gaze. I will not analyse them individually, but will instead switch, in an

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¹² 'Dance as a Metaphor for Thought', 60.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid., 61.

ellipsis, to the general conclusion that comes out of them, before returning in my discussion to those aspects of the axioms that are key to that conclusion.

The main conclusion of the six axioms of dance is that the true and essential opposite of dance is – theatre.

This opposition is first manifest in the set of problems relating to space. According to Badiou, dance is the only art that is condemned to space, because it is an event before its naming, an event that effects the halting of time in space, that is, the spatialisation of thought. That spatialisation refers to the 'pure site', which needs no décor, whether it empirically has one or not. By contrast, theatre is not an event, but a consequence of playing out an act of naming. Naming in theatre occurs in the text/drama, which precedes the performance, so the performance needs not space but time (for the narration). Badiou deals with the obvious fact that theatre nonetheless is performed in a certain space (onstage) with the assertion that 'Theater can consist in someone reading from behind a table'.¹⁵

The other locus of that opposition is the body and the gaze. For Badiou, the dancing body is a thought-body that can never be someone. It is a manifestation of pure emerging, so it does not express, imitate, or represent anything or anyone. It is nameless, impersonal. By contrast, the theatre body is caught up in imitation, 'seized by the role'. From this opposition, Badiou derives the thesis that the real thought that dance halts in the thought event is – the impersonal subject. Accordingly, just as the dancer is never anyone in particular, so is the spectator of dance expected to be person-less. The spectator must not surrender her desire to the stage, as theatre demands her to do, but must instead situate herself in the role of a voyeur, in whose gaze 'dance subtractions abolish themselves'. From this follows the assertion that dance is 'not a spectacle' at all,¹⁶ since every spectacle expects the spectator to invest her desire, whereas dance demands that it be taken away in the spectator's gaze.

The next aspect of the body that matters for understanding the opposition between theatre and dance is nakedness. For Badiou, the dancing body is by default naked. That does not apply to its empirical state of (un)dress; instead, nakedness in dance is understood as the presentation of self-referential thought in its emerging. That means a thought that refers to nothing but itself, a thought that has no name, but appears before our eyes in the nakedness of its emerging. Badiou adds: 'Dance is a thinking without relation, the thinking that relates nothing, that puts nothing in relation. We could also say that it is the pure conflagration of thought...'¹⁷ Unlike in dance, the body in theatre is never naked. According to Badiou, what is mandatory in theatre is the costume, because the theatrical presentation procedure turns even nakedness itself into a costume, 'and one of the most garish at that'.¹⁸

Finally, the opposition between dance and theatre is evident in regard to the sexes, too. Badiou situates Mallarmé's assertion that the dancer 'is not a woman' in the continuation of the thesis on the impersonal subject, i.e. the dance body-sign, but also explains it with a specifically dance treatment of sex. In dance we encounter a conjunction of the sexes, but at the same time their disjunction as well. His view of dance as an interpretation of the kiss or, a step further, of the sexual act, seemingly contradicts Mallarmé's assertion. According to Badiou, however: 'It is because dance retains only a pure form from sexualisation, desire, and love: the form that organizes the triptych of the encounter, the entanglement, and the separation'.¹⁹ It is precisely the energy of the disjunction that preserves the outcome produced by the meeting and the joining – the sexual act – so that instead of presenting it, dance leads to the effacement of the sexes and the cancellation of their omnipresence. In dance, the omnipresence of the sex difference is abolished in the event itself, in

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¹⁵ 'Dance as a Metaphor for Thought', 63.

¹⁶ Ibid., 64.

¹⁷ Ibid., 66.

¹⁸ Ibid., 68.

¹⁹ Ibid., 65.

that ‘which every being resembles in its disappearing’. That shapes the twofold dance axiom of ‘the effaced omnipresence of the sexes’. And that axiom theatre is obliged to violate, because according to the axiom of presentation, it always brings an even ‘hyperbolic role play of sexuation’.

Badiou takes the basis of these oppositions from Nietzsche and his break with Wagner over the issue of theatricality. So whereas theatre is an example *par excellence* of the submission to theatricalism, modern art (dance) accomplishes itself by shedding it. In the submission to the theatrical effect we re-encounter vulgarity, which is what dance opposes. Still, neither for Badiou nor for Mallarmé is the attribution of vulgarity a mere condemnation of theatre, because that is its artistic superiority over dance, whereas in that dichotomy dance is left with conceptual purity. Explaining that thesis, Badiou expounds his final radical position on dance:

In order to understand, we must put forward a provocative, but necessary statement: Dance is not an art. ... Dance is not an art, because it is the sign of the possibility of art as inscribed in the body.²⁰

In other words, by performing the thought-body, dance shows that the body is capable of art [‘Not as a thought caught in a body, but as a body that thinks.’]²¹ And the body-that-is-capable-of-being-a-thought is Badiou’s answer to Spinoza’s question/challenge to deal with what thought is, without yet knowing what the body is capable of.

This intriguing philosophical conception of dance seems consequentially and consistently shaped; however, it contains a central inconsistency/slippage, for which I cannot find a solution within Badiou’s system. If we return to the introduction to my reading of Badiou’s text, we will see that his whole conception rests on the thesis that dance, being an art, belongs with the four generic procedures of truth. Hence Badiou’s philosophical interest in dance, as well as the entire metaphor of dance as a thought event. At the end of his text, however, Badiou strips dance of its art status, taking it ‘a step back’ and pronouncing it a sign of the possibility of art. The problem there is that if dance is not an art (and it’s certainly not politics, or science, or love), it cannot be a truth procedure either. At that point the thesis of dance as a thought event that establishes and brings out the truth fails. Surprisingly, Badiou apparently doesn’t notice this self-contradiction and offers no explanation for it in the remainder of the text.²²

In the end, given this illogicality, ‘Dance as a Metaphor for Thought’ looks pretty unconvincing in its application of Badiou’s basic theses on truth to art – because art may or may not be a truth procedure (which varies between dance and theatre), and a truth procedure may also be something outside of the four generic procedures (e.g. dance that is not art). It is Badiou’s philosophy itself that, perhaps, suffers the most from this, because, remember, this is about its internal examining. It seems that the effects of art on philosophy are quite confusing and, moreover, so strong that they negate the very postulates of philosophy that they were supposed to serve as metaphors.

Since this, I think, exhausts Badiou’s text’s internal aspects, I will here end my exegesis and pose some important intra-theoretical questions on the above. From the aspect of performance arts theory, there are several problems in Badiou’s text. The foremost is that his text teems with approximations, inaccuracies, commonplaces, cursory claims, in a word, with a practical unfamiliarity with dance and theatre practice, which are being put as the basic metaphors. The convolution of errors is so great that, in places, it becomes impossible to tell what the text is talking about and seems as though the word ‘dance’ could be easily replaced

with something else. For instance, the philosophically important claim that dance is not an art is one of those that one cannot debate about – because dance (theoretically observed within society) simply is an art, long ago recognised and established as an art, with all the elements a micro-artworld needs to function as an institution, a historical phenomenon, a social practice, and a specific field of perception. It is precisely around this issue that Bojana Kunst carries out her uncompromising critique:

Although dance could be a very creative metaphor for thought in the philosophic field and although its pre-rationalistic primacy in philosophy influenced as well a certain number of beginners in contemporary dance, the latter is primarily an autonomous art form, a typical twentieth-century art form; therefore, it is nothing special that abstraction, slipperiness, and deconstruction are at work in it.²³

We have already seen that from the aspect of philosophy there is indeed a great deal to say about that. But what about the a-theoretical approach? From that perspective, Badiou’s claim bespeaks an ontological and essentialist understanding of art that takes no interest in discursivity, but floats above its named object, just as that object is itself posited vis-à-vis its surrounding discourses. Analytical aesthetics and institutional art theory, as the most radical discourses in that sense, have already said enough about such an understanding of art, so I do not have to add anything of my own here. The juxtaposition alone is enough. It shows that this is not about a total disregard for the object, but a failure to explicate one’s own discursive position, which transcends neither the object nor that discursivity, but instead opposes an institutional understanding of art.

In a similar way, the body of a-theoretical reflections could also include references to the ballet tutu, to the pure site, to the inevitably representational character of theatre or the un-representational character of dance, to naming, to the view of impulse and desire, to the not-showing of dancing skills and the straining of the body in motion, to the effacement of all-encompassing sexuality, to the verticality of the dancing thought-body, to the use of language, and also, finally, to the status of choreography regarding the dancing body. Reading closely through twentieth-century dance practices with their complex links to the surrounding societies and cultures, theory could here cite arguments to condemn these claims, by citing numerous examples of dances and discourses that criticise, contest, or perform the opposite of what Badiou claims.²⁴ This could include, for example, the fact that dance is not performed in the ballet tutu, that showing physical effort becomes important for many authors, that dancers speak, that there is also feminist and gay dance, or that the hybrid form of the *Tanztheater* is one of the key phenomena in postmodern dance, that many dance practices and discourses oppose the verticality of the dance body, calling it oppressively phallic, that the title of one of the seminal contemporary dance works is *Name Given by the Author* (Jérôme Bel, *Nom donné par l’auteur*, 1994), that there are solo as well as mass dances without duets, that the emancipation of choreography from its servitude to the dance movement is an important shift in dance today, etc. And to all that, an a-theoretical approach would say: those errors are evident, but what needs to be established is *their discursive position*, because that is what the intra-theoretical problems are. In relation to what discourses of dance, philosophy, culture, and society is dance written out ‘as a metaphor for thought’? How is it situated in discursive networks, what does it count on, what does it miss, what discourses does it re-read, what discourses re-read it? And in all this, how does it discursively produce the ‘dance’ that it talks about? My extremely provocative answer to all those questions is: This is a typically philosophical, conservative, romanticising and bourgeois, psychoanalytic-phallicentric and heterosexist view of a hypothetical, early-modernist abstract dance. Thus for the a-theoretical approach, the problem is not that the text misses dance; no, it

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²⁰ ‘Dance as a Metaphor for Thought’, 69.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 70.

²² A similar slippage occurs on the side, too, in the case of theatre, and its basic conception at that. Unlike dance, theatre for Badiou is not an event but the effect of an already performed naming of an event. It is therefore clear why dance makes room for the establishment of truth and why theatre does not. At the

same time, however, for Badiou theatre is an art and a superior art at that (in relation to dance), which should mean that it is a truth procedure.

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²³ Bojana Kunst, ‘What Was This about John?’ (1998), <http://www2.arnes.si/~ljintima2/kunst/t-john.html>.

²⁴ For instance, see Ana Vujanović, ‘Jedna, druga, treća... n-ta PLEŠUĆA TELA’, *Teatron*, Nos. 126–127 (Belgrade, 2004) for a theoretical alternative of my own to Badiou’s conception of the dancing body.

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does not miss it, it deduces it in a totally determined discursive web, the contours of which emerge inside a theory whose chief task is to situate thought (philosophical as well as artistic thought) in discursivity, in the exclusively impure material, social, and historical field where that thought is, in a complex way, produced, where it occurs and operates. In other words, that Badiou misses his referent would matter for a theoretical critique – because even when the intra-philosophical effects of dance are being discussed, that discussion must begin with the material state of affairs in dance itself. Theory's task would therefore be to pull dance, to rip it out of Badiou's metaphorical web and to situate it on the material, social plane. What matters for an a-theoretical discussion, however, are the routes of the signifying practices and references that construct, perform, and produce such and that concept, i.e. what matters is precisely that the text refers to dance, and moreover to a specific dance in a specific way – and articulating those 'specificities' and their effects belongs in the domain of intra-theoretical problems.

In what follows, I will present some of my own concrete a-theoretical reflections on Badiou's text, explaining my positions one at a time.

Dance as a philosophical concept and referent. When talking about dance as a metaphor for thought, Badiou is talking about 'a hypothetical early-modernist abstract dance'. That dance is not narrative; it is achieved through an essentialist differentiation of it from the other arts (especially from theatre); it strives for a high degree of formalisation, has no mimetic relationship to music, assumes the male-female duet but also the abstracting of certain sexual positions, depersonalises and disembodies the body in favour of the being of a reflexive event; it is mostly performed on an empty stage, sometimes with the ballet tutu on, shows no technique and no effort of movement; it is neither representational nor expressive. Where do we find that dance? ...Roughly, only a step beyond white ballet, one step before high modernism and minimalism, facing the opposite direction from all the avant-gardes, two steps behind postmodernism, and many steps to the right (and left?) of contemporary dance. This metaphorical topography still fails to grasp the Badiouian concept of dance in the form of any concrete dance practice, where we could say: that's Martha Graham, or Doris Humphrey, or Isadora Duncan. No, it is not a concrete, historically familiar dance. But what is it? It is dance as the public opinion, the doxa, usually sees it. Badiou merely adopted whatever was there for the taking, a vague and undemanding view of dance, undemanding because it is unverifiable and relies on general truisms. The same goes for theatre, too, although there it is a case of 'a hypothetical pre-modern theatre', which likewise is a view of theatre frozen in the doxa.

The problem with these referents is twofold. On one hand, they point to the author's unquestioning acceptance of fossilised images of art, to a simple adoption of whatever public opinion regards as art. In the same move, Badiou excludes from these concepts all the debates, deconstructions, changes, breaks, and even dance- and theatre-practice events that affect the status quo in the arts of dance and theatre but do not fit the images that he is familiar with. On the other hand, the problem is that those two 'images' are unequally located in (the discourse of) the artworld, the one in the early-modernist (dance), the other in the pre-modernist paradigm (theatre). Almost all the dichotomies that Badiou establishes between dance and theatre come out of that inequality. For instance, the dancer represents no one / the actor is obliged to act; the dancing body is naked / the theatre body is costumed. It is important to stress that the dichotomies refer not to the universal characteristics of theatre and dance, but to the differences between the macro-

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paradigms of art that are realised in theatre and dance alike. So, just as the pre-modernist actor is obliged to act, so is the ballerina obliged to present a role, while the naked body is, on the other hand, the mandatory costume both in postmodernist theatre and postmodernist dance.

The philosophical signifying practices and routes of referencing dance. Badiou's production process of the above-described image or concept of dance is 'typically philosophical' for a variety of reasons. First, it is an erudite writing on dance, based not on a specialist's knowledge of dance, but on a profusion of philosophical and literary sources, which are used a-historically, a-contextually, with the general body of knowledge taken for granted and a liberal usage of images and assertions. Second, it is the usual, traditional way philosophy views art, especially dance, as the ineffable, as what is outside language, rationality, and representation, as the innocence of a being that is beyond the reach of society and language. Bojana Kunst thus asserts:

It is true that in philosophy, dance or, more specifically, the dancing body, are very often understood as a metaphor of an innocent, speechless, and uncorrupted field, not infected with rationality and its consequent – language (or word). That's the game it makes us play, demanding that we keep pursuing it, always one step ahead of representation, presentation, interpretation, the field of pure movement flow, the flow of innocent thought and pure existence, which is always resuming itself.²⁵

Finally, in another typically philosophical procedure, Badiou's text, whilst dealing with art, relies not on the empirical demand and verification, but on its own ontological grounding, which calls for its essential conceptual categories. Badiou's dance is thus really not a 'theoretical object', because it includes no material resistance of dance; instead, he posits dance as an empty field where philosophical concepts may occur, where they may be projected and exemplified.²⁶ Were it an object, dance would give out some sign of its autonomous life, in the form of speaking, travesty, urination, narration, sexual nudity, letting the audience down, and the like. Since it is not, it doesn't provoke philosophy or its self-reflexion with anything, but instead remains a pure source of only that which philosophy needs (lightness, innocence, grace, and the like). Thus when I say that this is a typically philosophical approach, I am pointing, in an epistemological sense, to its Platonic-mimetic conception of art, which has no material existence of its own, but is understood as a representation of the ideas, or as a 'shadow's shadow' (hence also the disembodied metaphor of thought).

The other route the production of the concept of dance takes in Badiou's text is 'psychoanalytic-phallogocentric and heterosexist'. It is carried out through the concepts of the verticality of thought, images of the source (spurting and emerging), dichotomous distribution of gender roles (only 'man' and 'woman' exist in there), interpretation of dance as a formalisation of the sexual act and especially of the 'encounter-entanglement-separation' trinity. That trinity follows directly from Freud's Oedipal Triangle, the Lacanian formation of the subject as \$ and the claim that there is no sexual encounter, i.e. that it is impossible. Let's also look at the treatment of the sexes. What are the epistemological and discursive grounds for Badiou's thesis about the omnipresence and effacement of the sexes? That is no universal truth of the sexes, but a heterosexist normative discourse that divides the sexes in the man-woman binary. Among the many feminist and gender and queer theorists, Judith Butler has offered in her numerous works the most powerful theoretical deconstruction of that conception of sex.²⁷ When it comes to Badiou's stance on being, theory refutes it with the position that there is no being as such, but only its bodies and subjects in the social field. Also, the idea of being as such clashes with the bio-political conception of the manifold body, a body that goes in

²⁵ 'What Was This about John?', <http://www2.arnes.si/~ljintima2/kunst/t-john.html>.

²⁶ Cf. Damisch's determination of the theoretical object: 'It is posed in theoretical terms; it produces theory; and it necessitates a reflection on theory', in Yves-Alain Bois, Denis Hollier, and Rosalind Krauss, 'A Conversation with Hubert Damisch', *October*, No. 85 (New York: Summer 1998), 8.

²⁷ See, for instance, Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1999); *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex'* (New York: Routledge, 1993); *Undoing Gender* (New York: Routledge, 2004).

manifold directions, as well as with the whole of feminist and gender theory, precluding all questioning of the firmly established gender and sexual roles that classify beings as female and male, brushing over the entire continuum of sexuality along which beings perform themselves. Is it possible that Badiou is unaware of all of that theoretical development? Probably not, especially since it belongs in what is called postmodern theory, which Badiou opposes. But if it's not, then he is clearly taking a conservative stand that combines Lacanian psychoanalysis and philosophical idealism, and thus classifies being on the socio-linguistic plane into only two sexes (for Badiou, enough for a universality of the sexes), whereas on the evental plane it obliterates the sexes into being, whose image covers up the historical problem of the distribution of power among the locations of the sexes within the heterosexual matrix that has long dominated Western society.

Badiou's 'conservatism' does not only refer to this aspect of dance, but characterises his entire approach, thereby producing a nostalgic and romanticising image of dance that can harm no one. The romanticising image is achieved by excluding all the exigent, unclear, progressive, or rough dance practices and, simultaneously, with Badiou's generalisations of traditional dance practices or even just those that only hypothetically exist in the public mind. Thus nakedness and the sexual act, for instance, are possible only as domains of innocence and the pure emerging of thought, but certainly not as domains of desire, individual corporeality, politics, bio-power, and bio-politics. The most important example here is Badiou's demand that knowledge/skill and the effort of movement in dance remain unshown. It is precisely their hiding, as Badiou acutely realises, that lends dance its lightness, or, rather, its semblance of lightness. Although his philosophical intention was perhaps going in a different direction, poststructuralist-materialist art theory has clearly seen right through that demand as typically modernist and bourgeois.²⁸ It commands: art must conceal its making, the conditions of its production! This is because its intra-sociality would thereby be acknowledged, which must immediately be concealed, because, in Marxist terms, the means of production determine the social relations, that is, the means of artistic production determine the process, identity, and effects of the artwork. The point is that what the work is saying about society is what is allowed to appear in the public sphere through a system of representations. However, the work's social content itself emerges there in the place of the medium, as a result of the economy of the artistic process and the materiality of the organisation of the medium.²⁹ The modernist, bourgeois artwork thus constitutes precisely that which was excluded from it: the materiality of the medium, the process, procedures, and methods of work, the conditions and techniques of production. And so, while Badiou requests that precisely these aspects of dance remain concealed, numerous critical contemporary dance works raise the issues of the geopolitical contexts of action, conditions of work, technologies of authorship, production of knowledge and access to education, political capacity of virtuosity, consumption and fatigue of the body, property and distribution of artworks. It is important to note that, although Badiou is on the left, his view/making of the concept of dance is anything but Marxist or dialectic-materialist. This may not necessarily be due to some hidden philosophical anti-Marxism of his, but may rather be an effect of his adoption of a fossilised bourgeois view of the fossilised hypothetically-modernist art, which he does not recognise as such, but takes as the truth of art. One final thing I wanted to say about Badiou's approach to dance comes up at this point: he relies not on the truth of dance, but on the truth of philosophy, its truth of dance, as much as he claims that philosophy establishes no truths, but articulates those that are offered up by the four generic procedures, which include dance (as an art), too.

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²⁸ 'Umetnost, družba/tekst' contains one of the most thorough interpretations and refutations of this position.

²⁹ For an important analysis of this status-function of art and culture, see Paolo Virno, *Grammar of the Multitude: For an Analysis of Contemporary Forms of Life* (New York: Semiotext[e], 2004).

Finally, here's again why we need theory. We need it, because a philosophical text about art such as 'Dance as a Metaphor for Thought', however lucid and exciting, does not actually create a problematic of art, but a self-referential metaphoric about art. That is, such a text may speak about art in important ways, thereby leaving room for introducing philosophical concepts into art as a thought practice, but the text itself must leave that space open. This is because the more philosophy deepens its conceptual problems, the farther it strays from the materiality of art. Such philosophy does not reach it. In that sense, 'Dance as a Metaphor for Thought', too, is a thought construction that is unverifiable in the field of art; in other words, when we posit the text as verifiable, it becomes inaccurate, so there are no problems then, and if we accept that it is unverifiable, then the problems of dance forever remain beyond its reach. Unlike the Badiou text, contemporary dance theory would be one of those Foucauldian 'discursive practices', which intervenes in dance, itself understood as a material practice with which theory shares the fortunes of a dirty, historical, bodily discursivity and sociality. Such theory not only finds new discursive solutions for the problems of dance as an art, but, at its best, also deepens the very problematic of the actualisation of new dance paradigms in dancing, whereby it begins to concern both dance and the society where dance occurs.

... the most general of the senses. We could well see or hear with just one small part of the body, but in order not to be automata that can be destroyed or dismantled without even noticing it, we require the sense of touch in all parts of the body.

[... la sensation la plus generale. Nous pouvions bien ne voir ou n'entendre, que par une petite portion de notre corps, mais il nous falloit du sentiment dans toutes les parties pour n'être pas des automates, qu'on auroit demontés et detruits, sans que nous eussions pu nous en apercevoir.]

– Chevalier de Jaucourt, 'Le Tact', in *Encyclopédie*

Having suggested in previous chapters ways in which social choreography informed the project of nineteenth-century aesthetic socialism, I now wish to locate such social visions within a broader Enlightenment tradition of thinking about the relation of the physical body to the body politic. That is, here I will begin to examine the choreographic in its second dimension – as not only a disposition of bodies in social space but as a way of educating the individual body in its experience of itself and in its movement toward language as an expression of that experience. In terms of the 'aesthetic continuum' outlined in the introduction, I will examine the threshold at which the aesthetic in the most fundamental sense (as sensory experience) passes over into 'the aesthetic' in the more limited sense – as a socially endorsed framing of the sensual. Thus I will address physical movements that would not ordinarily fall under the rubric of choreography in the more limited aesthetic sense in order to examine the way in which bodily experience prefigures and prepares for the Enlightenment subject's passage into language. While my consideration of the body will constantly parallel an Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment reflection on writing and legibility, it is my contention that the possibility of 'reading the body' has always been posited only in retrospect – as a Utopian originary moment in which meaning was supposedly immanent, embodied, and uncomplicated by its social situation. I will argue that over the course of the nineteenth century repeated attempts were made to subject the body to a specific regime of legibility in continuance of an Enlightenment hermeneutic tradition.

By and large, these attempts – which built on the pseudoscience of eighteenth-century physiognomy – succeeded in suppressing a more radical strain of thought that recognized both the contingent nature of the body's movements and the importance of aesthetic criteria in establishing a social choreography. I do not, then, offer here a chapter that 'reads the nineteenth-century body', but rather one that seeks both to locate the very possibility of bodily reading historically and to reexamine moments of critical stumbling in that hermeneutic. I will argue for a 'dialectic of tact', in which social choreography is presented as a necessary accommodation to the state of a society fallen from grace (or self-immanence). This fantasized state of grace – the originary moment of true and immanent democracy – was figured as a situation in which the direct physical communication of members of a community with each other was still possible.

The pivotal figure in this chapter is the nineteenth-century French theorist of theatrical deportment and declamatory gesture, François Delsarte, who built on a tradition of speculation about the body's relation to language in order to develop a systematic study of physical deportment and public speaking that was immensely influential for the body consciousness of the educated middle class in Europe and America.¹ As a figure who fuses the taxonomic zeal of the encyclopedist with the spiritualism of the nineteenth-century

STUMBLING AND LEGIBILITY: Gesture and the Dialectic of Tact*

* 'Stumbling and Legibility: Gesture and the Dialectic of Tact', in *Social Choreography*, Andrew Hewitt (Duke University Press, 2005), 78–116.

¹ François Delsarte (1811–1871) was a French teacher of acting and singing. He set up rules coordinating the voice with the gestures of all parts of the body. From 1839 on his advice was sought by great actors such as Rachel. His exercises aimed to render the individual conscious of his body in space. It was the exportation of his ideas to the United States, however – where his thought directly influenced Isadora Duncan

and the mother of Ruth St Denis – that greatly boosted his posthumous fame. In Europe, meanwhile, Laban studied Delsarte assiduously.

² Nordau's analyses of cultural decay enjoyed great popularity around the turn of the century. See Max Nordau, *Degeneration* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1993). His attempts to link sociological, cultural, and physiological traits were based on the work of the Italian criminologist Lombroso. See Cesare Lombroso, *Crime: Its Causes and Remedies*, trans. Henry P. Horton, intro. Maurice Parmelac (Boston: Lit-

tle, Brown, 1911); and Cesare Lombroso and William Ferrero, *The Female Offender*, intro. W. Douglas Morrison (New York: Appleton, 1895).

³ 'allein zu gehen ... aufter dem Gangelwagen, darin [ihre Vormunder] sie einsperreten.' Quoted in Bernd Jürgen Warneken, 'Bürgerliche Gehkultur in der Epoche der Französischen Revolution', *Zeitschrift für Volkskunde*, Vol. 85, No. 2 (1989), 177–187. Immanuel Kant, 'An Answer to the Question: What Is Enlightenment?' in *Perpetual Peace and Other Essays*, trans. Ted Humphrey (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1983), 41–48.

parlor, Delsarte serves as a bridge to the early theorists of modern dance in the United States. His observations on the significance of gestures – which originated, according to his own account, in his early training as an (unsuccessful) actor – were hugely influential at a time when a newly emergent bourgeois class was eager to represent through its body, as well as its possessions, its newly acquired status. If that status could be represented physically, it was assumed – in the "natural" language of the body – that the social status of this ascendant class could itself be represented as something natural and inevitable. This is, then, a chapter on bourgeois gesture. By making such a general claim I do not seek to oppose the bourgeois gesture to, say, the proletarian – although the criminological and cultural work by figures such as Cesare Lombroso and Max Nordau at the end of the nineteenth century was organized around just such divisions.² I am arguing instead that the very concept of 'gesture' is itself bourgeois in the sense that it seeks to universalize and naturalize, through a choreographic embodiment, the cultural language of a specific class.

To this extent, Delsarte is pivotal precisely because he raises a question implicit in all of the other figures I treat in this chapter: When does a physical action function as a 'gesture'? By tracing this question briefly through a variety of thinkers – from Rousseau to Bergson, then on to the Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben, in our own day – I wish to suggest that bourgeois culture has always been troubled by the (im)possibility of embodying itself. Seeking to codify itself in a series of appropriate and acceptable gestures and manners, bourgeois culture always risked reducing itself to mere code, undercutting the naturalizing legitimacy it sought in the bodily language of gesture. At its most simple, I trace bourgeois social choreography back to learning comportment and how to walk – to the promenade that clearly shows off the body and makes of the very condition of man ('walking on his own two feet') an aesthetic gesture, a mode of representation. Walking is that human action where performance and text meet, where the question poses itself: Is this a gesture?

Before fleshing out this argument on walking, it is necessary to point out what is at stake politically in such reflections. In an essay examining the fundamental importance to Enlightenment political theorists, of the metaphor of walking, Bernd Jürgen Warneken cites as paradigmatic Kant's essay 'What Is Enlightenment?' with its exhortation to all liberated humanity to 'take a single step without the go-cart to which they are harnessed'.³ As Warneken notes, this Kantian peripatetic pedagogy also accepts falling as one of the processes whereby mankind will learn to walk. Thus Kant's investment in a certain 'epistemology of walking', so to speak, does not preclude the occasional inelegant stumble. Examples of walking as the central trope of an emerging Enlightenment politics abound. Thomas Hobbes famously defines freedom in specifically physical terms as freedom of movement; and in a passage that certainly complicates the class politics of Schiller's celebration of dance, Johann Pestalozzi critiques the dances of the upper classes as effete, and recommends instead a good, brisk, bourgeois stroll.⁴ In the late eighteenth century, for the first time, walking could be celebrated either as an escape from a corrupt society and a return to nature, or as a democratic and revolutionary communion with the hoi polloi.⁵ After quoting an enthusiastic German walker of the early nineteenth century – "I consider walking to be the most noble and independent thing about a man and believe that things would work better if people walked more"⁶ – Warneken concludes: 'Particularly from the 1780s on, a new bourgeois culture of walking is discussed and rehearsed in Germany. It could be claimed

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⁴ See Thomas Hobbes, *Man and Citizen: De Homine and De Cive*, ed. Bernard Gert (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1991); and Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi, 'Über Körperbildung als Einleitung auf den Versuch einer Elementargymnastik in einer Reihenfolge körperlicher Übungen', in *Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi über Körperbildung*, ed. Heinz Meusel (Frankfurt am Main: Limpert, 1973).

⁵ For a consideration of the literary implications of this concern with walking, see Anne D. Wallace, *Walking, Literature, and English*

Culture: The Origin and Use of Peripatetic in the Nineteenth Century (Oxford: Clarendon, 1993). Also helpful is the study by Belinda Quirey, Steve Bradshaw, and Ronald Smedley, *May I Have the Pleasure? The Story of Popular Dancing*, ed. Libby Halliday (London: Dance Books, 1976). In this study the relationship between body posture and social dance highlights the ways in which both theatrical and popular dance responded to quite specific changes in fashionable deportment – specifically, a three-centuries-long aristocratic preference

for the out-turned toe – to develop new forms of dance.

⁶ 'Ich halte den Gang für das Ehrenvollste und Selbständigste in dem Manne und bin der Meinung, daß alles besser gehen würde, wenn man mehr ginge.'

with some justification that the bourgeoisie's attempt to develop its own lifestyle and its own body culture did not simply include walking and posture among other things, but that this new culture of walking acquired a significant and independent role both in inculcating a modern bourgeois habitus and in demonstrating bourgeois self-consciousness' (179)⁷ Clearly, the questions of walking and gesture – or walking as gesture, as a 'demonstration of bourgeois self-consciousness' – are questions of cultural hegemony, and it is as such that I wish to approach them now.

We might begin this examination of walking as bourgeois gesture at the moment of its putative demise. In an essay on gesture from *Infancy and History: The Destruction of Experience* the Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben has argued that 'by the end of the nineteenth century, the gestures of the Western bourgeoisie were irretrievably lost'.⁸ This loss of gesture, however, might be seen instead as a loss of syntactical or legible gesture, for in fact what seems to have happened – at least in Agamben's account – is instead an explosion of gesture beyond the bounds of legibility. In charting the destruction of gestural experience from the clinical writings of Gilles de la Tourette at the end of the nineteenth century, Agamben notes how the wild gestures noted by Tourette (and captured in the films of Marey and Lumière) seemed to have gone underground 'until the winter's day in 1971, when Oliver Sacks, walking through the streets of New York, saw what he believed were three cases of Tourettism within the space of three minutes' (137). This historical and bodily return of the repressed leads Agamben to conjecture 'that beyond a certain point everyone had lost control of their gestures, walking and gesticulating frenetically' (137). The fate of the gesture is interesting here: precisely to the extent that nonverbal languages have been subjected to a prevalent logocentrism, this very subjection has apparently unleashed a proliferation of unreadable bodily ejaculations. The repression of the body's (linguistic) movements has led to ever broader ranges of (uncontrolled) movement. It is as if we were faced with a paradigmatic Foucaultian play of repression and proliferation, in which the usual displacements that enable a sublimation have no 'place' left. The body – the final resting place of the repressed, in so many cases – cannot itself be displaced. It is as if, in other words, displacement had reached a dead end and we had nothing left for protection and camouflage but the techniques of condensation – the terse, condensed gestures of Tourettism.

Of course, if we accept the hypothesis that Agamben proposes, any analysis of parapraxis – and the regime of reading on which it depends – becomes highly problematic. If the body's gestures have become spastic, we can no longer simply read back from them – even parapractically – to a putative subject. Thus the very project of situating such bodies culturally and historically – the project of cultural studies – becomes problematic because such bodies will not sit still long enough to be situated: they do not signify according to established norms of legibility. It is only from the perspective of an already alienated body that the somatic can be made to figure anything like a 'natural language'. In effect, Agamben's argument works only if we posit an implicit distinction between gesture and gesticulation; the former a willed linguistic articulation, the latter a subjection of the body to spontaneous or involuntary movements. 'The gestures of the bourgeoisie' would then denote a bodily regime by virtue of which a certain class asserted its hegemony. The loss of bodily control observed by Tourette would then serve as the marker of the demise of bourgeois cultural hegemony. In other words, Agamben understands 'bourgeois gesture' as a form of embodied communication. Its crisis is a crisis of writing and intentionality (a loss of control of gesture) and of legibility (the gestures no longer 'mean' anything). Bourgeois cultural hegemony, then, is understood as a certain regimen of reading and writing, and 'gesture' would be the action wherein that regimen attempts to take on an apparently trans-

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⁷ 'Eine neue, bürgerliche Gehkultur wird in Deutschland insbesondere seit den 1780er Jahren beredet und erprobt. Und es läßt sich mit einigem Recht sagen, daß das bürgerliche Bemühen um einen eigenen Lebensstil und auch eine eigene Körperkultur nicht nur neben vielem anderen eben auch Gehpraxis und Gehstil einbezieht, sondern daß dieser neuen Gehkultur bei der Veralltäglichen eines mo-

deren bürgerlichen Habitus und der Demonstration bürgerlichen Selbstbewußtseins eine eigenständige und bedeutsame Funktion zukommt.'

⁸ Giorgio Agamben, *Infancy and History: The Destruction of Experience*, trans. Liz Heron (London: Verso, 1993), 135 [hereafter cited in the text].

historical and natural form: it is my body, not my class, that speaks. We find a similar logic in Adorno, where a nostalgia for the bourgeois promenade of the nineteenth century retrospectively simplifies what it meant to walk in that century.⁹ I wish to demonstrate, however, that reflections on gesture always resulted from moments of stumbling. The self-assured bourgeois promenade was always a potentially precarious affair aestheticized most elegantly in an ironic essay by Balzac, 'Theorie de la démarche'.

The slight consideration Agamben's essay gives to choreography in either the limited or the expanded sense is as telling as his observation of Balzac's 'Theorie de la démarche' – that it is, 'when all was said and done, disappointing' (135). Agamben does not entirely neglect dance, however: it serves for him to describe the condition of Tourette's syndrome, in which 'the patient is incapable of either beginning or fully enacting the most simple gestures; if he or she manages to initiate a movement, it is interrupted and sent awry by uncontrollable jerks and shudders whereby the muscles seem to dance (chorea) quite independent of any motor purpose' (136). Dancing, then, figures a movement beyond the communicative gesture – the sublime 'vibrations' of Ruskin are now experienced only as a shuddering. Dance fails as gesture through an inability either to begin or to complete the gesture, and it figures a linguistic play that neglects the work of semiotic closure. Moreover, chorea necessitates a rethinking of 'purpose' with respect to bodily movement. Dance figures either an aesthetic of interruption or, stated more positively, an openness to discourses that cut across primary lines of communication, confounding hegemonic meanings. And yet, dance – as movement 'independent of any motor purpose' – might be taken as paradigmatic of a Kantian aesthetic of 'purposiveness without purpose'. This suggests a fascinating possibility that choreography as an aesthetic practice responds to the 'loss of gesture' or 'destruction of experience' in the bourgeois era; that it emerges both as an uncontrollable chorea, or symptom of the loss of gestural control, and as an attempt to regain control through aestheticization.

This reading of dance, however, would finally limit itself too closely to Agamben's constricted parameters for understanding the nineteenth century. For example, his foregrounding of Tourette is tendentious: in the mathesis of nineteenth-century gesture an incalculably more influential figure was Delsarte, whose theory of oratory and gesture permeated many fields of cultural and social life. Perhaps the most striking cultural expression of a nineteenth-century obsession with 'gesture', Delsarte's oratorical system – never satisfactorily transmitted in his own fragmentary writings – became de rigueur for would-be public speakers and, most notably, for genteel young ladies seeking to supplement their lessons in deportment. Isadora Duncan, for example, tells of her early exposure to salon Delsartism at her home in California. Delsarte's systematization of social self-presentation was obviously conducive to a society in which greater class mobility was now possible. The classification of gesture allowed for the naturalizing, through embodiment, of a newly acquired social standing (and the pun here is intentional). Not surprisingly, then, Delsarte's system would be most widely disseminated in the United States thanks to the proselytizing work of his followers Steele Machay and Genevieve Stebbins, but it was also here that it was most thoroughly vulgarized as a tool of social climbing. By looking at the dissemination of the hugely popular work of Delsarte toward the end of the nineteenth century – and in a milieu that immediately and profoundly affected the choreography of the twentieth century via figures such as Stebbins and Duncan – I wish to show how a concern with gesture became a unifying cultural phenomenon. Any apparent loss of cultural hegemony on the part of the bourgeoisie was, in fact, no more than an inevitable failure to install that hegemony as a natural condition through gestural language and an all-embracing social choreography.

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⁹ Adorno's reflections on walking and promenades are primarily to be found in Theodor Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections from Damaged Life*, trans. E. F. N. Jephcott (London: Verso, 1974).

Tracing back to eighteenth-century treatises on the origins of language the various roles ascribed to dance and gesture as transitional forms of language would allow us to understand how for Enlightenment thinkers choreography, like grammar, served to organize ‘naturally’ occurring communicative impulses. Were we to follow such a line of study – and in this chapter I do not, in fact, propose to cover origin of language debates from the eighteenth century – we would immediately confront the question of gesture and gesticulation both as a philosophical figure and as a historically determined articulation of the body.¹⁰ While I propose to focus on precisely that essay by Balzac that Agamben passed over – and while I certainly do not wish to offer yet another reading of Rousseau’s famous *Essay on the Origin of Languages* – it is helpful to consider a short passage from Rousseau in order to contextualize my arguments within a broader Enlightenment project. Specifically, I am interested in the question of gesticulation and its relation to mimesis. ‘Since learning to gesticulate’, Rousseau opines, ‘we have forgotten the art of pantomime, for the same reason that with all our beautiful systems of grammar we no longer understand the symbols of the Egyptians. What the ancients said in the liveliest way, they did not express in words but by means of signs. They did not say it, they showed it.’¹¹ It would be tempting to see in this passage a simple privileging of showing over saying, but the valuation of speech elsewhere in the essay and the implicit and subtle privileging of music over painting at the essay’s end must make us wary. Rather than elaborating a semiotic from Rousseau, I would simply point out that gesture, as gesticulation, is already a problematic phenomenon. It is not a product of but rather a replacement for a lost mimetic capacity. Rousseau obviously uses ‘symbol’ to indicate that language that predates articulation: ‘In the most vigorous language everything is said symbolically, before one actually speaks’ (7). The symbolic writing of Egypt somehow figures as a language that predates speech, whereas gesticulation – the linguistic articulation of the body – marks the relativism of grammar.

It would seem that the possibility of meaningful body language is always something that we project onto the past. If it is Tourette, according to Agamben, who finally charts the demise of the bourgeois gesture, Rousseau is already forced to search in antiquity for gestures that retain some of the power he otherwise associates with the hieroglyph. His examples of symbolic gesture range from the violent (‘Thrasylbulus lopping off poppies’) through the sensual (‘Alexander applying the seal to the mouth of his favorite’) to the quotidian (‘Diogenes promenading in front of Zeno’) (7), and culminate in the terrible ‘harangue’ delivered to Darius by the King of Scythia.¹² According to Rousseau’s own taxonomy, however, the example of Diogenes differs from all the others. The King of Scythia is already using language, whereas both Alexander and Thrasylbulus engage in acts of amatory or violent touching. ‘Generally’, Rousseau writes, ‘the means by which we can act on the sense of others are restricted to two: that is, movement and voice. The action of movement is immediate through touching, or mediate through gesture. The first can function only within arm’s length, while the other extends as far as the visual ray’ (6). If this taxonomy is accepted, then strictly speaking only Diogenes engages in gesture, which is understood as movement mediated and distanced by symbolic signification. Gesture, then, would be the mode of passage from direct to indirect communication. It involves putting the body on display, and thus the most fundamental gesture is the simple act of self-presentation: the promenade. Diogenes actually becomes a symbol through the simple act of walking.¹³ The promenade as

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¹⁰ For a comprehensive study of eighteenth-century work on the origins of language, see Hans Aarsleff, *From Locke to Saussure: Essays in the Study of Language and Intellectual History* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982); and Hans Aarsleff, *The Study of Language in England, 1780-1860* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967).

¹¹ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, ‘Essay on the Origin of Languages; Which Treats of Melody and Musical Imitation’, in *On the Origin of Language. Two Essays*: Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Gottfried Herder, trans. and with afterwords by John H. Moran and Alexander Code (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 1-83, 6.

¹² The vigor of Thrasylbulus finds its counterpart in an even more violent act: ‘When the Levite of Ephraim wanted to avenge the death of his wife, he wrote nothing to the tribes of Israel, but divided her body into twelve sections, which he sent to them. At this horrible sight they rushed to arms, crying with one voice: Never has such a thing happened in Israel, from the time of our fathers’ going out of Egypt, down to the present day’ (7). In his celebration of vigor Rousseau overlooks the lack of vigor in the dismembered female body. In its most dramatic example the symbol is already murderous of the very vigor that supposedly motivates it. On the other hand, the body becomes articulate in

its very dismemberment: it speaks through its disarticulation. A distrust of meanings made possible only through grammar plays itself out as a murderous attack on a female body – a forcible recuperation of ‘mimetic’ possibilities by a rejection of linguistic and bodily articulation. Furthermore, we would be wrong to ignore the historical setting of the Jews’ ‘fathers’ going out of Egypt’. Given all Rousseau has just said about Egypt and symbolic writing, what are we meant to make of this singular symbol disseminated in the wake of a ‘going out of Egypt’? Clearly, the implication would seem to be that any attempt to ‘reinvigorate’ the symbol post-Egypt would consist merely of

a significant social gesture is, then, already a nostalgic figure in Rousseau, already a historical anachronism even before the nineteenth-century heyday of the flâneur. It marks the possibility of the body signifying in a symbolic or mimetic fashion without engaging in gesticulation.

Rousseau exemplifies in this essay what we might call a ‘dialectic of tact’ in which rhetorical tactfulness enables a semblance of seamless social integration, but only in the face of a loss of actual tactile interaction. Gesture is already a mediated form of communication that comes into play with the demise of direct touching – politics ‘within arms length’ – as a feasible practice. When communities can no longer embrace themselves quite literally, they resort to gesture. To study gesture, then, is to study instances of a failure to connect. Thus, the most basic of gestures would be the gesture that signifies the lack of connection, the gesture that displays its own failure in direct physical connection. It is just such a gesture that forms the basis of Balzac’s ‘*Theorie de la démarche*’ of 1833.¹⁴ Balzac offers an anecdote at the outset of his study: in the street one day he observes a man exiting his carriage to hail a friend. Lurching forward to broach the acquaintance, the stranger loses his balance and stumbles as his friend moves out of reach of the salutary hand. It is this simple stumble on the part of a stranger that gives rise to Balzac’s observations on the absurdly difficult task of walking. The stumble seems clumsy and tactless – and Balzac’s essay will develop, in fact, into a treatise on elegance – and yet, marking the moment when the other moves out of reach, the stumble is the inaugural moment in which social tact becomes necessary. It is as if Balzac’s instance of a failed salutation, a failed interpellation, marked precisely that moment where any natural, palpable social order is lost.

Stumbling, then, would be the gesture that inaugurates a language of gesture. Balzac’s scenario troubles the simplicity of the famous Althusserian salutation or interpellation that we instinctively know to be addressed to us. Here, the friend remains oblivious to the stumbling commotion he leaves behind him. If walking is to be read as a gestural self-presentation, it is nevertheless preceded by a stumble over the threshold of social mediation. We might say that stumbling is less an instance of singular socialization than of a certain social order finding its footing. It marks not just the moment of nature’s transition into culture – as in Rousseau, the somatic expressive gestures discovering their communicative value – but any moment at which one cultural order, perceived – or no longer perceived, in fact – as natural, makes place for another. Whereas the Althusserian paradigm focuses on the inevitable interpellation of the one hailed, Balzac is interested, instead, in the bumbling mechanisms of the one who hails.¹⁵ ‘In society man is obliged to move continually from the center to all points of the circumference’, Balzac notes. ‘He has a thousand passions, a thousand ideas, and his basis is so scarcely proportionate to the extent of his actions that at every moment he is in danger of being taken in a moment of weakness’ (56-57).¹⁶ Under such circumstances, how can he fail to stumble? Balzac’s notion of a constant social movement ‘from the center to all points of the circumference’ and the necessary *faiblesse* that results (i.e., man’s inability to compose all his bodily indicators to signal the same hypocrisy) suggest that ours is a society produced by parapraxis.

‘*Theorie de la démarche*’, with its twelve central axioms and its pseudoscientific empirical rigor, reads as an extremely funny parody of taxonomic encyclopedism. Indeed, the essay begins with a defensive gesture of astonishment. Balzac asks: ‘Is it not extraordinary to note that ever since man has been walking,

an autopsy on symbolic language. To attempt to recover pan-tomimetic language is necessarily to do violence to the body.

¹³ The gendering of the symbolic body is, of course, very interesting here. Whereas the body of the woman becomes significant through its death and dismemberment, Diogenes becomes a symbol precisely at the point where his body serves to figure his personality through walking. If the symbolic presents and confirms embodied masculine identity, it seems to demand the sacrifice of the feminine.

¹⁴ Honoré de Balzac, *Theorie de la démarche et autres textes* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1990 [1833]); hereafter cited in the text.

¹⁵ Althusser famously describes interpellation as follows: ‘Ideology “acts” or “functions” in such a way that it “recruits” subjects among the individuals [it recruits them all] or “transforms” the individuals into subjects [it transforms them all] by that very precise operation which I have called interpellation or hailing, and which can be imagined along the lines of the most commonplace everyday police [or other] hailing “hey, you there!” (Louis Althusser, ‘Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses’, in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays* [New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971], 174).

¹⁶ ‘L’homme social est obligé d’aller continuellement du centre à tous les points de la cir-

conférence. II a mille passions, mille idées, et il existe si peu de proportion entre sa base et l’étendue de ses opérations, qu’a chaque instant il est pris en flagrant délit de faiblesse.’

no one has thought to have asked how he walks, whether he walks, if he could walk better, what he is doing when he walks, or whether there might not be some better way to impose, change or analyze his walking: questions that bear on the very philosophical, psychological, and political systems that so preoccupy the whole world?’ (17).¹⁷ The absurdity of the presentation cannot mask a serious concern here – the same concern that informed the political theorists of the Enlightenment touched on earlier. Precisely those things that no one would think to ask – how we walk, for example – are the things that form the basis of our world. To ask about walking (*démarche*) is necessarily to ask about how our society works (*marche*). Let us take the ironist at his word; for indeed it is strange that no one should have asked so simple a question – how walking can happen, or ‘comment ça marche’. Balzac’s concerns are epistemological. Stumbling provides him with a model of scientific method – a model that allows him to critique and yet pursue the project of the Enlightenment encyclopédiste.

This text offers a curiously ‘postmodern’ twist on scientific method as a form of stumbling that moves beyond any simple positivism. The central question of method, Balzac will claim, is itself a question of balance: ‘A madman is one who sees the abyss and falls in. The man of knowledge hears him fall, takes his fathom stick and measures the distance... There is no single movement, no single action that might not be seen as an abyss where even the wisest man might leave his reason and which might not provide the man of knowledge with the occasion to take his measuring rule and measure infinity itself. There is an infinity to be found in the slightest *gramen*’ (26-27).¹⁸ The *fou* simply falls – this is not what interests Balzac. Likewise, the measured empiricism and quantifications of the scientist do not interest him either. Instead, he explains, ‘here, I shall forever be between the fathom stick of the man of knowledge and the vertigo of the madman ... placing myself at the very point where science touches on folly’ (27).¹⁹ Tie advances to the abyss, teeters and stumbles on its edge, then – by virtue of a *retraction* – theorizes in measured terms. We might see in this stumbling a new and important critical methodology that takes the pathological and aberrant, the unbalanced, into the very act of critique, making *parapraxis* the very measure of *praxis*. By parodying the taxonomic vigor of the encyclopédistes, Balzac demonstrates how critical thought will constantly stumble rather than promenade across a terrain of leveled categories.

Notably, Balzac is interested not in an act of falling – an act of failing, let us say – but in stumbling; that is, in a failed fall, in an act of recuperation or *retraction*. He is quite insistent on this point when citing, in mock academic style, from the existing authorities on the question of the *démarche*. Referring to the authority of Borelli’s *De actu animalium*, Balzac chronicles his own disappointment on realizing that ‘Borelli tells us why a man, carried beyond his own center of gravity, falls; but he does not tell us why that man often will not fall, if he knows how to make use of a secret force, discovering in his feet an unbelievable power of recovery [*retraction*]’ (40).²⁰ It is stumbling, not falling or walking, that is at the heart of Balzac’s study of the *démarche*. He is concerned with how order and system are grounded on *parapraxis* rather than seeking, like Rousseau, some moment of immediate physical communication. Where Balzac does begin to expatiate on the refining of physical representation, his essay quite explicitly shifts gears into a consideration of elegance: that is, he envisages as a willed aesthetic construct that which Rousseau posits as an historical origin – a certain state of grace. This is what makes Balzac’s study so important for those who seek to resist the aestheticization of politics: for while it recognizes the aesthetic endeavor as the basis of the social collective, it refuses to ground that political aesthetic in a moment of pure communication and communitarian self-immanence.

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¹⁷ ‘N’est-il pas réellement bien extraordinaire de voir que, depuis le temps où l’homme marche, personne ne se soit demandé pourquoi il marche, comment il marche, s’il marche, s’il peut mieux marcher, ce qu’il fait en marchant, s’il n’y aurait pas moyen d’imposer, de changer, d’analyser sa marche: questions qui tiennent à tous les systèmes philosophiques psychologiques et politiques dont s’est occupé le monde?’

¹⁸ ‘Un fou est un homme qui voit un abîme et y tombe. Le savant l’entend tomber, prend sa toise, mesure la distance... II n’y a pas un seul de nos mouvements, ni une seule de nos actions, qui ne soit un abîme ou l’homme le plus sage ne puisse laisser sa raison, et qui ne puisse fournir au savant l’occasion de prendre sa toise et d’essayer à mesurer l’infini. II y a de l’infini dans le moindre *gramen*.’

¹⁹ ‘Ici, je serai toujours entre la toise du savant et le vertige du fou... Je me place au point précis où la science touche à la folie.’

²⁰ ‘Borelli dit bien pourquoi l’homme, emporté hors du centre de gravité, tombe; mais il ne dit pas pourquoi souvent l’homme ne tombe pas, lorsqu’il sait user d’une force occulte, en voyant à ses pieds une incroyable puissance de *retraction*.’

Stumbling needs to be thought of not as a loss of footing but rather as a finding of one’s feet: it is the act in which the body rights itself by a retraction and the mind becomes aware of the operation of measure and balance – ‘a secret force’ – operating in and through the body. To reflect on what it means to walk is necessarily to reflect on what it is to profess a science. Is it, perhaps, to reflect on the necessity of a shift from Enlightenment science to the critique necessitated by the dialectic of Enlightenment? Although I hesitate to make what seems the inevitable deconstructive gesture, Balzac indeed finally obliges us to question the relation of walking to writing, and to ask what it might mean to stumble in literary terms. ‘You might ask why such emphasis on so prosaic a science’ (20),²¹ he reflects in a rhetorical aside that itself suggests the importance of the rhetorical. Walking is ‘prosaic’ and Balzac is concerned with the question of writing prose. If this concern seems a little distant from our concern with social choreography, Balzac’s own literary point of reference suggests the connection once again. Referring to the famous scene from *Le bourgeois gentilhomme* in which M. Jourdain takes lessons from his dancing master and his oratory instructor, Balzac reflects that ‘is man not here like M. Jourdain, who speaks prose without knowing it; walking without realizing what important questions his walking raises?’ (19).²² To reflect on walking is, for Balzac, to reflect – albeit in an ironic manner – on the question of science and method, on prose style, and on the condition of the bourgeois.

It is important to note – given the centrality in the modernist critical vocabulary of the figure of the Baudelairean *flâneur* – that the decadence of gesture and the problematization of the social promenade seem to have set in earlier than we might have assumed. A loss of balance is the corollary of what we might call ‘the exorbitant style’ in Balzac’s essay – a style that appears baroque and disjointed while nevertheless emanating from a central *idée fixe*. This exorbitance, meanwhile, is also at the very heart of Balzac’s theory of movement: ‘I decided that man was capable of projecting out from himself, by all the acts deriving from his movements, a quantity of energy that was bound to produce some effect within his sphere of activity. What luminous insights in this simple formula!’ (34).²³ He is concerned – in a manner that clearly presages Bergson, albeit ironically – with a vital energy that emanates from man in his actions and gestures. This concern turns on the question of a natural will unconsciously operative in man: ‘The fluid motor, that ungraspable will, the despair of all thinkers and physiologists’ (41).²⁴ Stumbling opens up the realm of unconscious human action. Balzac’s approach shifts, however, when he turns his mind to the practical implications of his observation of vital expenditure through movement and to the question of whether some profit might be drawn from this new discovery. He reflects: ‘Could it be that man has the power to direct the action of this constant phenomenon that he does not think about? Might he store up or stockpile this invisible fluid that he possesses without knowing it?’²⁵ In other words, do we exist in a world in which ‘vital expenditure’ can be collected and amassed as a form of ‘vital capital’? Balzac, *avant la lettre*, is already assessing the value of philosophical vitalism to the economic and ideological well-being of the bourgeoisie. The danger that vitalism poses to the storing up of surplus value obliges him to seek out modes of stockpiling that value. We confront here similar concerns to the nineteenth-century theories of entropy and perpetual motion treated in chapter 1. Balzac seems to be offering the possibility of the kind of self-perpetuating expenditure that later theorists would link to the intoxicating effects of dance and rhythm: ‘There is a sublime prodigality in every exorbitant movement,’ he will observe in his final axiom (75).²⁶ The energies Balzac deals with in this essay – ‘prodigality’ and ‘stockpiling’ – are, finally, the twin energies that make the flow of capital possible. How might we collect and amass gestural capital if, by their very nature, gestures are prodigal and antipathetic to any economy? Balzac argues that ‘the soul loses in centripetal force what it gains in centrifugal’ (56).²⁷ In this model human ener-

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²¹ ‘Vous demanderez pourquoi tant d’emphase pour cette science prosaïque.’

²² ‘Ici, ne serait-il pas toujours M. Jourdain, faisant de la prose sans le savoir, marchant sans connaître tout ce que sa marche souleve de hautes questions?’

²³ ‘Je décidai que l’homme pouvait projeter hors de lui-même, par tous les actes dus à son mouvement, une quantité de force qui devait

produire un effet quelconque dans sa sphère d’activité. Que de jets lumineux dans cette simple formule!’

²⁴ ‘Le fluide moteur, cette insaisissable volonté, désespoir des penseurs et des physiologistes.’

²⁵ ‘L’homme aurait-il le pouvoir de diriger l’action de ce constant phénomène auquel il ne pense pas? Pourrait-il économiser, amasser

l’invisible fluide dont il dispose à son insu?’

²⁶ ‘Tout mouvement exorbitant est une prodigalité sublime.’

²⁷ ‘L’âme perd en force centripète ce qu’elle gagne en force centrifuge.’

gies are essentially centrifugal, passing from man into the objects of his labor. The classic example of such exorbitant expenditure is, for Balzac, the act of writing itself, from which he draws his most ironic example of a possible resistance to energistic entropy. He writes admiringly of those ‘autograph hunters, and those who claim to be able to judge men’s character by their handwriting’, describing them as ‘superior people’ [38].²⁸ The autograph hunter is a form of literary capitalist. He realizes that the autograph is not simply the indexical marker of the subject that produced it, but rather the fixation of the energies emanating from that subject. In collecting what we might call the ‘graphic power’ of the great man, he acts like the capitalist who exploits the labor power of the worker. This, finally, is why focusing on the question of the truth or falsehood of gesture – and writing – is misplaced: gesture figures writing as a mode of performance. Gesture would be the happening of writing – writing beyond reference.

As we shall see, this emphasis on performance, while never fully lost, submerges in the taxonomic fervor of the nineteenth century. Subsequently, gestures will be traced to their origin – as the manifest to the latent: what will be forgotten is the ‘gesture work’ through which the collective mediates and performs itself. We need to insist on stumbling precisely in order to rescue Balzac from a more facile notion of subjectivity that clearly appeals to him and that he draws from the eighteenth century. In extending his system of homologies Balzac refers to Lavater’s physiognomic studies: ‘Before me, Lavater already said that since everything in man is homogeneous, his manner of walking must by necessity be as eloquent as his physiognomy: walking is the physiognomy of the body. But this was just a natural deduction from his primary proposition: ‘Everything about us corresponds to an internal cause’ [21].²⁹ This system of homology, reducible to ‘an internal cause’, posits a centered notion of subjectivity at both the physical and the metaphysical levels. This physiognomic cataloging of the body is ideological precisely insofar as it posits a preexisting subject that can be inferred from both its actions and its physical embodiment. Although Balzac declares as his first axiom that ‘walking is the physiognomy of the body’, the epistemology from which we are freeing him is precisely this epistemology of the physiognomic, that will, in fact, reassert itself toward the end of the century. (The work of Lombroso and Nordau, for example, depended on just such an assumption of the homology of physiological and intellectual or moral traits.) My argument is that Balzac’s stress on the stumble in performance draws attention to the *work* of social choreography, both collective and individual, but that this critical awareness will be buried again later in the century by an insistence on the legibility of the body, on the body as text. While the ‘scientific’ claims of physiognomy were, of course, always rather precarious, the physiognomic epistemological construction can only continue to exist in an explicitly ideological form after Balzac effectively debunks it *malgré lui*. By shifting critical awareness from moments of legibility toward the notion of social choreography as a performance (in his consideration of poise and *élégance*), Balzac challenges our notions of ‘body as text’ and indicates what I take to be a broader shift (exemplified in my reading of Isadora Duncan) away from essentially ‘literary’ models of (national) culture, toward ideology as performative.

Near the end of the essay, as he begins to reflect on the deportment of passersby, Balzac introduces the distinction between *le mouvement faux* (a false movement), in which is revealed ‘the nature of the character’, and *le mouvement gauche* resulting from habit [82]. The former denotes a body, and its falsehood is referential (it reveals something ‘false’ in the character), whereas the latter is performative and aesthetic, finally; its falsehood is an effect (produced on the observer) rather than a cause. As the essay moves from pseudoscientific reflection on the human motor to an altogether more frivolous assessment of the charms of feminine movement, it also moves away from questions of true and false, or *le mouvement faux*. The appar-

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²⁸ ‘Chercheurs d’autographes, et ceux qui prétendent juger le caractère des hommes sur leur écriture.’

²⁹ ‘Lavater a bien dit, avant moi, que, tout étant homogène dans l’homme, sa démarche devait être au moins aussi éloquente que l’est sa physiologie; la démarche est la physiologie du corps. Mais c’était une déduction naturelle de

sa première proposition: Tout en nous correspond à une cause interne.’

ently sociological or merely fashionable turn toward *le mouvement gauche* constitutes, in fact, a rejection of the textual and referential as a means of ‘reading’ the body. Balzac’s treatise is not, in fact, about the legibility of the unconscious subject through his actions or *parapraxes* but rather the power of retraction that causes us to right ourselves, to represent ourselves gesturally despite the fallibility of social interpellation. Balzac is already beyond a theory of interpretation that would depend upon *vrai* and *faux*. As the essay develops, it soon becomes clear that he is concerned instead with the *élégant* and the *gauche*. This movement of the treatise from its own feigned center of gravity, or *gravitas*, is a critical stumble that opens up different epistemological questions.

That our earlier analogy of writing and a prototypical labor theory of value is not altogether misplaced is suggested by an example that Balzac offers to demonstrate the necessity of his shift from a physiognomic consideration of *vrai* and *faux* movements to a consideration of elegance. He describes a craftsman who lathes marble in a repetitive movement of exorbitant expenditure. Does the object, the production of objects, sap our power? What results in the workman is a gesture of habit – and habit is the origin of the *mouvement gauche*.³⁰ A critique of the inelegant is a critique not of misrepresentation – the habits inculcated by repeated labor are not ‘false’, indeed they are adopted precisely because they are, in some sense, ‘correct’ in their adaptation to the task – but of misproduction. The habits of repeated labor produce something ‘wrong’ rather than derive from something wrong. We encounter here something akin to the aesthetic socialism of the English writers already considered. Balzac’s critique of repetitive toil derives from an observation of an ugly or *gauche* action. Mechanized or repetitive labor is rejected for being *gauche* rather than *faux*. This methodological shift from a pseudoscientific treatise to a rather frivolous examination of elegance is extremely important. Like Morris, who saw the production of beautiful objects as tied to the physical production of beautiful subjects, Balzac derives an implicit critique of toil from the observation of a lack of elegance.

What is the significance of this criterion of aesthetic discernment? What do we gain from mustering an aesthetic critique of the *gauche* rather than a cognitive critique of the *faux*? Clearly the *faux* depends on a model of reference: a gesture is *faux* when it fails to reflect ‘the nature of the character’. The *gauche* meanwhile is a purely aesthetic judgment – offending not because it is misrepresentative but rather because it is repetitive, belabored, and mechanical. It is wrong not because it fails to represent human subjects truly but because it fails to produce true human subjects. This is a crucial shift. Methodologically, Balzac points out what would become a persistent ethical problem throughout nineteenth-century reflections on gesture and comportment. If we are to read from the gesture its emotional referent, the project of cataloging becomes highly problematic because it reduces gestures to legible and nominal signs that can simply be copied. If we categorize in encyclopedic fashion the mimetic language of gesture, do we not risk a denaturing – a perfect dissembling translation of true affects into merely hypocritical gesture? (It is notable that Bergson, for example, uses over and over the example of Molière’s prototypical hypocrite Tartuffe in his study *Laughter*.)

Balzac’s vitalism might be read – at least in its linguistic implications – as an attempt to counter such possibilities. Rejecting, by the end of the essay, the simple listings of an encyclopedia entry, he is concerned instead with a theory of writing organized around the active agency of the verb. In an analysis of action that will be taken up later by Delsarte, Balzac reads gesture as verb rather than noun – performance rather than designation: ‘From then on, movement, for me, included thought, the most difficult action of a

³⁰ We should beware of overstating this shift, however. Balzac observes the manner in which a physiognomic reading of morals from bodily proportions can easily be confused with a reading of *gauche* gestures. Observing how ‘an obese man is necessarily obliged to surrender to the false movement introduced into his economy by the belly that dominates him’ [Un obèse est nécessairement forcé de

s’abandonner au faux mouvement introduit dans son économie par son ventre qui la domine] [62], he concludes that ‘edifying work and destructive vice produce the same effects in man’ [le travail qui édifie et le vice qui détruit produisent en l’homme les mêmes résultats] [63]; namely, imbalance.

human being; the verb, a translation of thought; then walking and gesture, the more or less impassioned completion of the verb... transformations of thought in the voice, which is the sense of touch by which the soul most spontaneously let flow miracles of eloquence and the heavenly enchantments of vocal music. Is the word not, in a sense, the heart and brain's manner of walking?' [34–35].³¹ Of course, the idea that language can be thought of as 'the heart and the brain's manner of walking' might easily be accommodated to a form of logocentrism, and Balzac himself facilitates such an accommodation when he argues, for example, that 'granted that walking is the expression of bodily movements and Voice the expression of intellectual movements, it seemed impossible to me to make movement lie' [35].³² The idea that walking is an embodiment of the metaphysical values of voice necessarily reframes our consideration of what it means to walk. However, we must not forget the importance of the stumble in Balzac's theory. If neither la démarche nor la voix can lie, both can, nevertheless, falter. Indeed, they both only become aware of themselves insofar as they stumble or stutter in performance.

Before moving on from Balzac, I should clarify what I take to be the critical significance of the stumble and, more broadly, the historical significance of Balzac's essay. It is important to note a dialectic operative within the very episteme of physiognomy as Balzac understands it; a dialectic that allows us to see this essay as, in many senses, the threshold of a modern 'social choreography' (it would subsequently become most important for Baudelaire). In moving on from Balzac let us say, for the moment, that he serves in the present context to represent a certain nineteenth-century model of the promenade that has already been problematized by the very stumble that inaugurates his reflection. He at once confirms an urban, modernist nostalgia for the promenade, depicting a worldview in which elegance is more than just excess and display; in which 'every jolting movement betrays a vice or a bad education'.³³ At the end of the essay, Balzac focuses on the question of representation in its political as well as its semiotic sense. Looking at the representational function of the monarch, he notes how 'it has been proven in autopsies performed on royal personages that the habit of representing introduces vice into the princes' bodies: they are feminized' [86].³⁴ By dint of representing (and in this case no body is more representative than the king's) the body loses its equipoise and falls into vice, into the rupture of legibility and the jolting movement. Thus, we might say that the stumble or jolting movement is the last legible bodily sign insofar as it connotes vice, but the vice that it connotes is the fall from grace that sunders bodily performance from will, intentionality, or political subjectivity. To this extent, Balzac's stumble marks the threshold of legibility and illegibility. It is legible as the historical threshold of the illegible. Subsequent attempts to reinstate a purely mimetic notion of gesture will necessarily be anachronistic.

For Adorno in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* stumbling would subsequently become the paradigmatic mode of totalitarian induction; we all stumble at the threshold of subject formation and, in failing to become subjects, genuflect before the totalitarian collective. In Balzac I am stressing instead the self-critical rupture that stumbling makes possible; the awareness of the constructedness of social order. That Balzac launches into a celebration of elegance indicates that he by no means opposes constructed social orders to putatively natural ones. The criterion of political discernment is aesthetic, and Balzac envisages an aesthetic social order – a social choreography – that might be more physically and aesthetically pleasing than others. To this extent, he stands in the tradition of Schiller outlined in the introduction. What he resists, however, is the colonization of all critical potential by scientific positivism: the essay's movement beyond the faux indicates that the critique of ideology cannot, for Balzac, be restricted to a cognitive 'reading' of false statements

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³¹ 'Pour moi, dès lors, le mouvement comprit la Pensée, action la plus dure de l'être humain; le Verbe, traduction de ses pensées; puis la Démarche et le Geste, accomplissement plus ou moins passionnés du Verbe... des transformations de la pensée dans la voix qui est le toucher par lequel l'âme agit le plus spontanément, décourent les miracles de l'éloquence et les célestes enchantements de la musique

vocal. La parole n'est-elle pas, en quelque sort, la démarche du coeur et du cerveau?'

³² 'La Démarche étant prise comme l'expression des mouvements corporels, et la Voix comme celle des mouvements intellectuels, il me parut impossible de faire mentir le mouvement.'

³³ 'Tout mouvement saccade trahit un vice, ou une mauvaise éducation.'

³⁴ 'Il est prouvé, par les différentes autopses des personnes royales, que l'habitude de la représentation vicie le corps des princes; leur bassin se féminise.'

measured against empirical historical reality. Ideology is performative, and so is its critique—in this case, as elegance. Given the privileged position accorded Balzac by Marx in his explication of art's ability to function as a critique of ideology even despite itself, I am suggesting that we need to reevaluate the importance of the performative, as opposed to the simply denotative, in our understanding of ideology and its critique. In Balzac there is a clear aestheticization of politics – he choreographs social orders that are elegant but in so doing he recognizes the fundamental function of social cohesion performed by the aesthetic. Thus, the historical significance I accord his work is retrospective rather than causal. It is for the critic that he marks a break – a break that historians need to historicize and evaluate for its broader significance.

In what follows I will look at the interplay of performative and taxonomic approaches to gesture in the work of Balzac, and at the ways in which these approaches relate to each other. In essence, Balzac's move toward an aesthetic concern with deforming habit marks a methodological shift away from a reading of gesture and démarche as mimetic, semiotic, or reflective instants toward a concern with the epideictic or performative nature of gesture; a concern, that is, with what gestures enact rather than with what they represent. Moreover, I contend, the observation of physical 'habits' also reflects a concern with the automatization and decadence of gesture that had already set in early in the nineteenth century. This concern with 'habit' and its deleterious effects on human movement also forms the cornerstone of Bergson's theory of laughter, to which I now turn.

Notably, one of the central examples from Bergson's study is that of a pratfall observed in the street; 'A man, running along the street, stumbles and falls; the passersby burst out laughing. They would not laugh at him, I imagine, could they suppose that the whim had suddenly seized him to sit down on the ground. They laugh because his sitting down is involuntary. Consequently, it is not his sudden change of attitude that raises a laugh, but rather the involuntary element in this change, – his clumsiness, in fact'.³⁵ The example is paradigmatic of Bergson's theory of laughter in so many ways that we would do well to stand among the passersby and refrain, for a moment, from laughing. What important elements of a theory of laughter are exemplified in this passage, and how do they contribute to our examination of a social choreography dependent on a stumbling? We encounter, first, laughter at the man's predicament exemplifying an 'absence of feeling' [4] or that 'momentary anesthesia of the heart' [5] that Bergson sees at the heart of the comic. Contrary to theories of contagious kinaesthesia central to so much modern dance theory in the twentieth century, then, we see a community being produced through a curious anesthetic effect. Second, laughter is elicited here by a lapse of will. What remains to be seen, however, is whether the somatic eruption of laughter itself merely repeats or compensates for the failure of will on the part of the man who falls. Is laughter an intellectual or a somatic reflex, or both? Third, this lapse of will is itself seen as gauche or clumsy in physical terms. In fact, however, the gauche is always linked to the faux in Bergson's presentation, because all stumbling traduces a certain organic human nature. Fourth, those who laugh do so at the 'mechanical inelasticity' [10] of the man who cannot adapt to specific conditions and who therefore falls. Finally, the laughter of the passersby is itself, on the contrary, 'a living thing' [2], an irrepressible explosion of the vitality of the body. To this extent we might see this scenario of stumbling – fall and recovery – as descriptive of Balzac's retraction, only now the force of rebounding has been projected onto the collective: in the fall we see man's lapse into mechanical rigidity; in the laughter of the passersby the recuperation of vital collective energy. This is not an instance of one man falling but of a paradigmatic social stumble in which the collective is established as a recuperation from the fall. Laughter, we might say, is the mark of that Balzacian retraction that keeps us from the pratfalls' of the fool. But where, we might ask, is the community?

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³⁵ Henri Bergson, *Laughter: An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic*, trans. Cloudesley Brereton and Fred Rothwell (New York: Macmillan, 1911), 8-9 (hereafter cited in the text).

The ‘momentary anesthesia’ of Bergsonian laughter obviously challenges the kind of social order dreamt of in modern dance, with its grounding principle of kinesthetic, sympathetic movement. Indeed, the principle of anesthesia seems to call into question the fundamental viability of the social; for, in Bergson’s presentation, ‘comedy can only begin at the point where our neighbor’s personality ceases to affect us. It begins, in fact, with what might be called a growing callousness to social life’ (134). In essence, then, the comic plays a paradoxically socializing role while itself deriving from a certain antisocial (and somatic) impulse. Clearly, Bergson attempts here to parse out the gesture of the one who falls and the gesture of laughter itself as a response. He demands ‘unsociability in the performer and insensibility in the spectator’ (145). This presentation can all too easily be deconstructed, however; for it overlooks not only a certain sensibility of the laugher to the laughter of others, but also the social work performed by the one who falls and makes possible the community of laughers. The opposition of this model to a choreographic understanding of the social becomes manifest in the text of *Laughter* when Bergson notes how we need only ‘stop our ears in a room, where dancing is going on, for the dancers at once to appear ridiculous’ (5). Here is neither the bodily communication of kinesthesia nor the all-encompassing order of the Schillerian dance: social order as understood through a community of laughter is a critical construct: ‘Its appeal is to intelligence, pure and simple’ (5). ‘This intelligence’, Bergson observes, ‘must always remain in touch with other intelligences’ (5). The man who finds dancing ridiculous because he has shut his ears to the beat, or *Taht*, of those around him is not necessarily empowered to laugh: ‘You would hardly appreciate the comic if you felt yourself isolated from others’ (5). This community, we should note, depends on a paradoxical state of being ‘in touch’ with others – even in our isolation the fantasy of an immediate pregestural social order persists.

Laughter, needs community, then, but it also grounds it. If this is true, and if ‘the comic does not exist outside of what is strictly human’ (3), then we must conclude that Bergson’s conception of the human is essentially social. ‘Several have defined man as “an animal which laughs”,’ observes Bergson, ‘they might equally well have defined him as an animal which is laughed at’ (3-4). The man who falls in fact performs vital human labor just as do those who laugh at him. It would appear, then, that any isolation of the forces of retraction and social recovery on the side of those who laugh is premature. Here we begin to encounter certain problems. For while Bergson justifies the preceding statement by insisting that ‘if any other animal, or some lifeless object, produces the same effect, it is always because of some resemblance to man’ (4), he also insists that what we laugh at is a lapse of will and a reduction of man to a mechanical level beneath that of humanity (see the second and fourth points above). So, do we laugh at things and animals because they remind us of people, or do we laugh at people because they remind us of things and animals? Bergson’s anthropological binaries begin to blur.

Consider the notion that the man who falls does so through a mechanical habit. Bergson will use the example of a man whose routine is upset by a practical joke, whose chair has been moved slightly and who falls over because his body memory is stuck in the old patterns.³⁶ First, we should note with regard to the victim of the joke that his gaucheness is a sign of intellectual operation at the level of the body: the body does what it thinks is right. It thinks, but thinks wrongly. The body merely thinks that it thinks, one might say – whereas in fact we are merely encountering that Balzacian *habitude* that is at the root of all gauche actions. Bodily gaucheness is a form of intellectual laziness or ideology. But is it the falseness of *what* the body (wrongly) thinks or the gaucheness implicit in the fact *that* it thinks that forms the basis of the comic? Bergson argues that ‘a comic character is generally comic in proportion to his ignorance of himself. The comic person is un-

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³⁶ There is also an interesting example of this sort in Balzac’s *Théorie*. He describes a practical joke where, as a child, he watched his sister pick up a box in which he normally stored heavy coins, but which he had removed unbeknownst to her. His sister exerts a force to lift the box and finds herself tumbling backward because it is now so light. While he links this practical joke to ‘the chaste and pure sentiment I felt

for my sister’ [‘le chaste et pur sentiment que j’avais pour ma soeur’] (30), he nevertheless follows it up with another example from which he draws the following moral: ‘I compared the voyager to the jug full of water that a curious girl was carrying back from the fountain. Busy looking at a window, she is jostled in passing and spills a splash of water. This vague comparison expressed in broad terms the ex-

penditure of vital fluid that this man seemed to have made for nothing’ [‘Je comparais le voyageur à la cruche pleine d’eau qu’une fille curieuse rapporte de la fontaine. Elle s’occupe à regarder une fenêtre, reçoit une secousse en passant, et laisse perdre une lame d’eau. Cette comparaison vague exprimait grossièrement la dépense de fluide vital que cet homme me parut avoir faite en pure perte’] (3132). The

conscious’ (16). By contrast, the laughter of the passersby is both a recuperative vital force and ‘intelligence pure and simple’. For all the irrationalism of Bergson’s vitalism, *Laughter* in fact attempts to isolate a purely rational instance in social interaction. It is not only he who falls who becomes complicated: those who laugh are equally complex. Clearly the attempt to parse out conscious and unconscious across the two terms of the joke – those who laugh and those who are laughed at – is very reassuring. Nevertheless this attempt consistently fails: For to what extent is the laughter itself voluntary? Its very vitality springs from its ability to bypass the regimen of individual will. In many ways laughter is itself as mechanical as the man who falls.

Man becomes risible through his functioning as a machine, through mechanistic repetitions that invoke the brainless operation of a machine. But likewise, ‘laughter appears to stand in need of an echo’ (5); it inaugurates a mimesis rather than being an unrepeatable and unique eruption of the body. Laughter too is caught in a logic of repetition and mimesis – no less than the butt of the joke: ‘It is not an articulate, clear, well-defined sound; it is something which would fain be prolonged by reverberating from one to another, something beginning with a crash’ (6). There is something mechanistic and reiterative in the very enunciation of a laughter that Bergson would like to present as a sort of somatic commonsense: ha ha ha. Laughter is a form of sonic stumble. It is stuck in a repetition that is not yet articulation, but is—for Bergson at least—nevertheless human. At the conclusion of the book he will finally acknowledge this mechanistic element of laughter—supposedly itself the recuperation of the mechanistic. ‘Laughter’, he writes, ‘is simply the result of a mechanism set up in us by nature or, what is almost the same thing, by our long acquaintance with social life. It goes off spontaneously and returns tit for tat’ (198). This linkage of the machinic and the spontaneous indicates a new phase of vitalism passing over into ‘techno-logy’.

Laughter, then, reveals the mechanisms at the very heart of the human, debunking the organicist tendencies of Bergson’s vitalism. Moreover, the group formation necessary to laughter vitiates another of his crucial distinctions. Laughter is infectious in an almost literal sense – it is communicated from body to body: ‘How’, Bergson asks, ‘should it come about that this particular logical relation, as soon as it is perceived, contracts, expands and shakes our limbs, whilst all other relations leave the body unaffected?’ (7). When we laugh we do not, in fact, raise ourselves to the level of pure contemplative intellect but rather yield to a physical reflex passed on by the bodies of others. If we recall (from Rousseau) that gesture is inaugurated at the precise point when bodies can no longer directly communicate with each other by touch, this logic of contagion acquires an ideological significance: it articulates a quasi-pathological fantasy of immanent bodily community.

To maintain this image of laughter as a contagion, we might better describe it as an inoculation – the entry of the organic into an intellectual and social structure that was itself in danger of becoming mechanistic by its own rigor. To this extent, then, Bergson might be seen as radicalizing the tradition of Balzacian skepticism toward the taxonomic zeal of science. Whereas Balzac pokes fun at the taxonomic, cataloging zeal of the Enlightenment – which could happily embrace the organic world – Bergson’s view is more Manichaeic here. The rigor of taxonomy has been overtaken by the rigidity of the machine. What is at stake, of course, is the question of social order: organic or mechanistic? Where Bergson has traditionally been ranged alongside the organicists, we need to be sensitive to the mechanistic tropes that undercut his scheme of laughter at mere machines. Where his model of rationality itself seems to become mechanistic and closed, however, it too stumbles and becomes susceptible to the organic and bodily contagion of laughter.

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oddly out-of-place remark regarding his own chaste sentiments for his sister is thrown into doubt by this description of the casual expenditure of ‘vital fluids’.

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This idea of laughter as inoculation is exemplified in *Laughter* by the rituals of the circus. The simplicity of Bergson's presentation of a theatricalized pratfall is only apparently simple. In aestheticizing the stumbling man on the street into the schtick of a circus clown, Bergson writes: 'The first time, the clowns came and went, collided, fell and jumped up again in a uniformly accelerated rhythm, visibly intent upon affecting a *crescendo*. And it was more and more to the jumping up again, the *rebound*, that the attention of the public was attracted' (58-59). It is no longer the very act of falling down that is comic in its implicit inflexibility and intractability; now it is the act of (social) rebounding (or Balzacian retraction) that has become the source of laughter. The mechanistic and automatic impulse that always lies at the heart of the comic here presents itself not in the pratfall itself, but in a mechanistic and ritualistic self-righting that is at the root of the comic. The 'rebound' of the clown mimes the rebound of vital energies that is itself enacted by social laughter: in laughter, a social intelligence also 'bounces back'. In effect, the audience laughs at the embodiment and enactment of its own strategy of laughter; it sees in the clown's rebound the image of its own rebounding through laughter. And it laughs. Because bourgeois society cannot admit that something is wrong – that people keep falling – it has to keep them mechanically bouncing back as if full of life.

Given that Bergson has taken laughter as a distinguishing feature of mankind, he quite rightly questions the suitability of the examples he has just given (the man who slips and the man who forgot that his chair had been moved) for 'in both cases the result has been brought about by external circumstance. The comic is therefore accidental: it remains so to speak, in superficial contact with the person' (10). He does not draw the radical conclusion of Adorno, for whom stumbling is paradigmatically funny because it reveals that man himself is accidental: that there is, in fact, no human essence. Instead, Bergson retains the traditional distinction of essence and accident to ask of this superficial comic element: 'How is it to penetrate within?' (10). He suggests imagining 'a certain inborn lack of elasticity of both senses and intelligence' (11). He pictures this lack as a lag in tempo – a kind of syncopation – and asks us to 'imagine a mind always thinking of what it has just done and never of what it is doing, like a song which lags behind its accompaniment' (11). He then acknowledges that 'in one sense it might be said that all *character* is comic, provided we mean by character the *ready-made* element in our personality, that mechanical element which resembles a piece of clockwork wound up once and for all and capable of working automatically. It is, if you will, that which causes us to imitate ourselves' (150). That which resists is the comic – 'all character is comic'. In a reversal of the Enlightenment trope of the subject standing on his own two feet – learning to walk – all centeredness, all character, is now suspected of rigidity and eccentricity. All character is now strictly mimetic (if only of itself). As we shall see when we move on to consider the popularization of Delsarte, what is demanded in place of this mechanical body is a new flexibility or elasticity – a fungibility that acts as the physical and mental identity structure corresponding to the conditions of exchangeable labor power.

What we seem to be confronting, then, is Agamben's scenario of a body unable to master its own movements. From the perspective of social modernization, however, this failure of the body is not to be understood as something unfortunate but rather as a necessary surrender of autonomy. The derisive laughter that stumbling evokes should not be understood as an irrepressible explosion of the vital, as Bergson would have us believe, but as a mechanistic, mimetic, and quasi-ritualistic iteration: ha ha ha. 'The attitudes, gestures and movements of the human body are laughable in exact proportion as that body reminds us of a mere machine' (31). In broader terms, this brings us to the conclusion that the very notion of the gesture has itself become problematic and risible insofar as significant gesture might be presumed to maintain some pretense

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to autonomy. What Bergson corrects in a laughter that might more properly be called derision is a lack of the 'flexibility' deriving from the *élan vital*. Flexibility, however, does not betoken 'character' but rather its lack. It is not a spiritual state or an amalgam of skills but a merely physical condition. Thus, habitude – of which any character might consist – is encountered merely as a restraint on flexibility. The Balzacian formulations have been retained, but to quite different ends: whereas for Balzac habitude connoted a deforming physical action that hampered the development of a character displayed by physical elegance, for Bergson habitude in fact betokens character – yet for this reason it is equally to be renounced.

If we think of the movement from Balzac's promenade – already problematic and dependent on an aestheticization that seemed to recognize its precariousness – through Tourette's analysis we confront a fact that seems to sit uneasily with the implicit Bergsonian analysis of community. For Bergson, remember, 'tension and elasticity are two forces, mutually complementary, which life brings into play ... Society will therefore be suspicious of all inelasticity of character, of mind, and even of body, because it is the possible sign of a slumbering activity as well as of an activity with separatist tendencies, that inclines to swerve from the common centre round which society gravitates: in short, because it is the sign of an eccentricity' (19). In such a configuration, Tourettism seems a particularly overdetermined historical syndrome. It figures that play of tension and elasticity that has become the very spring of Bergsonian social order. The tics of Tourettism are but one side of the coin, however. The demand for 'elasticity' as a physical as well as spiritual condition provides us with an interesting backdrop for reading the growth of gymnastics and physical culture at the end of the century. Whereas the *Körperkultur* tradition of naturism and gymnastic dance would see in rhythmical movement the free play of a centered and self-centering subject – elegant in Balzac's terms – a Bergsonian reading allows us to understand how the privileging of rhythm and elasticity in fact reflected an antihumanist agenda. Rather than reading flexibility and elasticity as the virtues and competences of a centered subject, we might also read them as foreclosing that minimal fixation or habitude constitutive of character. In such a reading, the demand for flexibility would approximate Arendt's condition of labor rather than the agonistic inter subjectivity of action or the objectivity of work.

What I wish to indicate in this movement from Rousseau through Balzac to Bergson is a degeneration in the course of the nineteenth century from the social ideal of action to the minimal gesture and, finally, to the loss of gesture and a new ideology of mere 'flexibility'. This degeneration traces the collapse of an ideal of immanent community, the subsequent emergence of a strictly codified bourgeois subject capable of constructing and manifesting itself 'aesthetically' through gesture, and the eventual somatization of that individual body to a condition of mere potentiality. To reiterate the terms employed in chapter 1, what we observe is the emergence of Marsyas as a prototypical postsubjective model of embodiment. As Bergson notes, even in the gesture – that seeming last retreat of the autonomous body as it seeks to articulate itself within and against a collective: '[society] is confronted with something that makes it uneasy, but only as a symptom – scarcely a threat, at the very most, a gesture. A gesture, therefore, will be its reply. Laughter must be something of this kind, a sort of *social gesture*' (20). Gestures threaten the hegemony of any universal schema of social legibility, for they mark either the last idiosyncratic retreat of the embattled subject or, as gesticulation, the demise of that subject (Agamben's Tourettism) and the loss of any referent to which the gesture might refer. And yet, in Bergson's presentation, society itself responds through a gesture reduced to the level of ritual: laughter. In moving now from Bergson to Delsarte – whose immensely popular exercises reinstated the taxonomic project mocked by Balzac – I wish to indicate a process whereby a regimen of bourgeois subjectivity was reconstructed through the rendering legible of gesture.

What I will suggest is that both Bergson's and Delsarte's reworkings of stumbling typify a return to a 'physiognomic' way of understanding the body's actions. Now, however, the displacement of reading from the face and skull (as in Lavater) onto the entire body betokens a move into the parapractical, into the reading of bodies by their slips, Action has been reduced to the parapractical. As Bergson notes in an absolutely key passage:

Instead of concentrating our attention on actions, comedy directs it rather to gestures. By gestures we here mean the attitudes, the movements and even the language by which a mental state expresses itself outwardly without any aim or profit, from no other cause than a kind of inner itching. Gesture, thus defined, is profoundly different from action. Action is intentional or, at any rate, conscious; gesture slips out unawares, it is automatic. In action, the entire person is engaged; in gesture, an isolated part of the person is expressed, unknown to, or at least apart from, the whole of the personality. (144)

In other words, the gesture necessarily problematizes the political and social ideal of action deriving from Arendt. The slippage from action to gesture is a movement from intention to automation – the sign of a new 'technocracy'. A gesture that was legible – physiognomically, in the eighteenth-century tradition – bespoke the persistence of a subject. If stumbling is to be understood as the debacle of the gesture – the fall out of action into gesture as a mode of bodily experience – we face two possibilities. Either the gesture is to be read counterintentionally, as parapraxis; or we need to examine the possibility of a loss of gesture – a complicated spastic body – in which the hegemony of the social is figured by a return to the somatic. Moreover, if we are to see in the nineteenth century's obsession with gesture and its composition an anxiety regarding the possibility of reading and constructing subjects from their signs, we need also to ask what it means for this parapractical, antiintentional notion of gesture to be resubsumed under a system of legibility and interpretation in the Freudian system. What is the difference between Bergson's observation that 'inadvertently to say or do what we have no intention of saying or doing, as a result of inelasticity or momentum, is, as we are aware, one of the main sources of the comic' (112), and Freud's reevaluation according to which we do at the unconscious level 'intend' and signify by such lapses? Could it be that the very system of analysis that seemed to undermine the rational bourgeois subject (psychoanalysis) in fact restituted a system of legibility (a distant relative of Lavater's physiognomy) that refers back to a subject, even after thinkers such as Balzac more radically undercut any such restitution? And if so, is Freud not more closely linked than one might think to such contemporaries as Lombroso and Nordau, who extended such systems of legibility to bodies that seemed, through their stumblings, to have become increasingly illegible?

In tracing the persistence of an epistemology of legibility with regard to the body in the late nineteenth century, few figures can be as important as Delsarte. A failed actor who dedicated his life to cataloging the rhetorical gestures of the body, Delsarte wavered between the taxonomic zeal of an encyclopedic rationalist and the irrational metaphysics of Swedenborg. Although he never collected his thoughts in a definitive work, his system was picked up eagerly by devotees in both Europe and America and made the basis of a series of practical and pragmatic exercises that effectively reduced him to the status of the Dale Carnegie of the nineteenth century. Delsarte's 'system' fuses the vitalist and the taxonomic aspects of the nineteenth century's concern with gesture. Many of his supporters and popularizers—particularly in America, where his practical exercises were stressed – accepted that the spiritual pretensions of the system were little more than mystical mumbo jumbo, identifying affinities and homologies across completely unrelated phenomena, from the smallest gesture to the movements of the cosmos. At another level, however – and particularly in

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its more popular forms – Delsartism served as a dictionary for the reading and writing of bodily signs. Not unlike vulgar attempts to codify Freud in terms of phallic symbols and dreambooks, Delsarte's system too was often reduced to a primer for reading – and, more importantly, writing – the body. Delsartism offered an etiquette in every sense of the word, both a labeling and an ethos for a class seeking to naturalize its cultural hegemony through its very physical comportment.

That these two extremes – the mystical-arcane and the literal-mundane – should be produced by one system, however, should not surprise us. By the end of the nineteenth century the ideology of legibility had itself become a crucial metaphysical underpinning of social interaction. Through reading signs, it was assumed, some origin – some subject, intentional or otherwise – could be reconstructed. What Delsarte retains from the physiognomic tradition I have rather simplistically identified here with Lavater and the eighteenth century is a method of reading moral and spiritual qualities from the body – this despite the historical break with physiognomy marked by Balzac's 'Theorie de la démarche', which ironically replaced pseudoscientific rigor with aesthetic elegance. Balzac presented the subject as a cultural construct, an elegant and gestural entity recuperated from an original, and literal, social stumble or faux pas. What Delsarte offers instead is the possible reconciliation of a radically constructivist notion of identity (for the first time, a model of reading the body would also serve as a primer for writing it; that is, for simulating affect rather than interpreting it) and a centered metaphysics (in which the missing core of the humanist subject is supplemented by references to a cosmic order).³⁷

On one level, then, it is possible to reduce Delsarte to a 'how to' of oratory and self-presentation, and this possibility clearly goes a long way in explaining his popular posthumous success. In an American study from 1889, *An Hour with Delsarte: A Study of Expression*, Anna Morgan warns: 'Has it ever occurred to us that we are constantly creating impressions by our unconscious expressions, and in consequence are possibly being judged sickly, weak, conceited, vain, or vulgar? People form their estimates of our character, not necessarily through our language, for perhaps they have never heard us speak, nor through the expression of our faces alone, but through the bearing of our entire bodies... This is not to be wondered at when we consider that the body is but the outward symbol of the development of the real or inner self'.³⁸ Worth noting here is the retention of what I have been calling the physiognomic model of reading the body; Morgan's recourse to the notion 'that the body is but the outward symbol of the development of the real or inner self'. Notably, however, it is no longer the face, the traditional bodily repository of the subject, that is to be read but rather the entire body. Even if Morgan quotes Addison's adage that 'a man's speech is much more easily disguised than his countenance' (52), it is not just faces that will be read. The model of reading, moreover, is parapractical; the will controls neither the signals being sent nor the codes within which those signals will be read. The function of art, therefore – and of the Delsarte exercises – is to reinsert some notion of intentionality into the reading of the body and to avoid misreadings.

The central paradox of Delsartism, of course, lies in its codification of a putatively natural language and the resultant exposure of that language to artifice: once we reduce 'nature' to a series of legible signs, we can counterfeit more effectively. A system that is supposed to unlock the deepest secrets of (human) nature through a homology of spiritual and physical attributes now in fact serves an upwardly mobile social class as a handbook on how to fake it. Thus there is a deliciously Wildean – yet unintended – cynicism to Anna Morgan's observation that 'all gesture, to be natural, must be unconscious, or seem to be so' (62). If everyone knows such and such a gesture connotes such and such a sentiment, it becomes possible to feign

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³⁷ It is interesting to note that during a stay in New York, Wilde studied quite intensively with Steele Machay, Delsarte's primary proselytizer. Delsarte is equally important as a theorist of 'posing'.

³⁸ Anna Morgan, *An Hour with Delsarte: A Study of Expression* (Boston: Lee and Shepard, 1889), 11.

and dissemble sentiments through bodily manipulation. Morgan's troubling warning is thus highly ambiguous. If people do, indeed, judge me as 'weak, conceited, vain, and vulgar' – and the implication, of course, is that I am really none of these things but just appear to be through bad posture – how is it possible that these readings are, in fact, misreadings? We are faced with two models of reading: the parapractical and what we might call 'the corrective'. Either people judge us 'weak, conceited, vain, and vulgar' because the body cannot lie (although we might seek to hide such qualities even from ourselves); or they judge us so because the body is sending the wrong signs.

If we allow the possibility – implicit in Delsartism – that the body is sending the wrong signals, the whole physiognomic system of homology is broken down and the ideology of natural language is revealed as fantasy. In this sense, then, Delsartism needs to be seen as a resistance to the model of parapraxis: there is no hidden self revealed against one's will, but merely a failure of the will to communicate properly in bodily terms. The opacity of the signifier – the body – distorts social communication. A study of Delsarte serves as a prophylactic or corrective. Thus, Delsarte performs a double ideological function in the narrative I present here: at one and the same time he recognizes the failings of the 'physiognomic' epistemology while seeking to reinstate it across the entirety of the body. An insistence on the possibility of reading – even if it is only a complaint about ubiquitous misreadings of our body by society – seems even more important than the accuracy of the readings. Thus, a subject reemerges in a kind of Barthesian 'author effect' as the putative origin of the bodily text.

In fact, though, Delsarte himself – unlike his commonsensical American devotees – was less than confident that bodily meaning could be traced back to any individual, intentional, authorial subject. As opposed to the didacticism of American Delsartism, the mysticism of Delsarte's own pronouncements offers a second solution to the central paradox: if the body is unable to lie, why is it saying such unpleasant (and, implicitly, untrue) things about me? Rather than reading gesture as the semiotic of an intentional subject, Delsarte derives meaning not from an intentional subject but from a higher being. To push an analogy, where Tourette sees physiological loss of control Delsarte sees a form of spiritual possession. Apparent parapraxis signifies a higher intentionality working through the body. 'What is human reason, that faculty at once of so little avail and yet so precious?' he asks. 'The answer', he concludes, 'must spring from the study of the phenomena of instinct... If these phenomena are directed by a physiological or a spiritual necessity, a necessity on which instinct is based, I am forced to admit, here, a reason that is not my reason; a superior, infallible reason in the disposition of things; a reason that laughs at my reason, which, in spite of itself, must subsist under pain of falling into absurdity.'³⁹ In other words, misinterpretations arise by virtue of the individual's failure to master a kind of transcendental semiotic that occupies a space both higher than its own empirical subjectivity and more fundamental than its distorted experience of its own body. What I am proposing is that Delsartism marks a failed attempt to make sense of the body by forcing gesture to signify; by grafting onto the body (physiognomic) models of reading. This quest for meaning, however, bypasses the category of the intentional subject to imply a direct link between body and spirit that transcends the intellect. Where Delsarte differs from an analysis of parapraxis, however, is in his refusal to read against the category of the subject and in his displacement of intention into an external objective realm. Building on precisely the parapraxes that seem to beset all gesture, Delsarte posits a more all-embracing metaphysical reasoning in which any absence of meaning can be recuperated.

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³⁹ François Delsarte, *Delsarte System of Oratory*, 4th ed. (New York: Edgar Werner, 1893), 392.

What trace do we find of such a reason? It is a divine yet derisive Bergsonian 'reason that laughs at my reason'. Laughter serves, as it did in Bergson, to figure intellect. Whereas intellect was folded into biological reflex in Bergson, however, in Delsarte it has become transcendental. Nevertheless, it is not difficult to locate in Delsarte's system social imperatives entirely consonant with Bergson's humiliating social model. As if anachronistically versed in Bergson, early popularizers of Delsarte in the United States made the question of elasticity – as a spiritual as well as a physical virtue – the basis of their concerns. Elasticity, we may conjecture, is precisely that power of retraction that can be proven at the moment of stumbling, as well as a capacity for the abstraction of psychic and physical labor. In *An Hour with Delsarte*, Morgan observes how, 'thanks to the genius of Delsarte, we are in possession of means whereby we may obtain muscular strength, but not at the expense of flexibility, which is the basis of grace. He has given us a perfect method by which we may not only obtain freedom and elasticity of action, but one which adds force and meaning to our every moment. It frees the body from all restrictions, and renders it as it should be, – subservient to its master, the will' (8). Morgan superimposes aesthetic and productivist discourses in her concern for pairing muscular strength with flexibility. It is flexibility and 'grace' – a fusion of aesthetic and religious qualities – that Delsarte offers as a supplement to the brute strength of the body.⁴⁰ Contrasted with the metaphysical vagaries of Delsarte's own sparse writings, Morgan's presentation is most notable, however, for its commonsensical American reinroduction of the will as the origin of expressive gesture. By reinserting notions of intentionality and personal agency missing from Delsarte himself, Morgan effectively makes of the body a means for the production of a subject. Her linkage of 'force and meaning', meanwhile, tacitly recognizes meaning itself as the cultural force productive of those subjects.

In Morgan's digest of Delsarte, the body becomes a proving ground for both class and race distinctions to the same degree that the physical becomes the primary trope for the intellectual. Thus, she argues that 'muscular flexibility is found in its greatest perfection among intellectual people; and as the intellectual fibre becomes coarse in quality, so the muscles lose their delicacy, and as the muscles gain in mere physical force, they lose in temperamental or flexible strength' (46). The introduction of the category of flexibility is coterminous with an aestheticization of the social order. This privileging of flexibility over muscle reflects both industrial society's need for more fungible workers and fears about the dwindling muscularity of a postpioneer population. Not surprisingly, this aestheticization of the social order is underpinned by a healthy dose of racism: 'As we said of the limbs in the chapter on the vital division of the body, that they attain the greatest perfection of physical strength among the inferior races of men, so in the highly sensitive organisms of the more advanced races, as the quality of the material becomes finer and the quantity is lessened, there is a gradual development toward the perfection of flexible strength' (46). Note the implicit fear that the inferior races are more vital: mental refinement seems necessarily linked to a 'lessening' of quantitative vitality and to an increased 'flexibility'. Beauty and proportion are still white, for the idea that force and vitality are in themselves beautiful has not yet fully taken hold of aesthetic thought. What, then, are we to make of Morgan's assertion that 'as man becomes civilized and refined there is a greater freedom in the movements of the arms and legs, showing a blending of the mental and emotional natures in man' (38)? Has the very ideal of social choreography become a (white) refinement of the dwindling vital force in this American context?

Time and again, the aesthetic and the sociological aspects of flexibility are intertwined in Morgan's presentation, the aesthetic discourse serving to legitimate the social demand for flexibility. Chapter 3 of her

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⁴⁰ It might be interesting to trace the movements of 'grace' between its aesthetic and its religious connotations in nineteenth-century discourses of the body; see T. Jackson Lears, *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture, 1880-1920* (New York: Pantheon, 1981). One should also note the element of muscularity that Morgan does not simply reject and that subsequently

forms the basis of popular American 'muscular Christianity'.

study – ‘Plea for Flexibility’ – argues that ‘we must free the body from the stiffness of individuality by yielding it up to the claims of universality. We must break down error before we can build up truth. This object is attained in physical training by surrendering the body to the discipline of an aesthetic gymnastic drilling’ (15-16). Freedom has come to mean the surrender of individuality to ‘aesthetic gymnastic drilling’. As in Bergson, individuality is experienced only as a disabling ‘stiffness’. Meanwhile, the criterion of ‘error’ and ‘truth’ has been conflated with that of bodily grace in a manner entirely opposed to Balzac’s paradigmatic distinction between the faux and the gauche. Whereas Balzac’s turn to the aesthetic served to destabilize scientific certainties, positive truth claims now reenter the aesthetic realm. Science and art collaborate in shoring up the subject.

The question finally boils down to issues of literacy and legibility: the notion of being read and who gets to read whom. On the one hand Morgan posits a natural language of gesture, claiming that ‘gesture is the language of nature, and it is comprehensible to people of every tongue; whereas their different forms of speech must be laboriously learned before they can be employed or understood’ (58). At the same time, however, she envisages the production of art in terms of genius and a necessary servility to the will of the great man. It is not fanciful, I think, to see the appeal of Delsartism – with all its contradictions – to the specific situation of late-nineteenth-century America. In the land of the melting pot the idea of a universal bodily language is clearly attractive, while at the same time posing a threat to the privilege of the literate classes. We all speak different languages but maybe there is one universal language of the body that would be democratic.⁴¹ In the writings of figures such as Lombroso and Nordau – who sought to harness the physiognomic structure of homology derived from Lavater to the pseudosciences of eugenics and social Darwinism – it was primarily a question of reading the criminal classes. In America there arises now the frightening Utopia of a universal legibility. The universal code is everywhere and nowhere – for there is, finally, no subject as referent outside the regime of legibility itself.

In Morgan this has become the possibility of panopticism: what if one were always being read; if every gesture could be read without our knowledge or volition? As a system, Delsartism may have originated in observations and interpretations of gesture – in ‘reading’ – but as a practice it was obsessed, instead, with being read or more precisely, being misread. ‘The pupil’s attention’, Morgan writes, ‘should be directed to the study of himself as the first step to a knowledge of others, and an assistance to him in observing nature and studying art’ (10), for ‘the most gifted among us must learn to know himself’ (111). Social existence becomes a form of proofreading, correcting the bodily errors that might obscure our legibility. Morgan’s bodies have to be readers and writers at the same time, for fear that the signs be unclear or open to misinterpretation: ‘The study of the attitudes of the head and those of all parts of the body, especially the various expressions of the eye, nose and mouth, should be carefully practiced before a mirror. Most people consult their mirrors for the single purpose of seeing their attractiveness; we should study them for the purpose of seeing ourselves as others see us’ (97-98). This imposition of the task of self-reading means that in a literate democracy self-alienation is inevitable insofar as individuals are obliged to become the first readers of their own bodily texts in order to police the possibilities of their interpretations. Moreover, this regime of reading – for fear of being misread – is explicitly opposed to an alternative aesthetic concern with ‘attractiveness’. Balzac’s ironically scientific treatise on elegance has now shed all irony and, as Delsarte himself proclaims, ‘aesthetics, henceforward disengaged from all conjecture, will truly be constituted under the severe forms of a positive science’ (57). The distinct epistemologies of the faux and the gauche will now merge: performance and textuality become one.

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⁴¹ This notion is, of course, encountered repeatedly in eighteenth-century reflections on gesture and the origins of language. In his entry on gesture for the *Encyclopédie, de Cahusac* affirms that ‘gesture is and always will be the language of every nation’ [‘le geste est et sera toujours le langage de toutes les nations’], *Encyclopédie* (Neufchâtel: Samuel Fauche, 1765), 7: 651.

While it is not my aim to enter into the metaphysics of Delsartism, arcane as it is, it is nevertheless important to note the way in which the central value in his system is ascribed to ‘Being’, which is described by Anna Morgan as a synthesis of ‘the soul and body’. Being needs to be understood as an indivisible vital unit rather than as a simple reconciliation of the traditional metaphysical binaries of body and soul. It is through a consideration of semiosis that Morgan effects this shift. Describing the study of Delsarte as the study of ‘expression’, she goes on to conclude that expression is ‘the Sign of the Being’. By way of example, and as an introduction to Delsarte’s triune system of vital, emotive, and mental forces, Morgan offers the following as examples of signs: the response to a question (mental sign); the cry of pain at being pricked with a pin (vital sign); and the cry of grief at learning bad news (emotive sign). To demonstrate the importance of the unity of body and soul in the definition of the sign, she points out that a dead body, when pricked, will not cry out because it lacks Being. Being, then, is a category that anticipates Bergsonian vitalism.

It is notable that all of Morgan’s examples of sign appear, at first glance, to be indexical in the Peircean sense – each of them caused by the thing of which they are the sign. But in fact the signified of the answer is not the question; nor is the signified of the cry the pinprick. Morgan is quite precise when she argues that expression is ‘the Sign of the Being’, for what her examples signify is the fact that the body is a signifying medium. It is only the body as a conductor of spiritual or physical stimuli that makes such signs possible. ‘Being’ is the ability to produce signs – no more, no less. In describing her pedagogical method Morgan reconstructs a conversation with a pupil: ‘Now, then, we have said that expression is a sign of the being. I will ask you, Mr. B., to exemplify or apply that definition in your own person by some action’. Mr. B. reflects an instant, during an impressive silence, and then admits that he is unable to do so, at the same time shifting in his seat and crossing his legs with embarrassment in his manner.

‘Why did you shift so in your seat and cross your legs when you replied?’

‘Well’, he continues, more confused than ever, ‘I scarcely know; I suppose it’s because I was a little nervous’.

‘Exactly, because you were a little nervous; you are not in the habit, I see, of analyzing these signs of your being; you answered my question unconsciously’. (35)

Whereas a reading of this exchange as a parapraxis would assume that there was something the student wished to hide – either from himself or from his teacher – for Morgan the body simply wishes to keep open dialog even when the intellect is incapable of providing the required response. The student ‘scarcely knows’ but comes to know through a reading of his own body.

Morgan’s work represented a first wave of Delsartism in America, deriving from the work of Steele Mackay who not only came to dominate the reception and propagation of Delsarte’s work on that continent but who was, in fact, the first truly to systematize the master’s work. To locate the Delsartian inheritance in a distinctly American social choreography, however, would require examining the writings and teaching of Genevieve Stebbins. In reading her work the *Delsarte System of Expression* one is immediately struck by the simplifications that have taken place, even when compared to Morgan’s presentation of Delsarte. Now, the value of Delsartism has been isolated: ‘There are two sides only to Delsarte’s System, in spite of the fact that he built everything upon threes. These are the physical and the metaphysical. One is practical and valuable; the other is of doubtful use to any but the lover of metaphysical abstractions’.⁴² The concept of Being that, despite its nebulousness, made Morgan’s work so interesting has been displaced by precisely the metaphysical binarisms that Delsartism otherwise sought to undo. Moreover, if we recall the epistemological uncertainty

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⁴² Genevieve Stebbins, *Delsarte System of Expression*, 6th ed. (New York: Dance Horizons, 1977 [1902]), 381 (hereafter cited in the text). It was Stebbins who was to prove most influential for the direction of modern dance in the United States and who most directly transmitted the work of Delsarte to a generation of dance pioneers. On Stebbins, see Nancy Lee Chalfa Ruyter, ‘The Intellectual World of Ge-

nevieve Stebbins’, *Dance Chronicle*, Vol. 11, No. 3 (1988): 381–97.

deriving from Balzac's balancing act between the scientist and the madman, in the work of Stebbins – the most influential popularizer of Delsarte and the most directly engaged in reflections on dance that helped shape the work of early modern dance pioneers – this ambiguity has been definitively resolved; 'This is an age of formulation. What Comte has done for exact science, Buckle and Mill for history, Spencer for culture, and Ruskin for painting, Delsarte has tried to do for action, for expression. It is as though the world, growing weary of productive activity, sought to pause and rearrange before plunging into further depths' (75). In the history of the propagation of Delsartism, we see here a culture 'weary of productive activity', shunning the performative to set down a textual ledger of bodily gesture.

Particularly sensitive to the charge that Delsartism is imprecise and mystificatory, Stebbins resorts to a positivism that discards the Swedenborgian hermeticism of most of Delsarte's own pronouncements. By establishing strict discursive parameters – science, history, culture, and the like – she effects a shift away from Delsarte's own anatomistic conception of science and sees the very principle of discursive rationalization itself as the principle of positivism. In other words, sociology becomes the paradigm of science insofar as it is capable of plotting the relations between other sciences. Stebbins reduces Delsarte to a physiognomic system of homology. Whereas Morgan's semiotic was essentially indexical in its presentation of signs caused by the things they represented, Stebbins is resolutely iconic in her insistence on transhistorical and transcendental homologies. For example, she 'credit[s] the French master with being the first in modern times to formulate a fixed principle or law that stands indisputable and unmovable in its triune manifestation in the art of human expression. This fixed principle is the great Law of Correspondance, a law almost as old as man... 'God created man in his own image'" (390). Precisely because it seeks to retain a notion of necessary causality while rejecting anything but what Althusser would subsequently call 'expressive causality', Stebbins's Delsartism has to posit a purely internal cause: the divine, or nature,⁴³ 'All outward forms being but manifestations of an internal cause, between which there was a co-necessity', she writes, there must be 'a perfect correspondence uniting cause and effect' (391). The stumble that in Balzac made apparent that power of retraction on which all elegance is based – and which in Bergson became the principle of flexibility – has now been replaced by a rigidified insistence on the 'fixed' and the 'unmovable'. What we have is a dialectical play between flexibility at the level of the social subject betokening a transcendent 'fixed principle' at the level of the transcendental subject; a coalescence, that is, of metaphysics and social fungibility.

Recalling Agamben's description of Tourettism as 'a movement... interrupted and sent awry by uncontrollable jerks and shudderings whereby the muscles seem to dance [chorea] quite independent of any motor purpose' (136), we begin, I think, to appreciate the historical significance of Delsartism. In effect, what we encounter at the end of the nineteenth century are coexistent stages in the decomposition of reading strategies. Dance, as chorea, figures a semiosis 'independent of any motor purpose' – in other words, arecognition of the 'nonmotivated' nature of the sign. At the same time, however, a symptomatic reading of Tourettism posits a causality that reestablishes both a somatic and a semiotic "motivation." Thus, any diagnosis of Tourettism effectively undercuts the philosophical and linguistic presuppositions of the condition itself. Stebbins, meanwhile, can be seen as moving in the opposite direction. Starting from a belief in expression as semiotically motivated – either as index ['cause and effect'] or as icon ['correspondence'] – her work of popularization and standardization nevertheless pushes the body in the direction of the non-motivated sign, the conventional symbol. It is, perhaps, Morgan – in a no man's land between the two – who retains the most interesting possibilities.

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⁴³ Althusser's distinctions between mechanical, expressive, and structural causality are most clearly delineated in the essay 'Marx's Immense Theoretical Revolution', in *Reading Capital*, ed. Louis Althusser et al., trans. Ben Brewster (London: New Left Books, 1970), 182–89.

Notably, in attempting to generate his semiotics by means of a physiological rather than sociological motor, Delsarte finally makes his breakthrough in the Paris morgue. 'Dead bodies only attracted me', he writes, with a rather necrophiliac turn of phrase, 'when they were – if not dissected – at least flayed' (401). In this presentation we reencounter, in all its paradoxicality, that Marsyan impulse outlined in our consideration of Ruskin, Morris, and Wilde. For Marsyas – now a flayed body on the mortuary slab – represents a liberation of vital human forces that are themselves destructive of any delimitable human subjectivity. If dissection is the most obvious image of an attack on the bodily integrity of the subject, then flaying – the laying bare of the body's vital and muscular motor – is no less destructive. One is reminded of the definition of touch from the *Encyclopédie* that serves as epigraph to this chapter. Touch is the sense that establishes us as something other than 'automatons that have been dismantled and destroyed'.⁴⁴ The skin – that which has been stripped from the flayed body – is the very organ of the tactile. At the point where vital forces are revered as mere principles rather than as embodied historical realities, respect for both bodies and subjects ceases.

For Delsarte, the possibility of reading bodies semiotically – and thereby of fathoming the vital nexus of 'motivation' – paradoxically exists only in the moment of death. 'I sought in some portion of the body, common to all', he explains, 'a form or sign invariably found in all... The hand furnished me that sign and responded fully to my question. I noticed, in fact, that in all these corpses the thumb exhibited a singular attitude... Such persistence in the same fact could not allow of a shadow of doubt; I possessed the sign-language of death, the semiotics of the dead' (404; italics mine). Delsarte's project of semiotics is grounded, finally, in the corpse. Conspicuously, the retraction that signified life in Balzac has here become a death spasm, an 'adduction or attraction inward' (404) of the thumb that he encounters in all corpses and that unlocks for him the complementary gestures of vitality. We have finally arrived at that moment in modernity where the most energetic and vital of movements resemble the final spasm or paroxysm of death. At the heart of Delsartian vitalism is a deathly semiotic. This extends to Delsarte himself as an observer at the morgue. Like the spectator of a Bergsonian pratfall, he avows that 'the emotion which such a sight would have caused me under any other circumstances was absolutely null at this moment; close attention dulled all feeling in me' (405). The meeting of the aesthetic investigator and the corpse of Marsyas dramatizes a lack of sensation, an absence of 'tact' – with only the retracted thumb as the signifier of a final deathly movement. At the end of the nineteenth century – before, that is, the point when vitalism had been popularized as a dominant philosophical and ideological current within modernity – Delsartism represented one effort to recontain bodily and semiotic instability – 'stumbling' – in a system that was itself nevertheless informed by vitalist presuppositions. As a social phenomenon Delsartism seeks both to celebrate and contain the semiotic profligacy of the body; to find immanent bodily meaning that can serve as the basis of a social textbook. Taking it as a primer for a new social 'flexibility', we need to note for the sake of political critique that its end and origin is the corpse.

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⁴⁴ 'Des automates, qu'on auroit démontés et détruits', Chevalier de Jaucourt, 'Le Tact', *Encyclopédie*, 15:819.

One must introduce in the diagnostic of our times, a kinetic and kinesthetic dimension because, without such a dimension, all discourse about modernity will completely bypass that which in modernity is most real.

(Sloterdijk 2000b: 27)

On 31 December 2000, the *New York Times* published an article by Senior Dance Editor Anna Kisselgoff titled ‘Partial to Balanchine, and a Lot of Built-In Down Time’, a review of the New York dance scene for the year that had just ended. At a certain point in her text Kisselgoff writes: ‘Stop and Go. Call it a trend or a tic, the increasing frequency of hiccupping sequences in choreography is impossible to ignore. Viewers interested in flow or a continuum of movement have been finding slim pickings in many premieres’. After listing some ‘hiccupping’ choreographers, which ranged from New York-based David Dorfman to (then) Frankfurt-based William Forsythe, Kisselgoff concludes: ‘It is all very ‘today.’ What about tomorrow?’ (Kisselgoff 2000: 6).

Perception of a hiccupping in choreographed movement produces critical anxiety; it is dance’s very future that appears menaced by the eruption of kinesthetic stuttering. Before a purposeful choreographic interruption of ‘flow or a continuum of movement’, the critic offers two possible readings: either those strategies can be dismissed as a ‘trend’ – thus cast as a limited epiphenomenon, an annoying ‘tic’ that does not deserve a too serious critical consideration; or they can be denounced, more seriously, as a threat – a threat to dance’s ‘tomorrow’, to dance’s capacity to smoothly reproduce itself into the future within its familiar parameters. This last perception – that the intrusion of stilling hiccups in contemporary choreography threatens dance’s own futurity – is of relevance to a discussion of some recent choreographic strategies where dance’s relation to movement is being exhausted. I suggest the perception of the stilling of movement as a threat to dance’s tomorrow indicates that any disrupting of dance’s flow – any choreographic questioning of dance’s identity as a *being-in-flow* – represents not just a localized disturbance of a critic’s capacity to enjoy dance, but, more relevantly, it performs a critical act of deep ontological impact. No wonder some perceive such an ontological convulsion as a betrayal: the betrayal of dance’s very essence and nature, of its signature, of its privileged domain. That is: the betrayal of the bind between dance and movement.

Any accusation of betrayal necessarily implies the reification and reaffirmation of certainties in regard to what constitutes the rules of the game, the right path, the correct posture, or the appropriate form of action. That is, any accusation of betrayal implies an ontological certainty charged with choreographic characteristics. In the case of contemporary dance’s putative betrayal, the accusation describes, reifies, and reproduces a whole ontology of dance that can be summarized as follows: dance ontologically imbricates itself with, is isomorphic to, movement. Only after accepting such grounding of dance on movement can one accuse certain contemporary choreographic practices of betraying dance.

It should be noted that such accusations of betrayal (and their implicit ontological reifications) are not confined to the realm of North American dance reviews. They emerge also in European courtrooms. On 7 July 2004 the Circuit Court of Dublin heard a civil case against the International Dance Festival of Ireland (IDF). The Festival was being accused of display of nudity and alleged performance of lewd acts in a dance piece titled *Jérôme Bel* (1995) by contemporary French choreographer Jérôme Bel.¹ The piece had been presented by IDF in its 2002 edition. Due to technicalities, the presiding judge eventually dismissed the case. Apparently, the complaining party, Mr. Raymond Whitehead, had based his suit on a faulty mix of obscenity laws and false-advertisement laws seeking ‘damages for breach of contract and negligence’ (Falvey 2004:

5). What is interesting in this case is that Mr. Whitehead supported his obscenity and false-advertisement case by claiming that Jérôme Bel could not be properly classified as a dance performance. In a statement to the *Irish Times* of 8 July 2004, Mr. Whitehead articulated a clear ontology of dance that was not at all dissimilar to Kisselgoff’s. According to the *Irish Times*: ‘There was nothing in the performance [he] would describe as dance, which he defined as ‘people moving rhythmically, jumping up and down, usually to music but not always’ and conveying some emotion. He was refused a refund’ (Holland 2004: 4).

Set side by side, these two discursive moments demand consideration. They reflect the fact that in the past decade some contemporary North American and European choreography has indeed engaged in dismantling a certain notion of dance – the notion that ontologically associates dance with ‘flow and a continuum of movement’ and with ‘people jumping up and down’ (with or without music...). But they also reflect a widespread inability, or even unwillingness, to critically account for recent choreographic practices as valid artistic experiments. Thus, the deflation of movement in recent experimental choreography is depicted only as a symptom of a general ‘down-time’ in dance. But perhaps it is the depiction itself that should be seen as symptomatic of a ‘down-time’ in dance’s critical discourse, indicating a deep disjuncture between current choreographic practices and a mode of writing still very much attached to ideals of dancing as constant agitation and continuous mobility. It should be remembered that the operation of inextricably aligning dance’s being with movement – as commonsensical as such an operation may sound today – is a fairly recent historical development. Dance historian Mark Franko showed how, in the Renaissance, choreography defined itself only secondarily in relationship to movement:

the dancing body as such is barely a subject of treatises. As the dance scholar Rodocanachi put it, ‘... quant aux mouvements, c’est la danse en elle-même dont la connaissance semble avoir été la moindre des occupations du danseur’ [... as for the movements, it is the dance itself that seems to have been the least of the dancer’s concern]. (Franko 1986: 9)

Ann Kisselgoff’s predecessor, *New York Times*’s first full-time dance critic John Martin, would have agreed with Franko. In 1933, he affirmed: ‘When we first find dancing assuming something of a theatrical form – that is, after the antique days – we find it concerned little if at all with the movement of the body’ (Martin 1972: 13). Why, then, this obsessive concern with the display of moving bodies, this demand that dance be in a constant state of agitation? And why see in choreographic practices that refuse that display and agitation a threat to dance’s being? These questions reflect how the development of dance as an autonomous art form in the West, from the Renaissance on, increasingly aligns itself with an ideal of ongoing motility. Dance’s drive towards a spectacular display of movement becomes its modernity, in the sense Peter Sloterdijk in the epigraph to this chapter defines it: as an epoch and a *mode of being* where the kinetic corresponds to ‘that which in modernity is most real’ (2000b: 27, emphasis added). As the kinetic project of modernity becomes modernity’s ontology (its inescapable reality, its foundational truth), so the project of Western dance becomes more and more aligned with the production and display of a body and a subjectivity fit to perform this unstoppable motility.

Thus, by the time when the Romantic *ballet d’action* is fully in place, we find dance clearly performing itself as a spectacle of flowing mobility. As dance scholars Susan Foster (1996), Lynn Garafola (1997), and Deborah Jowitt (1988) have argued, the premise of Romantic ballet was to present dance as continuous motion, a motion preferably aiming upwards, animating a body thriving lightly in the air. Such an ideology shaped styles, prescribed techniques, and configured bodies – just as much as it shaped critical standards for eval-

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¹I discuss Jérôme Bel’s work in detail in Chapter 3.

*‘Introduction: the political ontology of movement’, in *Exhausting Dance: Performance and the politics of movement*, André Lepecki (Routledge, 2006), 1-18.

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uating a dance's esthetic value. Even though the first Romantic ballet is considered to be Filippo Taglioni's 1832 production of *La Sylphide*, premiered at the Paris Opera, it is in an 1810 text that we can find one of the earliest and certainly most densely articulated theorizations of dance as clearly linked to a performance of uninterrupted flow of movement. Heinrich von Kleist's classic parable 'Über das Marionettentheater' praises the superiority of the puppet over the human dancer because the puppet need not stop its motions in order to regain momentum:

Puppets, like elves, need the ground only so that they can touch it lightly and renew the momentum of their limbs through this momentary delay. We [humans] need it to rest on, to recover from the exertions of dance, a moment which is clearly not part of the dance.² [in Copeland and Cohen 1983: 179]

However, it is only in the 1930s that the strict ontological identification between uninterrupted movement and dance's being was clearly articulated as an inescapable demand for any choreographic project. John Martin, in his famous lectures at the New School in New York City in 1933, proposed that only with the advent of modern dance did dance finally find its true, ontologically grounded, beginning: 'this beginning was the discovery of the actual substance of the dance, which it found to be movement' (Martin 1972: 6). For Martin, the choreographic explorations of Romantic and Classic ballet, and even the antiballetic freeing of the body's expressivity spearheaded by Isadora Duncan, had all missed dance's true being. None had understood that dance was to be founded on movement alone. For Martin, ballet was dramaturgically too tied up with narrative and choreographically too invested in the striking pose, while Duncan's dance was too subservient to music. According to Martin, it was not until Martha Graham and Doris Humphrey in the USA, and Mary Wigman and Rudolph von Laban in Europe, that modern dance discovered movement as its essence, and 'became for the first time an independent art' (1972: 6).

The strict alignment of dance with movement that John Martin announced and celebrated is but the logical outcome of his modernist ideology, of his desire to theoretically secure for dance an autonomy that would make it an equal to other high art forms. Martin's modernism is a construct, a project that, as dance historian Mark Franko has shown, took place not only in his writings and reviews, but also in the contested space between the choreographic and the theoretical, the corporeal and the ideological, the kinetic and the political (Franko 1995). Dance scholar Randy Martin notes how the project of grounding the ontology of dance in pure movement leads to 'a presumed autonomy for the aesthetic in the realm of theory, which is [...] what grounds, without needing to name or situate, the authority of the theorist or critic' (Martin 1998: 186). This struggle for critical and theoretical authority defines the discursive dynamics informing the production, circulation, and critical reception of dance; it defines how in journalistic dance reviews, in programming decisions, and in legal suits some dances are considered proper while others are dismissed as acts of ontological betrayal. To acknowledge that dance happens in this contested space clarifies how recent accusations of betrayal ventriloquize an ideological program of defining, fixing, and reproducing what should be valued as dance and what should be excluded from its realm as futureless, insignificant, or obscene.

Meanwhile, dance's ontological question remains open.

It is this open question, in its esthetic, political, economic, theoretical, kinetic, and performative implications that *Exhausting Dance* addresses. I dedicate each chapter of this book to a close reading of a few selected pieces by European and North American contemporary choreographers, visual artists, and performance artists whose work (regardless of whether that work properly falls into the category of theatrical dance) proposes, with particular intensity, a critique of some constitutive elements of Western theatrical

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² One of the other reasons for the superiority of the puppet is its lack of inner psychological life, which prevents it to displace the 'natural centers of gravity' to other parts of the body, thus guaranteeing full expression of graceful moves. Kleist's text is the subject of numerous readings and critical analysis. The most influential is undoubtedly Paul de Man's in *The Rhetoric of Romanticism* (1984). Briefly, de

Man understands Kleist's text as a parable on the act of reading, where reading is cast as an unfinished test to a reader who will always miss the marks of writing. Without precluding such a reading, I would argue that 'On the Puppet Theatre' demands an expansion of its interpretation as being only a commentary on reading due to the three ontokinetic-theological arguments it proposes between hu-

man movement, animal movement, and puppet movement in their relations to expressivity, truth, God, and being. It should also be mentioned that Kleist's evocation of 'elves' in the passage quoted is historically telling, and that his description of dancing puppets resisting gravity could very well fit the performances staged by Charles Didelot's 'flying techniques' – theatrical machines that could create, at the

dance. The critical elements that I highlight are, in order of appearance: solipsism, stillness, the linguistic materiality of the body, the toppling of the vertical plane of representation, the stumble on the racist terrain, the proposition of a politics of the ground, and the critique of the melancholic drive at the heart of choreography. The artists whose work sets in motion these critical elements are (also in order of appearance): Bruce Nauman, Juan Dominguez, Xavier Le Roy, Jérôme Bel, Trisha Brown, La Ribot, William Pope.L, and Vera Mantero.

The fact that two of these artists are not 'properly' dancers, and do not describe themselves as choreographers, but have nevertheless explicitly experimented with choreographic exercises (Bruce Nauman) or explicitly addressed the politics of motility in contemporaneity (William Pope.L) is methodologically important for my argument. Their work allows for reframing choreography outside artificially self-contained disciplinary boundaries, and for identifying the political ontology of modernity's investment on its odd hyperkinetic being. To address the choreographic outside the proper limits of dance proposes for dance studies the expansion of its privileged object of analysis; it asks dance studies to step into other artistic fields and to create new possibilities for thinking relationships between bodies, subjectivities, politics, and movement.

One of the relationships this book privileges is that between dance, dance studies, and philosophy. This theoretical dialogue departs from the observation that the recent difficulties of critically assessing dances that refuse to be confined to a constant 'flow or continuum of movement' indicate a reconfiguration of dance's relationship to its coming into presence. Now 'presence' is not only a term referring to the dancer's negotiation between technical and artistic proficiency in the performance of choreography. It is also a fundamental philosophical concept, one of the main objects of Heidegger's *Destruktion* of metaphysics and of Derrida's deconstruction.³ Thus, any dance that probes and complicates how it comes into presence, and where it establishes its ground of being, suggests for critical dance studies the need to establish a renewed dialogue with contemporary philosophy. I am thinking in particular of those authors that follow Nietzsche's destruction of traditional philosophy through the proposition of a critique of the will to power – a project that informs the philosophical and political work of Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, and Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari; works and authors I invoke frequently throughout this book. For theirs is not only a philosophy of the body but a philosophy that creates concepts that allow for a political reframing of the body. Theirs is a philosophy that understands the body not as a self-contained and closed entity but as an open and dynamic system of exchange, constantly producing modes of subjection and control, as well as of resistance and becomings.⁴ As feminist theorist Elizabeth Grosz explains, after

Nietzsche [...] the body is the site for the emanation of the will to power (or several wills), an intensely energetic locus for all cultural production, a concept I believe may be more useful in rethinking the subject in terms of the body. [Grosz 1994: 147]

Rethinking the subject in terms of the body is precisely the task of choreography, a task that may not be always subservient to the imperative of the kinetic, a task that is always already in dialogue with critical theory and philosophy. Fredric Jameson, in a recent book, sees the return to philosophy in recent critical studies as a dangerous return to modernist and conservative ideals and ideologies (Jameson 2002: 1–5). I don't think one immediately follows the other. I see Jameson's position as a perfect example of Homi Bhabha's powerful opening words in his essay 'The Commitment to Theory': 'There is a damaging and self-defeating assumption that theory is necessarily the elite language of the socially and culturally privileged' (Bhabha 1994: 19). Bhabha reminds us that there is 'a distinction to be made between the institutional history of critical

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end of the eighteenth century, the illusion of flight on stage.

³ For Derrida, the entire history of Western metaphysics (which he identified with the 'history of the West') revolved around a fixed center: that of 'Being as presence in all senses of the word' (Derrida 1978: 279). For Derrida, it is only with Nietzsche, Freud, and Heidegger that presence as Truth, presence as Subject,

and presence as Being, respectively, are fundamentally decentered (1978: 279).

⁴ Derrida remains a philosopher of the body in the sense he radically reframes the question of language as the question of a grammarology, as he carefully attends to the practice of writing and to the haunting effects of writing. The fact that the body, for Derrida, is already linguistic, already within a writing machine,

in the sense Kafka understands the body, does not mean it is less corporeal. See also Derrida's concern with actual performances and with the centrality of performatives in some of his most cherished themes: the force of law, giving, ethics, dying, listening to the other, theology.

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theory and its conceptual potential for change and innovation' (1994: 31). This is precisely Deleuze's position in distinguishing the institutional history of philosophy and the political power of philosophy (Deleuze 1995: 135–55). If there is one contribution I would like to propose to dance studies it is to consider in which ways choreography and philosophy share that same fundamental political, ontological, physiological, and ethical question that Deleuze recuperates from Spinoza and from Nietzsche: what can a body do?

The work of the philosophers and critical theorists I engage with deploys this politically progressive power founded in this fundamental question; in the necessary dialogue this question proposes between critical theory, philosophy and all modes of performance, including dance. Thus, I invoke throughout the book Roland Barthes's and Michel Foucault's critique of the authority of the author, Jacques Derrida's critique of representation and general economy, Avery Gordon's notion of the sociological force of the spectral, Anne Anlin Cheng's reframing of the Freudian notion of melancholia, Deleuze and Guattari's concept of body without organs, Peter Sloterdijk's unveiling of a kinetic ontology of modernity, Frantz Fanon's critique of ontology in the colonial condition, and Judith Butler's recasting of the Austinian performative – in order to understand the choreographic deployments of these crucial concepts. Moreover, the dialogue with philosophy is one in which the artists I discuss are explicitly engaged. Indeed, it can be said that without their explicit commitment to philosophy and critical theory there would not be their artistic work. As I will show, Vera Mantero dialogues directly with Deleuze's notion of immanence, William Pope.L 'talks' with Heidegger and Frantz Fanon, Jérôme Bel quotes the importance of Deleuze's notions of repetition and difference for his work, Bruce Nauman invokes Wittgenstein, while Xavier Le Roy explicitly acknowledges Elizabeth Grosz. Even when this dialogue is not directly made apparent, it is clear how Trisha Brown's converses with architectural theory and La Ribot is right in the midst of a debate with Heidegger's notion of *Verfallen*. Throughout this book, I do little more than to listen to each choreographer's proposals and then foreground the philosophy they deploy. And, in each chapter, I reiterate Bhabha's question: 'In what hybrid forms, then, may a politics of the theoretical statement emerge?' (1994: 22).

Much of my argument in this book turns around the formation of choreography as a peculiar invention of early modernity, as a technology that creates a body disciplined to move according to the commands of writing. The first version of the word 'choreography' was coined in 1589, and titles one of the most famous dance manuals of that period: *Orchesographie* by Jesuit priest Thoinot Arbeau (literally, the writing, *graphie*, of the dance, *orchesis*).⁵ Compressed into one word, morphed into one another, dance and writing produced qualitatively unsuspected and charged relationalities between the subject who moves and the subject who writes. With Arbeau, these two subjects became one and the same. And through this not too obvious assimilation, the modern body revealed itself fully as a linguistic entity.

It is not by chance that the invention of this new art of codifying and displaying disciplined movement is historically coincidental with the unfolding and consolidation of the project of modernity. From the Renaissance on, as dance pursues its own autonomy as an art form, it does so in tandem with the consolidation of that major project of the West known as modernity. Dance and modernity intertwine in a kinetic mode of being-in-the-world. Cultural historian Harvie Ferguson writes, 'the only changeless element in Modernity is the propensity to movement, which becomes, so to speak, its permanent emblem' (Ferguson 2000: 11). Thus, dance increasingly turns towards movement to look for its essence. German philosopher Peter Sloterdijk proposed that modernity's project is fundamentally kinetic: 'ontologically, modernity is a pure being-toward-movement' (Sloterdijk 2000b: 36). Dance accesses modernity by its increased ontological alignment

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⁵ Thoinot Arbeau coins 'orchesographie' – a writing ('graphie') of the dance ('orchesis') in 1589. The synonym currently used, 'choreography', was introduced in 1700 by Raoul-Auger Feuillet in his eponymous classic treatise. Interestingly, in 1706 John Weaver published *An Exact and Just Translation from the French of Monsieur Feuillet where he translates Feuillet's original title Choréographie as 'orchesography'*

thus indicating the currency of the older version in the eighteenth century. In either configuration of the word, the fusing of dance with writing names a practice whose programmatic, technical, discursive, economic, ideological, and symbolic forces remain active today.

with movement as the spectacle of modernity's being. Writing on Baroque dance, particularly as performed by the body of the Sun King, Louis XIV, Mark Franko notes how the performance of choreography is first of all a performance centered on the display of a disciplined body performing the spectacle of its own capacity to be set into motion:

Anyone who has studied baroque dance in the studio under the teacher's watchful eye can testify that it allows little or no place for spontaneity. The royal body dancing was made to represent itself as if remachined in the service of an exacting coordination between upper and lower limbs dictated by a strict musical frame. It was an early modern techno-body. (Franko 2000: 36, emphasis added)

If choreography emerges in early modernity to remachine the body so it can 'represent itself' as a total "being-toward-movement", perhaps the recent exhaustion of the notion of dance as a pure display of uninterrupted movement participates in a general critique of this mode of disciplining subjectivity, of constitute being. If we agree with Ferguson's insight that movement is modernity's 'permanent emblem', then this theoretical point of departure could allow for discursively reframing the current exhaustion of dance. If modernity's 'only changeless element' (Ferguson 2000: 11) is, paradoxically, movement, then it could very well be that by disrupting the alliance between dance and movement, by critiquing the possibility of sustaining a mode of moving in a 'flow and continuum of movement', some recent dance may be actually proposing political and theoretical challenges to the old alliance between the simultaneous invention of choreography and modernity as a 'being-toward-movement' and the political ontology of movement in modernity. In that sense, to exhaust dance is to exhaust modernity's permanent emblem. It is to push modernity's mode of creating and privileging a kinetic subjectivity to its critical limit. It is to exhaust modernity, to use Teresa Brennan's powerful expression – an expression that could be read as synonymous to the title of this book (Brennan 1998).

Since 'modernity' and 'subjectivity' are two central terms in the following chapters, they deserve some immediate clarification. My use of 'subjectivity' does not index a return to or a reappropriation of the notion of the 'subject'. The latter is usually associated with the reification of subjectivity in the legal figure of the person, with the assertion of the person as a self-enclosed, autonomous individual bound to a fixed identity, and with the identification of a full presence at the center of discourse (Dupré 1993: 13–17, Ferguson 2000: 38–44).⁶ Throughout this book, subjectivity is not to be confounded with this conception of a fixed subject. Rather, it is to be understood as a dynamic concept, indexing modes of agency (political ones, desiring ones, affective ones, choreographic ones) that reveal 'a process of subjectification, that is, the production of a way of existing [that] can't be equated with a subject' (Deleuze 1995: 98, emphasis added). Subjectivity is to be understood as a performative power, as the possibility for life to be constantly invented and reinvented, as 'a mode of intensity, not a personal subject' (1995: 99). Deleuze's understanding of subjectivity is close to Foucault's 'technologies of the self', which he defines as *operations*. Technologies of the self, permit individuals to effect by their own means [...] a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct and way of being so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness. (Foucault 1997: 225)

Thus, for Foucault as for Deleuze, subjectivities are always processes of *subjectification*, active becomings, the unleashing of potencies and forces in order to create for oneself the possibility of 'existing as a work of art' (Deleuze 1995: 95).

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⁶ 'The distinctive feature of modern embodiment lies in the process of individuation, in the identification of the body with the person as a unique individual and, therefore, as the bearer of values and legally enforceable rights' (Ferguson 2000: 38).

In this dynamic, one cannot neglect the destructive effect of hegemonic forces that constantly try to dominate and prevent the creation of subjectivities by binding individuals into reproductive mechanisms of subjection, abjection, and domination. To account for this hegemonic effect, I would like to supplement Deleuze's and Foucault's notions of subjectivity by invoking a model of subjectification they explicitly rejected, but that I nevertheless believe is of use to critically account for the multiple forces at play in the constitution of subjectivities. This model is described by Louis Althusser in his essay 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses' (1994). Althusser proposed that hegemonic forces are permanently 'interpellating individuals as subjects in the name of a Unique and Absolute Subject' (1994: 135). There is something uncannily choreographic in the way Althusser describes this mechanism:

The individual is interpellated as a (free) subject in order that he shall submit freely to the commandments of the Subject, i.e., in order that he shall (freely) accept his subjection, i.e., in order that he shall make the gestures and actions of his subjection 'all by himself'. There are no subjects except by and for their subjection. That is why they 'work all by themselves'. (1994: 136)

We can see why Deleuze and Foucault would critique this mechanism, where there seems to be no place for agency and where reification is crucial. However, the relevance of Althusser's model for dance studies was highlighted recently by Mark Franko. Despite critiquing Althusser's location of centers of ideological power in specific institutions (Church, Police, State), Franko writes how 'interpellation implies visceral address', and therefore remains a very useful notion for dance and performance studies, one that proposes that dance and 'performance could also "call" audiences to subject positions' (Franko 2002: 60). I agree with Franko's proposal that Althusser's model of how individuals are 'recruited' into normative subjectivity is particularly useful to understand how choreography creates its process of subjectification. Choreography demands a yielding to commanding voices of masters (living and dead), it demands submitting body and desire to disciplining regimes (anatomical, dietary, gender, racial), all for the perfect fulfillment of a transcendental and preordained set of steps, postures, and gestures that nevertheless must appear 'spontaneous'. When Althusser writes that the individual 'shall submit freely to the commandments of the Subject, i.e., in order that he shall (freely) accept his subjection, i.e., in order that he shall make the gestures and actions of his subjection "all by himself"' (1994: 136), this sounds a lot like the fundamental mechanism choreography sets in place for its representational and reproductive success.

But there is another aspect of Althusser's model that is of critical import for my analysis. Judith Butler, in *Excitable Speech*, recuperates Althusser's notion of interpellation in order to demonstrate how subjectivity is constantly being constituted by a dialectics of resistance and subjection that is nothing more than 'a mechanism of discourses whose efficacy is irreducible to their moment of enunciation' (Butler 1997b: 32). The notions of hailing and interpellation as discursive mechanisms will be particularly useful in Chapter 5, when I discuss William Pope.L's kinetic strategies of moving on the treacherous racist and neoimperial terrain of contemporaneity – a terrain informed by injurious utterances taking down bodies and shaping motions, gestures, postures.

I would like to turn now to the question of modernity. Harvie Ferguson writes, 'modernity is a new form of subjectivity' (Ferguson 2000: 5). Given that, as we saw, Ferguson also affirms that modernity's permanent emblem is movement, it follows that modernity hails its subjects to constitute them as emblematic displays of its being: mobility. Modernity's subjectivity is its movement and modernity subjectivizes by interpellating bodies to a constant display of motion, to the ontological agitation Peter Sloterdijk identifies as mo-

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derernity's 'kinetic excess' (2000b: 29). It is within this overwhelming and ontopolitical imperative to move that subjectivities create their escape routes (their becomings) and negotiate their self-imprisonment (their subjection).

If modernity is a new form of subjectivity, what might be its historical scope? Can we use the term 'modernity' to address contemporaneity? Here, consensus is hard to find. Recently, Fredric Jameson wrote on the 'political dynamics of the word 'modernity', which has been revived all over the world', and associated its dynamics and its recent revival with the (for him disturbing) demise of 'postmodernity' (Jameson 2002: 10). Jameson sees all kinds of regressions taking place with the resurgence of the word 'modernity'. For Jameson, the demise of postmodernity and the return of modernity as concept indicate an undesirable return of philosophy, of esthetics, and of the 'phallogentrism' of modernism in critical discourse (2002: 9–11).⁷ As for identifying modernity's epoch, Jameson affirms, 'the only satisfactory semantic meaning of modernity lies in its association with capitalism' (2002: 11). Thus, according to Jameson, one can talk of 'modernity' only after two conditions are met: the emergence of Kant's critique of Enlightenment and the establishment of the modes of production of industrial capitalism (2002: 99). Jameson's views are close to Foucault's and Habermas's who tend to identify the formation of the political, epistemic, and affective conditions prevalent in contemporaneity in the eighteenth century, particularly with Kant's philosophy.

However, another mode of temporalizing modernity would be to follow Ferguson's formula and consider that modernity is indeed 'a form of subjectivity'. Thus, modernity's periodization would be predicated on identifying not a particular period, nor a particular geography, but processes of subjectification that produce and reproduce this particular form. Cultural historian Louis Dupré identifies a modern form of subjectivity clearly in place by the seventeenth century and extending to our moment (Dupré 1993: 3, 7). The epochal understanding of modernity I deploy in this book aligns with Dupré's and also with those outlined by Francis Barker (1995), Teresa Brennan (2000), Gerard Delanty (2000), Harvie Ferguson (2000), and Peter Sloterdijk (2000b). These authors identify the establishment of modernity with the subjectification set in place by the Cartesian division between *res cogita* and *res extensa*. Even Jameson, in his harsh critique of the revival of the word modernity states, 'it is only by way of this newly achieved certainty [exposed by Descartes's method] that a new conception of truth as correctness can emerge historically; or in other words, that something like 'modernity' can make its appearance' (Jameson 2002: 47). Here, Jameson is explaining Heidegger's critique of representation (*Vorstellung*) in relation to the philosophy of Descartes and argues that Heidegger's critique is one that illustrates modernity as a mode of 'subjectification' (2002: 47). Jameson concedes that such an understanding of modernity as subjectification 'may well be preferred to any number of vapid humanist just-so stories' (2002: 49).

What characterizes this mode or form of subjectification? First and foremost, it locks subjectivity within an experience of being severed from the world. In modernity, subjectivity is trapped within a solipsistic experience of the 'ego as the ultimate subject for and of representation' (Courtine 1991: 79) that views the 'body as independently existing and governed by immanent laws' (Ferguson 2000: 7). Brennan is particularly insistent on the centrality of this subject experiencing his or her being as fully independent and ontologically severed from the world as constitutive of the modern process of subjectification. She identifies in the self-sufficient monadic subject the psychic work of a particularly alienating 'foundational fantasy' (Brennan 2000: 36).⁸ This fantasy must reproduce itself at all costs in order to keep in place the ecological and affective plundering that characterizes the modes of production unleashed by early capitalism and exacerbated to their paroxysm in our neoimperial contemporaneity. She writes:

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⁷ Jameson pushes his argument a bit when he identifies in Deleuze 'a quintessential modernist' (2002: 4).

⁸ It is a fantasy which accords certain attributes to the subject, and dispossesses the other of them as and by the process that makes the other into an object, a surrounds (as Heidegger might say), an absent background against which it is present. It is a fantasy that relies on a divorce

between mental design and bodily action to sustain its omnipotent denial. In this fantasy, the subject must also deny its history, in so far as that history reveals its dependence on a maternal origin. (Brennan 2000: 36)

[O]ne can debate whether the birth of the interior consciousness marks modernity, a hard case to sustain because of the evident exceptions to it. I would submit that a better measure would be the uniform denial, in the West, of the transmission of affect that we find in effect from the seventeenth century onwards. (Brennan 2000: 10)

For modern subjectivity, the ethical, affective, and political challenges are of finding sustained modes of relationality. How can a putatively independent being establish a relation with things, world, or others while remaining at the same time a good representative of modernity's 'emblem': movement? The inclusion of the kinetic into this political-ethical question of modern subjectivity brings us back to the problem of how to dance against the hegemonic fantasies of modernity, once those fantasies are linked to the imperative to constantly display mobility.

This is where analyses of choreographies and performances that directly address the impossibility of sustaining 'flow or continuum movement' are of theoretical and political import. If the formation of what Randy Martin calls 'critical dance studies' is to be taken seriously, then his proposition, developed in *Critical Moves*, for reexamining the notion of mobilization, understood 'as mediating concept between dance and politics,' seems particularly relevant for this discussion (Martin 1998: 14). Indeed, for Martin, mobilization is a key concept dance studies must probe in order to step out of its dubious political paralysis.⁹ The formation of a political theory and a political practice based on the primacy of movement must depart from Martin's suggestion that 'the relation of dance to political theory cannot usefully be taken as merely analogical or metaphorical' (1998: 6). Thus, considering literal or metonymical (as opposed to analogical and metaphorical) relations between dance and politics becomes a fundamental step for political and critical theory to address the choreographic dynamics of social movements and social change – regardless if those movements and changes manifest themselves on the stage or in the streets. Martin points out how

theories of politics are full of ideas, but they have been less successful in articulating how the concrete labor of participation necessary to execute those ideas is gathered through the movement of bodies in social time and space. Politics goes nowhere without movement. (Martin 1998: 3)

Martin's project could be read not only as a critical-kinetic updating and rephrasing of Marx's famous eleventh thesis on Feuerbach,¹⁰ but also as a challenging articulation that the perception and practice of dances through the viewpoint of political thought could indeed open up the possibility to mobilize not only theories but also otherwise politically passive bodies. The word 'participation' in Martin's theory is important, since it contains a critique of representation. For Martin, mobilization is already participation, it is a moving-toward-the-world – in the sense that methexis proposes a participatory encountering that challenges the distancing forces of mimesis. Indeed, Martin's argument is predicated upon a progressive politics as 'those forces mobilizing against the fixity of what is dominant in the social order' (1998: 10).

Martin's observation repeats a usually uncontested notion that associates the force of movement with a politically positive dynamics. Think for instance of Gilles Deleuze, when he defined two basic political positions: 'embracing movement, or blocking it' (Deleuze 1995: 127). Deleuze associated the latter with a reactionary force. Think also of Deleuze and Guattari's notions of becoming, as forces and powers coalescing on a plane of consistency defined as a plane of immanence where intensities circulate unblocked, and of the body without organs (remember how, for Deleuze and Guattari, the body without organs can be successful or unsuccessful, the latter being defined always by a blocking of intensities).

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⁹ 'Much contemporary dance criticism and scholarship is still inflected with the assumptions [...] that looking at dance politically might somehow interfere with its efficacy' (Martin 1998: 14).

¹⁰ 'The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point is to change it' (Marx and Engels 1969: 15).

In Randy Martin, in Deleuze, and in Guattari movement seems to be associated positively as that which will always apply its force towards a politics of progress, or at least towards a critical formation that could be considered progressive. We can think of many other examples of this association. But given that I have just posited that the condition of modernity is that of an emblematic motility, the question becomes of finding out where 'the fixity of what is dominant' might be. The question is to know if and how the dominant moves. And to know when, what, and who is it that the dominant requires to be moving.

This is where the 'critique of political kinetics' proposed by Peter Sloterdijk in his book *Eurotaoismus* becomes particularly relevant. Sloterdijk writes that the only way of fully assessing the political ontology of modernity is by critically addressing what he calls 'the kinetic impulse of modernity' (Sloterdijk 2000b: 35).¹¹ Sloterdijk posits that 'ontologically, modernity is a pure being-toward-movement' (2000b: 36). Therefore, 'a philosophical discourse of modernity is not possible except as a critical theory of mobilization' (2000b: 126). Here, we could almost read in Sloterdijk's propositions Randy Martin's words in *Critical Moves*, since for both it is modernity's kinetic being that has been profoundly neglected by critical theory. But Sloterdijk's ideas could also be read as a cautionary argument that both disagrees with and at the same time supports and supplements Martin's insights. As opposed to Martin, Sloterdijk argues that critical theory and progressive politics must take into account the fact that there is nothing fixed in the dominant, or hegemonic, order. Rather, for Sloterdijk, it is precisely the kinetic impulse of modernity articulated as mobilization that displays the process of subjectification in contemporaneity as that of an idiotic militarization of subjectivity associated to widespread kinetic performances of Tayloristic efficacy, efficiency, and effectiveness (to use Jon Mackenzie's terms [2000]). For Sloterdijk, the lack of a critical theory of the kinetic impulse of modernity is a fundamental flaw in Marxist theory, that theoretically neglected to engage in a critique of the kinetic due to its enthusiastic embrace of full industrialization. Although Randy Martin's proposals seem to have been articulated unaware of the political philosophy of Sloterdijk, and despite the fact that on occasion they may even be in direct disagreement with some of Sloterdijk's readings of Marx, the German philosopher's critique of modernity as 'kinetic excess' supplements Martin's notions of the different uses of mobilization in political processes and in political thought. If Sloterdijk is much more critical of Marxist theory than Martin would probably allow, both are nevertheless attempting to articulate 'if it's possible to imagine politics from within mobilization' (Martin 1998: 12). Sloterdijk, just as Martin, also looks for possibilities of countering hegemonic policies by thinking from within mobilization, if only to point out the conflicting problems such a term entails. Indeed, I believe Martin would agree with Sloterdijk when he writes:

[U]p to the present, the two known versions of a critical theory (I am thinking mainly of the Marxist school and of the Frankfurt schools) have remained without an object, either because they cannot seize their object – the kinetic reality of modernity as mobilization – or because they cannot show a critical difference in relation to mobilization. (Sloterdijk 2000b: 26–7, emphasis in the original)

Sloterdijk's philosophy outlines a critique of mobilization by addressing modernity's 'kinesthetic politics' as an exhausting and exhausted ontopolitical project of 'being-toward-movement' (2000: 36). What Sloterdijk's and Martin's works show is that we have arrived at a moment in critical theory and in critical dance studies where the political problem of contemporary modernity, capitalism, and action have been theoretically cast as essentially belonging to the realm of the choreographic ontology of modernity. This is a fundamental development not only for critical theory, but also for the possible theoretical interventions critical dance studies may attempt in its analysis of subjectivities.

¹¹ Throughout this book, all quotes from Sloterdijk's different works are my translations from the French editions.

In short, modernity is understood throughout this book as a long durational project, metaphysically and historically producing and reproducing a ‘psychophilosophical frame’ (Phelan 1993: 5) where the privileged subject of discourse is always gendered as the heteronormative male, raced as white, and experiencing his truth as (and within) a ceaseless drive for autonomous, self-motivated, endless, spectacular movement. But how could a body move about so spectacularly, so effectively, and so self-sufficiently? What is the ground this kinetic subject moves about apparently without effort, apparently always energized, and never stumbling? This is where the inescapable topography fantasy of modernity informs its choreopolitical formation: for modernity imagines its topography as already abstracted from its grounding on a land previously occupied by other human bodies, other life forms, filled with other dynamics, gestures, steps, and temporalities. As Bhabha explains, ‘for the emergence of modernity – as an ideology of beginning, modernity as the new – the template of this “non-place” becomes the colonial place’ (1994: 246). Fundamental for the argument of this book is the fact that the ground of modernity is the colonized, flattened, bulldozed terrain where the fantasy of endless and self-sufficient motility takes place. Since there is no such thing as a self-sufficient living system, all mobilization, all subjectivity that finds itself as a total ‘being-toward-movement’ must draw its energy from some source. The fantasy of the modern kinetic subject is that the spectacle of modernity as movement happens in innocence. The kinetic spectacle of modernity erases from the picture of movement all the ecological catastrophes, personal tragedies, and communal disruptions brought about by the colonial plundering of resources, bodies, and subjectivities that are needed in order to keep modernity’s ‘most real’ reality in place: its kinetic being. Given that all social and political creation today takes place within the frame of colonialism and its current metamorphoses, I foreground postcolonial theory and critical race theory as fundamental partners to critically assess how some contemporary dance and kinetic performance challenges colonialism and its new guises. I explore the colonialist force of modernity and its impact on contemporary choreographic practices in Chapters 4, 5, and 6 when I discuss works by Trisha Brown, La Ribot, William Pope.L and Vera Mantero, and invoke the critical theories of Homi Bhabha, Henri Lefebvre, Frantz Fanon, Paul Carter, Anne Anlin Cheng, José Muñoz, and Avery Gordon.

A final epistemological remark brought by Bhabha’s identification of the colonialist condition as the condition of modernity is that the colonial project not only introduces a spatial blindness (of perceiving all space as an ‘empty space’) but it introduces as well a fantastical temporality of which the concept ‘postmodern’ participates. My hesitancy throughout the book in using this central term in dance studies derives not only from the inconclusive debate in the late 1980s on the pages of *The Drama Review* between Susan Manning and Sally Banes on what constitutes ‘postmodern dance’,¹² but also from the profound insight by Bhabha when he writes that ‘the project of modernity is itself rendered so contradictory and unresolved through the insertion of the ‘time-lag’ in which colonial and postcolonial moments emerge as sign and history, that I am skeptical of those transitions to postmodernity’ that ‘Western academic writing’ theorizes (Bhabha 1994: 238). Throughout this book, my use of the word ‘modernity’ is a result of this same skepticism, opened up by postcolonial theory and reinforced by the recent hypervisibility of the same old colonialist and imperialist brutality proficiently deploying bodies and mobilizing death. Bhabha’s insight reframes Habermas’s depiction of modernity as an ‘incomplete project’ (Habermas 1998) – as long as the colonial condition exists (no matter in what guise) there will be no closure of modernity.

During the time frame that Sloterdijk (in 1989) and Martin (in 1998) were independently attempting to call critical theory’s attention towards the kinetic political formations of contemporary modernity, some

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¹² See Banes 1989, Manning 1988. See also Siegel 1992.

experimental dancers and choreographers in Europe and in the USA were refashioning dance’s relationship to its own politics and its own ethics of movement. Thus, dancers were challenging dance’s own political ontology by the enactments of stillness, by the practice of what Gaston Bachelard calls a ‘slower ontology’ (Bachelard 1994: 215). As it will become clear in all the works discussed in this book, the insertion of stillness in dance, the deployment of different ways of slowing down movement and time, are particularly powerful propositions for other modes of rethinking action and mobility through the performance of still-acts, rather than continuous movement.¹³

The ‘still-act’ is a concept proposed by anthropologist Nadia Seremetakis to describe moments when a subject interrupts historical flow and practices historical interrogation. Thus, while the still-act does not entail rigidity or morbidity it requires a performance of suspension, a corporeally based interruption of modes of imposing flow. The still acts because it interrogates economies of time, because it reveals the possibility of one’s agency within controlling regimes of capital, subjectivity, labor, and mobility. ‘Against the flow of the present’, Seremetakis writes,

[T]here is a stillness in the material culture of historicity; those things, spaces, gestures, and tales that signify the perceptual capacity for elemental historical creation. Stillness is the moment when the buried, the discarded, and the forgotten escape to the social surface of awareness like lifesupporting oxygen. It is the moment of exit from historical dust. (1994: 12)

To exit from historical dust is to refuse the sedimentation of history into neat layers. The still-act shows how the dust of history, in modernity, may be agitated in order to blur artificial divisions between the sensorial and the social, the somatic and the mnemonic, the linguistic and corporeal, the mobile and immobile. Historical dust is not simple metaphor. When taken literally, it reveals how historical forces penetrate deep into the inner layers of the body: dust sedimenting the body, operating to rigidify the smooth rotation of joints and articulations, fixing the subject within overly prescribed pathways and steps, fixating movement within a certain politics of time and of place. It is experimental choreography, through the paradoxical still-act, that charts the tensions in the subject, the tensions in subjectivity under the force of history’s dusty sedimentation of the body. Against the brutality of historical dust literally falling onto bodies, the still-act reshapes the subject’s stance regarding movement and the passing of time. As Homi Bhabha remarks, ‘it is the function of the lag to slow down the linear, progressive time of modernity to reveal its “gesture”, its tempi, “the pauses and stresses of the whole performance”’ (1994: 253). My first encounter with dance’s kinetic depletion as still-act, as a suspensive response to pressing political events, happened during the fall of 1992, when a series of still-acts were presented by a (very) diverse group of choreographers, musicians, critics, and artists gathered at Cité Universitaire in Paris, for a month-long choreographic laboratory titled SKITE curated by French dance critic and programmer Jean-Marc Adolphe. The insertion of the still-act had all to do with violent performances of colonialism and its racisms. This was the fall after the first Gulf War. The civil war in Bosnia-Herzegovina was raging. The Los Angeles uprisings had just happened. In SKITE, Portuguese choreographer Vera Mantero and Spanish choreographer Santiago Sempere both stated that the political events in the world were such that they could not dance. North American choreographer Meg Stuart choreographed a still dance for a man lying on the ground, reaching out carefully for his past memories;¹⁴ Australian choreographer Paul Gazzola lay quietly in the night, naked in an improbable shelter, by a highway. I see this moment in SKITE as one where the sedimentary forces of historical dust were unveiled by choreographers through their rearrangements of the very notion of dance: not only of the position of dance in relation

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¹³ I discuss Bachelard’s ‘slower ontology’ in Chapter 3.

¹⁴ The man in question is French critic and programmer Jean-Marc Adolphe.

to politics, but of the ontological and political role of movement in the formation of those disturbing events. And the choreographic unveiling happened by the means of the still-act. At the time, I felt the pieces had a spontaneous quality – there had been no discussions to create work based on dramaturgies of stillness. But the series of still-acts performed then suggested a sudden crisis of the image of the dancer’s presence (on the stage as well as in the world) as being one always serving movement. The stillact, dance’s exhaustion, opens up the possibility of thinking contemporary experimental dance’s self-critique as an ontological critique, moreover as a critique of dance’s political ontology. The undoing of the unquestioned alignment of dance with movement initiated by the still-act refigures the dancer’s participation in mobility – it initiates a performative critique of his or her participation in the general economy of mobility that informs, supports, and reproduces the ideological formations of late capitalist modernity.

The following chapters can be read in any order but I should outline their major thematic progression. Each chapter addresses a particular element that I believe is crucial for a critique of choreography’s participation in the political ontology of modernity.

In the next chapter, I discuss some nonkinetic elements and forces that are intrinsic to choreography and that have haunted its conditions of possibility at least as powerfully as the desire to move. Those elements and forces are: the dead master’s voice, the relation between choreography and what Jacques Derrida called the ‘illocutionary or perlocutionary force’ at the core of law (Derrida 1990: 929), the solipsistic nature of the dance studio, and the masculine homosocial desire at the core of the choreographic. I identify those forces in a series of films created by visual artist Bruce Nauman in the late 1960s, where he appears alone in his empty studio performing rigorously predefined steps. My readings of these films account for the hauntological force of the choreographic, a force that disrupts linear time and that erupts whenever certain conditions of subjectification are met. I then analyze two recent pieces by contemporary European choreographers Juan Dominguez and Javier Le Roy where solipsism and masculinity are deployed in a critique of the choreographic to reimagine the male dancer’s body in its relation to language (Juan Dominguez) and in its investment on becomings (Le Roy).

Chapter 3 expands some of the notions explored in Chapter 2 by analyzing several pieces by French choreographer Jérôme Bel in regard to his uses of repetition, stillness, and language. I propose that the linguistic materiality of the body proposed by Bel, when associated with the deflation of movement that also typifies his work, allows for the identification of paronomastic effects that recast choreography’s relation to temporality, while approximating Bel’s work to Derrida’s and Heidegger’s philosophy. I also propose that Bel’s work operates temporally along the lines of what Gaston Bachelard defined as a ‘slower ontology’ – one that distrusts the stability of forms, that refuses the esthetics of geometry, and instead privileges addressing phenomena as fields of forces and as systems of intensities.

My reading of Bel’s work introduces the framework for the critique of representation that I pursue in Chapter 4 when I focus on two recent pieces by two very different choreographers, the North American Trisha Brown and the Spanish La Ribot. Here, I am interested in investigating how each choreographer engages in a direct dialogue with visual arts, in order to refigure what constitutes dance’s ground. Brown’s *It’s a Draw/Live Feed* is read through its critique of verticality as a critique of the masculinist drive in Pollock’s drip paintings. I invoke Rosalind Krauss’s readings of Georges Bataille’s notion of formless, and I use Henri Lefebvre’s disclosing of the ‘erectility’ embedded in the architectural formation of ‘abstract spaces’ in order

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to consider how Brown makes space by confounding normative and disciplinary relations between dancing and drawing. My reading of La Ribot’s long duration performance *Panorama* introduces a discussion of the oblique as a space of disomorphic challenges to the architectural privileging of the vertical. La Ribot’s work, however, adds the phenomenological question of the weight of the gaze, which supplements Brown’s attachment to the perspectival in her performance of *It’s a Draw/Live Feed*.

Since modern subjectivity proposes a ‘being-toward-movement’ roaming about on colonized and racialized fields, any critique of dance’s political ontology inevitably implicates a critique of how to move on a ground ravaged by racist injuries and colonialist plundering. In Chapter 5, I locate how the stumble is a term mediating politics and kinetics by offering a choreopolitical reading of Frantz Fanon’s ‘The Fact of Blackness’ (1967) in relation to the parachoreographic practices of performance artist William Pope.L. I propose that Pope.L’s crawls reveal their full choreopolitical force once read in relation to what Paul Carter called ‘a politics of the ground’ (Carter 1996). And I advance that such a politics of the ground refigures Fanon’s critique of ontology in ‘The Fact of Blackness’. I propose the effort on the sagittal plane as performed by Pope.L as a slowing down of the kinetic that answers directly and interpellates profoundly the neocolonial surrounding and traversing us.

Attending to the ways colonialism and choreography, as facets of the modern kinetic being-toward-movement, are predicated on a politics of the ground reveals those movements initiated by ‘improperly buried bodies of history’ – those bodies Avery Gordon sees as haunting epistemology, as powerful ethical and critical forces (Gordon 1997). In Chapter 6, I read Vera Mantero’s solo *uma misteriosa Coisa disse e.e. cummings* in order to rethink postcolonial melancholia. I pay particular attention to the ethics of remembering and of forgetting as it relates to recent critical race studies (particularly with José Muñoz) and to the ontological project of choreography. By focusing on the particularities of a solo piece created in the last European openly Imperial nation, Portugal, I attempt to show the centrality of the racialized Other as energetic source for choreographic mobility in general. The book ends with a short concluding note, where I address the ‘project of melancholia’ in modernity (Agamben 1993) in order to map the impact of such a project in recent ontological framings of choreography by dance and performance studies, and where I propose an alternative modality of time and a different kind of affect for those two disciplines.

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Here we publish an excerpt from the philosopher and dancer Jill Sigman's Ph.D. thesis, 'Bodies, Souls, and Ordinary People: Three Essays on Art and Interpretation', defended in 1998 at Princeton University. The excerpt is from Chapter Three, 'Ordinary Movement: Trio A and How Dances Signify', where she develops a philosophic-analytical approach to the problematics of performing 'ordinary movement', using 'Trio A', a seminal work by the American choreographer Yvonne Rainer, as a case-study. The excerpt poses the problem of dance signifying practice, which is dealt with more fully in the remainder of the dissertation.

Full text is available in PDF format at <http://www.thinkdance.org/page6/page24/assets/How%20Dances%20Signify%20bu%20Jill%20Sigman.pdf>.

Yvonne Rainer

Yvonne Rainer was one of the original and perhaps most representative members of the Judson Dance Theater. After Dunn's class, she went on to develop the athletic, pedestrian, populist aesthetic that came to be associated with Judson, and more broadly, with postmodern dance. The natural movement of the Judson group has often been the raw, rugged action of running at top speed, falling in disorganized heaps, or rolling and sliding the way a child might roll down a hill or slide into home base. The excitement is in the sheer informal physicality of it.¹ No one typified that informal physicality more than Rainer. She herself jokes that during the sixties Steve Paxton invented walking and she invented running.²

Yvonne Rainer came to dance relatively late, studied modern and ballet techniques, became a captivating performer, and then rejected traditional modern dance for her own brand of anti-eroticism, a reaction to the seduction, exhibitionism, and narcissism of choreography as she knew it.³ At the time she was hot-headed and righteous and she summarized her ideology of denial in a manifesto that, as she says in *Eye on Dance*, now comes back to haunt her:

NO to spectacle no to virtuosity no to transformations and magic and make-believe no to the glamour and transcendency of the star image no to the heroic no to the anti-heroic no to trash imagery no to involvement of performer or spectator no to style no to camp no to seduction of the spectator by the wiles of the performer no to eccentricity no to moving or being moved.⁴

Although righteous and extreme, Rainer's ideology led her to innovate ways of moving that were both novel and revolutionary. With other choreographers of the Judson era, she forged a new aesthetic, a new way for dancers' bodies to look and move. Elizabeth Kendall describes it well:

This ideology led Rainer to a new kind of body and a new kind of movement. She ploughed it all under for a plain, bare, honest and uninflected kind of movement, a democratic dance to fit our times. Of course, Rainer was among friends – the rest of the Judson Church choreographers of the sixties – but she was probably the most passionate one of them and the most scrupulous about her relations with the audience. She practically invented the new dance body, that squarish and genderless entity which... eschewed all airs and graces, all dips and bends and especially all traces of exhibitionist dance virtuosity... The bodies in her sixties task-inspired works, in which mattresses and other objects were carried about, constituted a sort of plebeian ballet corps with a deliberately limited range of action.⁵

This plebeian aesthetic had neither the drama of Graham nor the virtuosic look of Cunningham. Rainer's rejection of both sorts of exhibitionism led her to an exploration of task and work. She was interested in people walking, running, jumping from heights, carrying mattresses and other objects, balancing pillows on their heads, and crawling over boards and beams. Critics and commentators like the ones cited below

ORDINARY PEOPLE: Trio A and How Dances Signify

¹ Jill Johnston, 'The New American Modern Dance', *Salmagundi*, Nos.33-34 (Spring/Summer, 1976), 168.

² Rainer said this in a television interview in the series *Eye On Dance*, 'PostModern Dance: Judson Dance Theater and the Grand Union', aired June 25, 1990, with host Celia Ipiotis, guests Yvonne Rainer and Sara Rudner.

³ Hecht, p.21. Also see *Eye On Dance*, and Rainer's

own writings on the subject, particularly 'A Quasi-Survey of Some "Minimalist" Tendencies in the Quantitatively Minimal Dance Activity Midst the Plethora', in her *Work 1961-73*, (New York: New York University Press, 1974).

⁴ Yvonne Rainer, 'Some Retrospective Notes on a Dance for 10 People and 12 Mattresses Called "Parts of Some Sextets"', Performed at the Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford, Connecticut,

and Judson Memorial Church, New York, in *March 1965*, *Tulane Drama Review*, Vol.10 (T-30) (Winter, 1965), p.168.

⁵ Kendall, pp.45-46.

testified to the work-like, ordinary look of Rainer's choreography,⁶ a quality which, whether enchanting or disenchanting, was new and surprising:

She went about it by stripping from her choreography most of the ingredients which usually make up dance productions... even the beautifully effortless or artfully effortful look custom has made us associate with professional dance theater.⁷

The object of performing the movements, which are natural and undancy, seems to be to accomplish them rather than display them... The entire work has an undramatic, relaxed, informal, even-paced, work-like attitude surrounding it. It is utterly different from all other dancing I've ever seen.⁸

The audience observes the performers navigating a cumbersome object, noting how the working bodies adjust their muscles, weights, and angles. If the dance is performed correctly, there can be no question of superfluity of expression over the requirements of practical purposes, because the *raison d'être* of the piece is to display the practical intelligence of the body in pursuit of a mundane, goal-oriented type of action – moving a mattress.⁹

Rainer's use of tasks, objects, and work did not stem from nor was it meant to suggest a repudiation of the body. Her rejection of the high-gloss of the work of Graham and Cunningham was not a rejection of the body but rather a modernist reduction to the body.

Take away the glitz – the costumes, the lights, the dance technique, the bravura – and you're left with pure body, and what Rainer famously called 'unenhanced physicality'.

Jack Anderson calls Rainer a 'puritan as hedonist' in virtue of this reduction; 'once she has stripped away all spectacle from the dance', he says, 'she is left with choreography's irreducible medium, the dancer's body. She loves the body – with all its nerves, muscles, bones, and sinews – as a physical instrument which can accomplish a multitude of things.'¹⁰

Description of Trio A

We see this unenhanced physicality perhaps most directly in *Trio A*. The dance, first performed as a trio in *The Mind is a Muscle* but often presented as a solo, is a five-minute string of unaccented, uninterrupted movement, a physical monologue delivered in a monotone with a smoothness and effortlessness reminiscent not of the bravura of a ballet dancer but rather of the competence of a pedestrian walking on the street. Much of the movement too seems pedestrian and ordinary. Rainer begins standing in profile. She bends her knees then turns to look away from the audience. She swings her arms casually and unenergetically, then takes two steps upstage... Some of it could be mistaken for something we'd see on the street, a person waiting for a bus perhaps; some of it is more playful and less ordinary but still executed with the same sense of detachment and unselfconsciousness.

There is almost no change in movement quality throughout the dance – a small folkdancy step and a sexy hip roll are executed with the same uninflected flatness. It all seems matter-of-fact and unpretentious; no matter how difficult, the movement is done in a way that looks workaday and unvirtuosic. Small circles of the head or swinging of the arms seem to require the same amount of effort, skill, and attention as handstands and arabesques.

The piece does not seem in the least performative; that is, it does not advertise or telegraph the fact that it is performance. The dancer never acknowledges the existence of an audience; she either looks elsewhere or closes her eyes when facing the audience. She seems unemotional and uninvested like a surveyor measuring a tract of land or a worldweary flight attendant. Watching her nonchalantly roll, pick up a leg with

⁶ In the PBS television special *Beyond the Mainstream: Postmodern Dance made for 'Dance in America'*, Rainer recalls how critics said she walked as if she were in the street.⁷ Jack Anderson, 'Yvonne Rainer: The Puritan as Hedonist', *Ballet Review*, Vol.2, No.5 (1969), 31.

⁸ Hecht, pp.13-14.

⁹ Noël Carroll and Sally Banes, 'Working and Dancing: A Response to Monroe Beardsley's

'What is Going On in a Dance?"; *Dance Research Journal*, Vol.15, No.1 (1982), 37.

¹⁰ Anderson, p.33.

one hand, squat, promenade, and swing the leg is like watching a person do calisthenics. The dancer seems detached and uninvolved.¹¹

She also seems like a person with a short attention span. There are constant shifts of weight, level changes, and changes of direction. Nothing is repeated. As soon as the dancer begins a new kind of movement she drops it; as soon as she starts off in a new direction she reverses. She isolates one body part and then begins to move another [head forward and back while left toe taps a semi-circle on the ground, arms rotating in small circles while walking upstage, head circles while leaping downstage on the diagonal].

The effect is that of many overlapping movements of isolated body parts but very little full body movement. Jack Anderson claims that the movement vocabulary is 'based on the physiological fact that a person is able to move several parts of his body simultaneously, a simple example being his ability to pat his head while rubbing his belly. Enormously complicated and difficult movement patterns can be developed from these simultaneities, but they are patterns which suggest physical fitness exercises rather than ballet or the technical systems codified by the older generation of modern dancers'.¹²

Perhaps the most salient feature of *Trio A* though is that there is nothing pretend about it. The dancer doesn't pretend to be lighter or heavier than he is, to expend more or less energy, or to be something other than the person he is. Things happen in real time. The dancer is not a body pretending to be a body moving in space; he is simply a body moving in space and the choices about movement quality draw our attention to that fact.

Describing part of *Trio A* Rainer said, 'The body is weighty without being completely relaxed. What is seen is a control that seems geared to the actual time it takes the actual weight of the body to go through the prescribed motions, rather than an adherence to an imposed ordering of time. In other words, the demands made on the body's [actual] energy resources appear to be commensurate with the task... getting up from the floor, raising an arm, tilting the pelvis, etc.'¹³

Of course, when it comes down to it, what we see as viewers is always the actual weight of the body moving for the actual time it takes the body to move. But there are times when it is as if we are meant to believe that the weight of the body is different from its actual one and the time elapsed is longer or shorter than the 'real time' of the dance or of a dance passage. In the classical ballet, the ballerina typically looks lighter than she is. In the Romantic ballet she appeared to levitate, and pointework, leaps, and lifts evolved to contribute to her seeming defiance of gravity. Some ballets supposedly unfold over the course of a day or days; the kind of virtuosic *allegro* that Balanchine demanded of his dancers seems to make prances and leaps take far less than the time a body usually takes to prepare for a jump, spring into the air, and land on the ground. But such examples are by no means limited to the ballet.

What is different in *Trio A*, Rainer points out, is that the amount of physical control and effort exhibited by the dancer is meant to reveal, not disguise, the weight and speed of the body.¹⁴ There was supposed to be a kind of simplicity and truthfulness about moving in this way. Such ideas about movement had already been introduced by Cunningham in the 1950s. He noted a trend in the arts that crossed disciplinary boundaries: 'These ideas seem primarily concerned with something being exactly what it is in its time and place, and not in its having actual or symbolic reference to other things. A thing is just that thing.' Walking was just walking, jumping was just jumping; Cunningham thought we should love them for what they are and not look for symbolism or representation. 'It's like this apartment where I live – I look around in the morning and ask myself, what does it all mean? It means: this is where I live. When I dance, it means: this is what I am doing. A thing is just that thing.'¹⁵

ORDINARY PEOPLE: *Trio A* and How Dances Signify

¹¹ Mark Franko dwells on the relation between emotion, or lack thereof, and dance for Rainer, and her subsequent exploration of emotion through the medium of film. He believes that Rainer's remarks and, we might add, choreography like *Trio A*, 'indicate a certain dissociation of emotion from the personal experience of bodiliness. They indicate that emotions are the body's social material, whereas dance only

allows the expression of an insuperable privacy or a kind of seduction'. See Mark Franko, 'Some Notes on Yvonne Rainer, Modernism, Politics, Emotion, Performance, and The Aftermath', p.294 as it appears in: Jane C. Desmond (ed.), *Meaning in Motion: New Cultural Studies of Dance* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), 289-303.

¹² Anderson, p.33.

¹³ Hecht, p.22.

¹⁴ I would stress that it is not necessarily the effort expended but the effort exhibited.

¹⁵ Merce Cunningham, 'The Impermanent Art', reprinted in: Richard Kostelanetz (editor), *Esthetics Contemporary* (Buffalo: Prometheus Books, 1989), 310-314; from *Seven Arts* (Indian Hills, CO: 1955).

Reactions to *Trio A*

To see such things presented as art was shocking at the time. It also prompted a great deal of interpretation. Dance critics, commentators, audience members and dancers had reactions to works like *Trio A*, reactions that ranged from reviews in the *New York Times* to making a black and white film of the dance. At the first performance of *The Mind is a Muscle* one performer even waved a white handkerchief tied to a piece of decor. These reactions often constituted or tacitly assumed interpretations, at least rudimentary interpretations, of the work. Such interpretations seem to fall into three groups, or cluster around three themes, two of which we've already encountered in the statements we looked at initially from Mueller and Banes.

Many read *Trio A* as a political statement against the elitism of dance. Rainer's work was one of the first instances in which performers were not showcased for their technical virtuosity and choreography was not justified in terms of technical innovation. It thus seemed to present an image of dance as something for the people, something everyone could relate to and everyone could do:

Rainer thought of *Trio A* as a populist dance and in the thirteen years since it was choreographed it has shown up in a number of her dances and performances, in dances choreographed by others, in Grand Union performances and at parties. It has been performed by both trained and untrained dancers, learned during performances and taught to hundreds of people. Through its form and its history, *Trio A* functions as a repudiation of the elitism of art dance, the cult of the star and the fetishism of the perfectly trained and shaped body.¹⁶

The other modern dance companies I had seen were either still committed to storytelling, psychological analysis, sentimental drama, or general over-pretentious theatricality – the use of the dancer as a show piece for technical virtuosity and the choreographer's brilliance (Graham, Limón, Lange, etc.)... Feeling this way about the prevalent situation of modern dance in 1969, I was ready for what Yvonne Rainer had to say, or more precisely, choreograph. I was ready for the relaxed way in which the dancers approached the movements and tasks, the unpretentious way in which they responded to objects and each other, the apparent structure of equality upon which the performance was based, where everyone did movements of similar stress – no performer striving for more attention than any other performer – all casually working out the material of the performance.¹⁷

Another streak of interpretation took Rainer's work to be a celebration of and elevation of the body, something that showed that the body and its natural ways of moving, its 'unenhanced physicality' could be beautiful. Of course, this message was related to the previous populist ideology, for the work was taken to show that the natural body too – not just the trained dancer's body – could be beautiful or compelling. And the ways it moved without training were seen as captivating in their own right. Rainer's choreography was a sort of emancipation of the body and argued for the value of its 'natural' movement:

Miss Rainer has achieved, to borrow a Cocteau phrase, a 'rehabilitation of the commonplace'. ... Yvonne Rainer is jealously guarding the human body. In order to do so, she has had to rush into the playhouse and knock down the idols of the theater, and if that action sometimes seems extreme to those of us who also enjoy other dance forms, the result for Miss Rainer has been a way of dancing in which the body looks at once ordinary and exhilarating.¹⁸ '*Trio A*'... ventures into a whole new approach, for Westerners, to human movement. Much like the most ancient of body disciplines, Tai Chi, it is based on the body's relation to gravity – its giving in to and working with this pull in a relaxed, symbiotic manner. This feel is also a key to Rainer's group movements, with their relaxed, subtle play of pressures and pulls – between the group members and with their environment.¹⁹

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Jill Sigman

¹⁶ Sally Banes, 'In Praise of Older Dancers', *Soho Weekly News*, (April 12, 1979), 26.

¹⁷ Hecht, p.15.

¹⁸ Anderson, pp.34, 36.

¹⁹ William G. Sommer, M.D., 'Some Like Yvonne Rainer – And Some Don't', [editorial in response to Clive Barnes], *The New York Times* (March 2, 1969).

There was also the tendency to associate Rainer's work with minimalist art in other media and with the contemporary movement of Pop Art. It was thus seen as a statement about what art could be, what it was reducible to, and also about the everyday commodities that had been thought to be outside of the realm of art. Warhol's Brillo boxes, for example, were introduced in 1964 and Jill Johnston makes a connection between Warhol's renderings of mass-produced pop icons and Rainer's deadpan presentation of potentially emotionally charged movement situations:

There seems, then, no necessity to treat any object or event with conventional reverence. Andy Warhol makes a monumental image of a Campbell soup can. Rainer reduces love to a plan of action. People are moved by the new context in which they find their familiar objects and events.²⁰

Carroll and Banes too compare Rainer's work to the visual arts:

The choice of ordinary working movement as the subject of *Room Service* is on a par with the 'demythologizing' tendency toward fine art that one finds in many of Jasper Johns's pieces... The Johns examples, as well as Warhol's Brillo boxes, attempt to literalize this type of theory by proposing masterpieces that in terms of certain relevant features are indistinguishable from everyday objects... these dances are able to articulate the modernist theme of anti-illusionism precisely because their movements are completely practical – a literal performance of a task.²¹

Rainer herself compares *Trio A* to minimalist sculpture in her essay 'A Quasi-Survey of Some "Minimalist" Tendencies in the Quantitatively Minimal Dance Activity Midst the Plethora'. These interpretations of her work, even if different, all take her to be making a statement in art theory; she is seen as saying something about what sort of thing is appropriate to the realm of art by framing ordinary movement in a certain way. We need not enumerate interpretations of Rainer's work more comprehensively though. We can now turn back to the general question about how *Trio A* signifies.

How does *Trio A* Signify? Clarifications

I will focus on interpretations of the second strain. If *Trio A* is in fact saying something about the beauty of pedestrian movement or its place in art, how exactly does it do this?

We could equally engage in the same sort of inquiry using any of the other readings of the work sketched here; I choose this interpretation just to have a place to start. I don't intend to argue for its correctness. Quite likely Mueller is right when he takes *Trio A* to be saying something about natural movement. That's not something to be debated here; I will take it for granted in this context. Given that *Trio A* is a work of art dance, and that it says something about ordinary movement, how does it do it? If we can answer this question we will be on the road to explaining how in general dances signify.

But first a few clarifications... I don't think the answer we are looking for will be a simple one. We might be tempted to think that signification reduces to what a choreographer says. Saying that a dance signifies is not just a shorthand way of saying that by making that dance a particular choreographer says something. Or a dancer says something. In that case, signification collapses into linguistic saying and what is signified corresponds to what is attributable to some person responsible for the work. We might then think that how a dance signifies is not so different from how a person says something, and probably is a direct result of that person's intention to say what he says. But dances have a life of their own apart from the artists who made them, and we need to address them in their own right. Works of art function differently from people, and besides, they are too rich and too interesting to reduce what a work says or does to what an artist says or does.

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²⁰ Johnston, p.170.

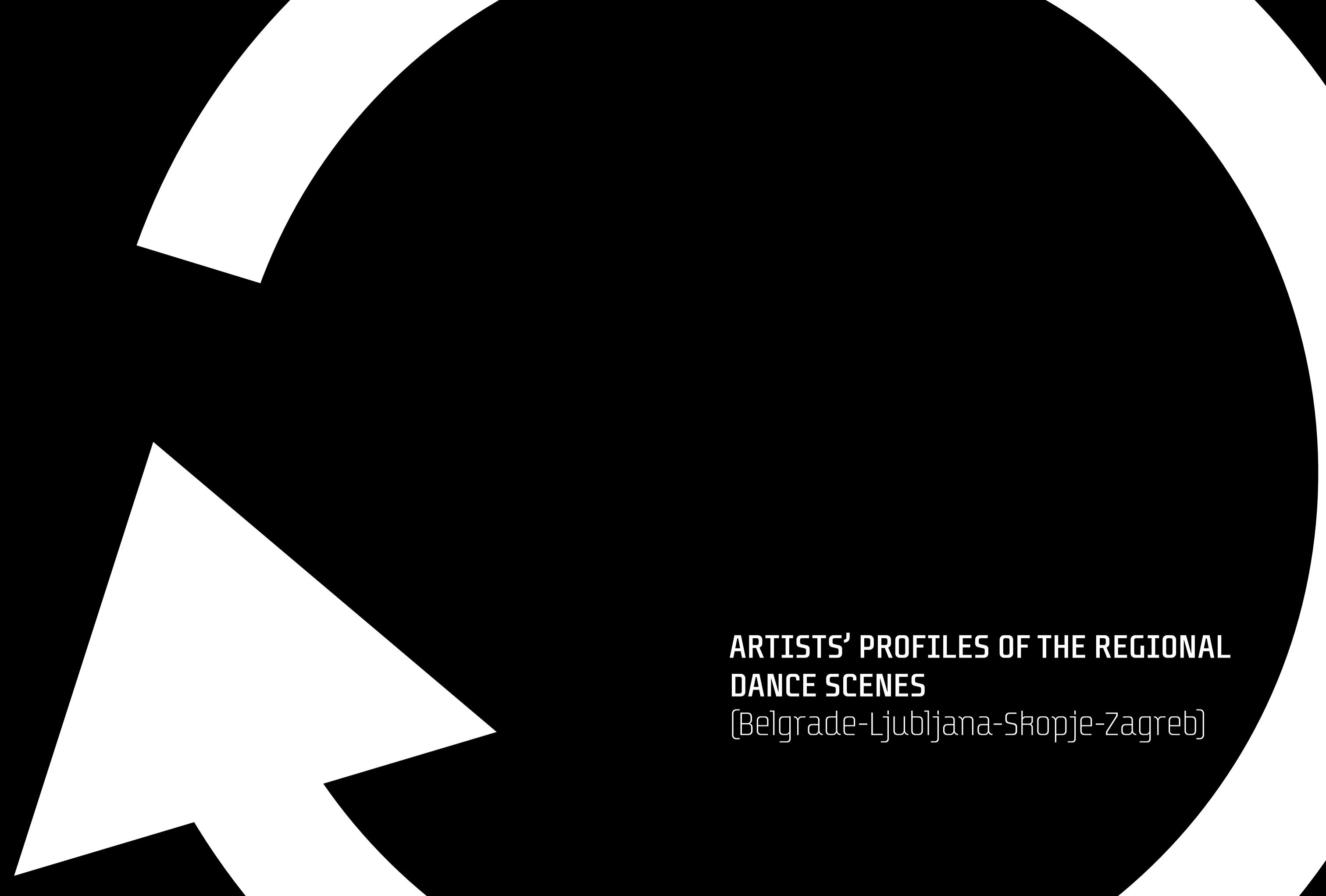
²¹ Carroll and Banes, pp.38-39.

Furthermore, the intentions of choreographers and performers, however thoughtful those people may be, are too vague and continually in flux to be even indirectly responsible for how a work signifies. Saying that a work signifies the way a person says would artificially limit signification to what a person could intend, or would leave us unreasonably dependent on theories of the subconscious.

We might also be tempted to think that what is signified by a work is just a matter of context. *Trio A* in the eyes of Deborah Jowitt is very different from *Trio A* to someone who has never before seen a dance performance. *Trio A* on the heels of Graham and Cunningham is very different from *Trio A* before American modern dance even existed.

Trio A danced in Times Square is very different from *Trio A* on the stage of the Metropolitan Opera. What a dance can say is severely affected by such contextual factors. I don't underestimate the power of such factors, but context doesn't tell the whole story. What a work says will vary from one context to another, but given a particular context, how does the dance manage to say what it does? The question about signification cannot be dismissed by handwaving about context. Sure, in part, *Trio A* says something about ordinary movement because it's different from classical ballet. But many things are different from classical ballet. Context alone isn't enough to account for how *Trio A* signifies.

Now let's begin our exploration by tentatively considering one way *Trio A* might succeed at saying something about pedestrian movement and the untrained body. The first, most natural reaction might be to say it signifies simply by being those things. In fact, if we can say that *Trio A* itself proposes an answer to the question, that would seem to be the answer it proposes; after all, it ostentatiously appears to be pedestrian movement. On this view, *Trio A* would say something about pedestrian movement because it is a case of pedestrian movement and so has the ability to make us think something about it; it instantiates its subject. This mechanism is a common one. I might, for instance, be taken to say something about how women can be philosophers in virtue of the fact that I am a woman and am also a philosopher. Since it's common and obvious, I'll consider this option first. Then, if we encounter difficulties, we can move on to conclude otherwise – that *Trio A* doesn't signify by being ordinary movement but by bearing some other relation to it, perhaps by representing it.



**ARTISTS' PROFILES OF THE REGIONAL
DANCE SCENES**
(Belgrade-Ljubljana-Skopje-Zagreb)



Dalija Aćin (1974) belongs among the notable choreographers on the contemporary cultural scene of Serbia. Her distinguished performances in Serbia have been complemented with successful tours abroad. In addition to being an author (choreographer) and performer, she is also serving as coordinator of the 'Station' Service for Contemporary Dance, which has been active on the Belgrade performing arts scene since 2005. The aim of the Service is 'to strengthen and structure Serbia's contemporary dance scene and make it visible on the local and international levels'. Dalija Aćin has played an important role in opening up space for dance art in Serbia's stage culture, giving it momentum both with her work energy and authorial achievements, which have been internationally recognised and awarded (the Special Award for New Tendencies in Theatre for the children's performance *Knjiga lutanja* [The Book of Roaming] at the TIBA international children's festival; the Jardin d'Europe prize at ImPulsTanz Vienna for *Handle with Great Care*, etc.). Her work in transforming the use of the dancing body and in developing a new contextualisation of dance during the mid-1990s was part of a trend among young performers to change the fossilised reading of contemporary dance on the Belgrade independent scene.

Her work comprises 15 authored performances and several institutional theatre projects in which she was featured as the choreographer.

Dalija Aćin's work energy is evident not only in her projects in choreography and performance, but also in her participation and numerous appearances at regional and European festivals, participation in symposia, conferences, and various Serbian and international projects, in which she worked both as a participant and curator. In addition to her choreography contributions to theatre plays, she has also worked in film and video.

Following the formal training she received at the Lujo Davičo School of Ballet, like many other contemporary choreographers in the region, she supplemented her education by attending workshops in Germany, Belgium, Austria, and the United States. She continued her training in ballet with well-known masters (Ivanka Lukateli, Aleksandar Izrailovski, Duška Sifnios, and Renato Paroni de Castro) and in contemporary dance with many artists from the region, Europe, and the US (Frans Poelstra, Fabrice Lambert, Charles Linehan, Ellen van Schuylenburch, Laura Moro, Serge Ricci, Martin Sonderkamp, Neta Pulvermacher, Jacek Łuminski, Uri Ivgy, Emmanuelle Vo-Dinh, Joanne Leighton, Thierry Bae, and Janet Panetta). In pursuing further education and developing her artistic performances she also spent time at important institutions of contemporary dance, such as Podewil in Berlin; the Tanzquartier Wien in Austria (as Artist in Residence); the COLINA in Dusseldorf, Germany; Chantier un Construction at the IHKIZIT in Paris, France; the Schloss Bröllin in Germany, etc.

This persistently upward professional trajectory is in an interesting joint with her aesthetic preoccupations. An overview of the titles of some of her projects already reveals her preoccupation with the phenomenon of 'identity slippage' and openness, constant transformation, maintaining of the atmosphere of the unexpected, and affirming the nature of movement between the sign and the freedom of interpretation (*Knjiga lutanja*, *Ovo nije ono što mislite da jeste* [This Is Not What You Think It Is], *There Is No Exception to the Rule because I Am Never What I Have*, *Raskrinhavanje* [Disclose]). Her recent choreography contribution to *Metamorfoze* [Metamorphoses], a play based on Ovid's work and directed by Aleksandar Popovski, gave her an opportunity to realise her affinity for the changeable and the unexpected. The critics noticed as much in a number of her works. The reviews thus read: she exposes 'the hidden and the unpredictable in the body'; she replaces 'the concept of desire with the concept of surprise'; 'one gets the impression of a constant refining of phenomena and identities'; 'Dalija Aćin conceptualises the stage event by constructing an inversion of

DALIJA AĆIN

ed. by Ana Isaković

Dalija Aćin,
Who would want
a mom like mine?,
photo Nenad
Milošević, 2010
←

roles in the work process, without a predetermined thematic orientation ... one may find oneself in entirely other relations, fantasies, self-deconstructions, which force one to keep resorting to the same concept that actually betrays one again and again'; 'in this case, roaming is posited as the goal – the objects of the exploration are aimless roaming, refining, arriving, departing, searching, yielding...', etc. This openness of possibilities is similarly manifested in her performances with very young children, whose psychological and biological position represents that openness and potential of various possibilities [*Handle with Great Care* and *Neke vrlo važne stvari* [*Certain Very Important Matters*]]. But this 'slipping of sense' definitely does not mean that Dalija Aćin refrains from using dance as a model to signify different psychological and social tropes, taking apart their mechanisms, the functioning of which constantly remains elusive in their complexity. Again, the critics notice it: 'the themes of virility, virtuosity, and seduction. Departing from the search for the hidden in the male body, especial attention was dedicated to the exploration of places of fragility and relaxation, the tropes of the unshown'; 'with interpretations of solitude and loneliness as well as concerning the cause-and-consequence effect of these phenomena in the context of communication in contemporary society' 'about exhibitionism, narcissism, spectacle, solitude, love, family'; the mother-daughter relationship; 'the surrealness of generational growing up, a critique of cultural policies, social and personal discriminations'; 'issues of sexuality, politics, intimacy, masculine and feminine phantasms, as well as strategies of domination'.

In the early 2000s Dalija Aćin began introducing references to certain theorists (e.g. Baudrillard) in her artistic processes, such as *Ultimate Illusion*, where the author includes in her explication a quotation from Baudrillard's *The Perfect Crime*. On the other hand, in *There Is No Exception to the Rule because I Am Never What I Have*, through a series of recorded dialogues on the topics of the presentation of the body, issues of identity, and the fluidity of presence in performance, she examines the mechanism of the dancing body. That open approach of playing one's own personae (or of searching for them) is also applied in *Mnogo nas je* [*We Are Too Many*], in which well-known figures from Belgrade's theatre life expose and explore their own positions [themselves], or in *Ko bi želeo mamu kao svoju* [*Who Would Want a Mom Like Mine*], where Aćin performs with her daughter, examining their relationship. In its minimalistic approach, *Handle with Great Care* deals with issues of remembrance, that is, the elusion of remembrance, which reasserts Dalija Aćin's preoccupation with the psychological fluidity and unexplicitness of the characters whose expression is meant to be articulated in the movement.

LIST OF WORKS

- 2010** CERTAIN VERY IMPORTANT MATTERS, The Duško Radović Little Theatre
WE ARE TOO MANY, The Bitef Theatre
WHO WOULD WANT A MOM LIKE MINE?, with Marisa Aćin, The Station and The Duško Radović Little Theatre
- 2009** THIS IS NOT WHAT YOU THINK IT IS, The Montenegrin National Theatre, Podgorica, Montenegro
OH, NO!, The Belgrade Drama Theatre and The Station
- 2008** DUETS / MEET THE EXPECTATIONS, the BELEF festival, Belgrade
THE BOOK OF ROAMING, a dance performance for children, The Duško Radović Little Theatre
OVERDONE AND GONE / ON SELF-TEMPTING, The Belgrade Drama Theatre and The Station
- 2007** HANDLE WITH GREAT CARE, The Belgrade Drama Theatre and The Station
- 2006** THERE IS NO EXCEPTION TO THE RULE BECAUSE I AM NEVER WHAT I HAVE, in collaboration with Isabelle Schad (Berlin), The Bitef Theatre and Tanzhaus Dusseldorf
GAMEPLAY, The Belgrade Drama Theatre
- 2005** SHE VERSIONI, The Choreographic Miniatures Festival, The National Theatre
- 2004** ULTIMATE ILLUSION, the BELEF festival, The Belgrade Drama Theatre
- 2003** GLORY HOLE, the BELEF festival, The Belgrade Drama Theatre
DISCLOSE, Forum for New Dance, Novi Sad
- 2002** PASIJA PO TELU / ECHOES OF SILENCE, The Bitef Theatre

Dalija Aćin,
Handle with great care, photo
Dalija Aćin, 2007
↓



AI: What was the moment when you ‘stepped out’ of your classical ballet education into contemporary dance?

DA: I haven’t got a novelistic narrative, many things about my work and life are intuitive. An important moment was when I was in my third grade at the Lujo Davičo School of Ballet, when I got an internship at the National Theatre. So I enrolled there, went to three or four rehearsals of *The Swan Lake* and realised, in fact felt that that wasn’t the real thing for me, and stopped. At least that’s what it looks like from here, at this moment, from the perspective of memory, which we know how unreliable it is. I even considered abandoning dance, so I started preparing for the entrance exam at the Faculty of Applied Arts. I wanted to major in conservation-restoration. I even participated in the restoration of the Belgrade Orthodox Cathedral in 1994, for a month. Anyway, I didn’t pass. Ended up a few spots too low on the list. Didn’t know the right people. Then I went to Africa, to my aunt’s. That was a time of crisis, caused by the well-known events in Serbia and the former Yugoslavia of the ‘90s, the war and all that transpired around it. When I came back, I resumed practising with Katarina Stojkov, who taught us contemporary dance at the ballet school. Then the theatre director Ljubiša Ristić turned up, offered to hire us at the KPGT, the theatre he had founded long ago with the choreographer Nada Kohotović, the actor Rade Šerbedžija, and the director Dušan Jovanović. That was the turning point in my professionalisation. He wanted to hire a choreographer and a few dancers and to make performances with us. That was in 1997. He’d heard from Katarina Stojkov about us, about our interest in contemporary performance. She put us together, took us to Ljubiša Ristić and we did a few performances with her. At that time, workshops were few and far between in Belgrade; only the Belgrade Cultural Centre put something together once in a while. At one point we decided to stop working with Katarina Stojkov and Ljubiša Ristić supported us. We started practising classical ballet and contemporary dance on our own. I organised yoga classes. That group included Isidora Stanišić, Bojana Mladenović, Jovana Ćirica... there were eight of us in total. We practised from 10 AM to 5 PM and then Ljubiša said: ‘If you’d like to do your own performances, please do’. We got our chance. At the same time, we started working on the choreographic miniatures that were going to be shown at the Belgrade Choreographic Miniatures Festival, so we did those miniatures at his theatre, too. That was the kick-off, in fact – his initiative to form a troupe. Ivanka Lukateli used to come, too. Dušanka Sifnios as well. That was it, actually. A step out – Ljubiša Ristić and the KPGT.

Dalija Aćin, *Oh, no!*, photo Lidija Antonović, 2009



AI: How would you briefly describe the metamorphoses in the contextualisation of your work, given that you’ve been on the independent scene since the mid-’90s?

DA: I would distinguish between two things. Those metamorphoses in contextualisation have been the way they are because I ought and need to challenge myself both on the level of the themes and the level of the form of whatever I’m doing. That means that I always have to try and trigger a situation in which I’m not sure how I’m going to manage, what kind of form and language I’ll use. I have never made the material first and added meaning later. It was always the meaning first, the searching, then understanding what I want, then a lot of rethinking, and only then finding the form that fits all those parameters. That is why my performances are so different. They don’t depart from a common vocabulary but from a set of themes, and then go through searching and challenging. And I think: what is interesting is that in fact I surprise myself every time. I’m never entirely sure what I’m going to find, what kind of form, language, aesthetic. Over the last few years, I’ve made excursions into various fields: with breakers, then there was a children’s performance, then a performance for babies, then a performance with my mum, then with actors in Podgorica, actors without any experience in dance, and in *We Are*



Dalija Aćin, *This Is Not What You Think It Is*, photo Montenegrin National Theatre, 2009

Too Many with certain theatre artists. I was trying to gain new ground and see how I’d manage. There are a few other things I’d like to do: for instance, site-specific art. In terms of relating to the audience, another step out was *Meeting Expectation*, which I did for the BELEF festival. And there’s something else, too, which I’ve been working on with Dorijan Kolundžija for a long time. We’re going to do that project for the Prague Quadrennial. He’s doing the programme, he’s made the platform, within which we’re going to make a basic choreographic unit and invite another ten artists to work along that pattern. In fact, a hologram is going to be in Prague but none of us will be there. And that way we’re going to have ten performances. It’ll be the first time that the Quadrennial has shown not only pre-existing performances, retrospectively, but also something that will be happening there for the first time. I’m looking forward to it, because I’ll get to learn some new technologies. During the ‘90s, my work had no relations whatsoever to the local context. There were no references of any kind in that work.

AI: Your work is focused on exploring identity, sexuality, gender, emotions, the dancing body itself, the marginalised body... Your every attempt to (de)position yourself, I think, points to an intervention both in the socio-political space that is here-and-now, as well as in the space of the dance scene. What do you think, how may one step out of the domain of artistic practice within the context of neoliberalism, which is now dominating?

DA: It is abundantly clear that whatever I do is inside the socio-political. My work has always been a kind of intervention, but on different levels and dependent on how our environment managed to understand it. *Overdone and Gone*, for instance, was a clearly political performance from many aspects. It included an anarchist as well. While we were working on it, when we realised how political it was, we got scared. But no one reacted. After that, I forgot just how much politics there was in that performance. The circle of people who are attached to art is non-responding. Unfortunately, most of the audience didn’t get the reference. Only a small number of individuals tend to be analytical or have the need to observe works in that way. When we were doing *Overdone and Gone* in Novi Sad, a journalist started interviewing me with the question: ‘Is this mainly a political performance?’ I said: ‘Thank you’. Because no one had said it till then. I don’t think that anyone in Serbia has the need to deal with politics in dance and that performance was my dealing with the issue of ideology in general, because I always did things that were very important to me and maintained that it was important to get engaged in a way that I could afford. I thought that the important questions were whether to engage or not, what is happening, on what level at this moment, whether it makes sense to have ideals, whether any ideology exists, whether any of them have survived. And then you realise that the ideology of fundamentalism is the only one that is still alive. *Overdone and Gone* is a kind of settling the score with my own beliefs in those things. There was a moment when it seemed that the pro-terrorist ideology would be the only one to survive. Because there is always some fundamental assumption behind terrorism: some faith. When we realised where we were headed, we got pretty scared. But I was quite satisfied with that performance.

I’d like to mention your recent performance, *We Are Too Many*, which was performed by two directors, a dramaturge, a playwright, and an activist. Could you briefly describe the process whereby those professional positions were deconstructed, which are unfortunately still fossilised on the cultural scene?

To throw an activist, two directors, and a dramaturge onto the stage – that’s an intervention right there. But half of the audience didn’t realise that we were trying to deal with the fundamental premises of theatre

that way. Some saw them as professional actors. I heard complaints that they were under-rehearsed. Of course they were under-rehearsed. With this performance, I was back in the domain of theatre and form. One of the basic points of departure was the crossing of fantasy, that is, of desires and expectations, mine and theirs alike. What was that in which I saw them, what was it that they saw in the sphere of fulfilling their own fantasies? Now, on what kind of levels we worked individually, that is another aspect of the process, and the parameters that were being set were very precise. On one level, the performance is open to change, but it also has a solid structure. And that's what is specific about it. What was at stake in this process was their personal spirituality, what they were going to do with the freedom and responsibility they had in the process. I found it interesting to observe them in a situation different from what they were used to, to see how and to what degree they would react to it, how they were going to use the space they had, what kind of trust level they would develop, what kind of relationship they were going to establish. The process was very difficult but on a level that mattered. And it turned out well. It was an important experience both for them and for me. They understood the difference between the performer's time and that of the observer. That can lead to distrust, to short-circuiting. But because we knew each other – and some of us are friends, too – nobody was going to be disrespectful. So everybody was respectful even during those turbulences.

AI: How did the process of increasing the visibility of the contemporary dance scene in Belgrade proceed at the Station Contemporary Dance Service, where you've been working as coordinator?

DA: From the moment when the Station was founded with the goal to improve the existing conditions or at least to make a bit of an impact on them and when we gathered 99% of the scene among the founders, we engaged in different practices, from discussing our problems with the decision-makers, to doing pretty serious fundraising in order to achieve continuity in education, maintaining that education improves the quality of the scene and affects the quality of the productions. Another set of problems including financing and the visibility of the scene, our relations with the City Hall and the Culture Ministry and the fact that their support would affect the quantity of our work. At one point we were successful, they agreed to support us, the City first and then the Ministry as well. That was, I think, in 2008 and 2009. At that time the City supported all the projects that had applied for funding. That was both their good will and a fruit of our negotiations. However, there were a lot of projects with which the City was dissatisfied, too. In our discussions with them we would tell them that they shouldn't expect results overnight, that it was something that required steady investment over at least five, six, or seven years to become sustainable, to maintain a certain level of quality. And their sudden desire to help was just that after all, sudden and not for the long haul. Then all of that coincided with the latest global economic crisis, which has been a good excuse for everybody to stop investing into certain things. We started having problems with some of the venues in the city, too. We tried a lot. Some things we did accomplish. Maybe on some level people have realised certain things, but the circumstances were such that the scene stayed small. The Station did succeed in supporting certain projects through its own programmes and produce one or two generations of dancers – Dragana Balut, Ana Dubljević, Ljiljana Tasić, Marko Milić, Nenad Milošević. Something was accomplished, but I think there's a weird mood prevailing on the scene. This year, for instance, not a single dance project secured funding either from the City or from the Ministry, but the scene failed to get its act together and speak out or make its reaction public. How visible the scene has become or hasn't, I'm not sure. Maybe it is more visible than it was, but it's all still hanging by a really 'thin' thread.



Dalija Aćin,
The Book of
Roaming, photo
Djordje Tomić,
2008
←

BOJANA MLADENOVIĆ
ed. by Ana Vujanović

FREE-FLOATING DANCE: An Introduction

Bojana Mladenović (Belgrade, 1976) is an author, performer, and cultural worker in the fields of performance, theatre, and dance, active on the scene for some fifteen years now. During that time, her professional work has changed its orientations and foci, in a certain way mapping out contextual changes on its own body – from the social macrocontexts of the '90s 'Milošević Serbia' and the pro-democracy transitional Serbia of the 2000s, via the formation processes of the contemporary dance scene in Belgrade and Serbia, through the personal move of her field of action, from the local on to the Dutch, that is, international scene. The work of Bojana Mladenović can hardly be described in terms of a linear development of an artistic career or opus. Rather, I want to introduce the readers to her profile by stressing its inconstant, variable, nomadic, and multi-layered character, because in my opinion, Bojana's work may be best understood precisely in its complexity and resistance to 'framing'.

In introducing Bojana's profile, I will therefore give a few basic indications, which should show its breadth and variety, whereas her profile's central part consists of a similarly unframed collage of diverse materials, which afford further insights into some of its segments.

Bojana Mladenović acquired her dance education at the Lujo Davičo Ballet School in Belgrade. Afterwards, she pursued her education like most other participants in the Regional dance scenes, through numerous workshops and similar programmes – including, among others, danceWEB, the European scholarship program for contemporary dance, and the professional development program at the Mathilde Monnier Centre choréographique national in Montpellier. She then entered and graduated from DasArts, De Amsterdamse School / Advanced Research in Performing Arts. Leaving to study abroad in 2006, she changed her place of residence and primary activity, transferring from Belgrade to Amsterdam.

Bojana Mladenović's choreographic work comprises eleven all-evening shows and a few smaller-format works. The beginnings of her artistic work are marked by influences from German *Tanztheater*, Pina Bausch, and Johann Kessner, and then also Anne Teresa de Keersmaeker, Wim Vandekeybus and others. Although these authors do not belong to the same dance style or conception, in Bojana's work their approaches appear as appropriated traces in a pretty consistent aesthetic-thematic blend. Thus one notices in her early shows – from *Black Kitten's Neck* to *The Topography of Extremes* – a striving to articulate the dancer's physical action and technical precision, a prominent visual quality of the scenes and a fragmentary dramaturgy in her treatment of a usually socially concretised theme. The next couple of shows abandon this 'late-postmodernist' conception of dance and turn to the conceptual issues of what dance is and what choreography is. *Next Step: The Island Project* and *Next Step: The Step Closer* are thematically concrete not directly, in the (local) social context, but above all with regards to the international contemporary dance scene, situated in the concrete neoliberal capitalist social system. These are collective works, made with the co-authorship of Dušan Murić and collaboration of a large number of performers/choreographers. The statuses and functions of the author and performer undergo a change here – the initial authorial concept is being opened to a process of research and creation, in which all collaborators participate. The result of that process is not a highly aestheticised and complete dance piece, but a more open form of performance that breaks down representational figures into the performer's here-and-now presence. Again, the works made in Amsterdam – *It Might Be that This Is Not Exactly What I Wanted to Say*, *One Piece*, *Violet* and *Vincent and Me* – should be viewed as discontinuous. They continue to problematise dance as an art discipline and the choreographer as an authorial subject. However, the external, macro-perspective on those issues is being abandoned in them and attention is focused on the exploration of singular and particular existence – personal micro-reconsiderations and the possibilities of such fragmented subjects' acting in or on a given social framework.

In addition to her own authorial work, Bojana Mladenović has collaborated with many choreographers as a performer. As a member of the Belgrade Dance Theatre group, she danced in several shows by Katarina Stojkov Slijepčević, and then also in shows by Isidora Stanišić, the Ister Theater, and others. Since her move to Amsterdam, she has performed in works by Dogtroep, Nicole Beutler, Sarah van Lamsweerde, Ivana Müller, Daniel AlmgrenRecén, among others... During her time in Belgrade, she was significantly engaged in consolidating the local contemporary dance scene. She participated in founding the STATION Service for Contemporary Dance, where she is still active, and was one of the founders of the Balkan Dance Network. Also, she initiated the Submarine project, a four-month education programme for contemporary dance at the Rex Cultural Centre. In Amsterdam, apart from her work on dance shows, she has been involved in other activities on that scene as well. With Sarah van Lamsweerde and Norberto Llopis Segarra she founded the group/platform TRETIGRI, and worked as artistic assistant to Nicole Beutler on *2: Dialogue with Lucinda* (Amsterdam,

2010). Besides all that, she is still affiliated to DasArts – as advisor to Nadia Tsulukidze, an IT/FP Student at DasArts, and as a member of the new students selection committee. In July 2010 she became the artistic director of *hetveem* theatre in Amsterdam.

This manifoldness and multi-directionality of acting are characteristic of Bojana's artistic work, that is, of her approach to, and understanding of, dance. In another sense, however, they are also typical of actors of contemporary independent cultural-artistic scenes in the region, and not only in the region. The multi-tasking actor (artist as worker) is the onto-historical heir to Benjamin's artist as producer at the beginning of the 21st century; one such artistic profile stands now before you.

CONVERSATION: Ana Vujanović / Bojana Mladenović

AV: Bojana, you took up contemporary dance in the late 1990s, when Serbia had no contemporary dance scene, while travel abroad and the possibility of getting to know the international dance scene were a rarity. What did you want with, and from, contemporary dance back then?

BM: At that time, the term 'contemporary dance' was an 'empty construct' for me, the chief sense of which was 'different from ballet'. When I say 'empty construct', I mean that we had neither history nor theory of dance at the Lujo Davičo School of Ballet, so that my knowledge and frame of reference depended on gathering along the way and transferring more-or-less everything into that empty, wide space of 'artistic freedom, imagination, difference, and expression that-is-different-from-the-rigidity-of-ballet'. (Although, to be honest, even now, eighteen years later, I don't really have a much clearer or more consistent answer as to what contemporary dance is and why (or whether!) I'm in it).

AV: Did you ever associate your 'distancing from ballet' with the then alternative (physical, anthropological) theatre in Belgrade?

BM: I do think that the alternative theatre of the '90s had some indirect impact on my work (as well as it's been impacted, after all, by whatever else I've encountered), whereas it directly influenced the next step in my 'no'-positioning. At first, a 'no' to ballet, and then immediately another 'no' to the local version of the Grotowski-Barbican theatre.

I think that at that time I found the best refuge in my own stubbornness that whatever I was doing had to be something different from whatever else was on offer. A naive and unthought-through position for sure, but to a degree liberating as well.

(If only I'd known of Yvonne Rainer's *No Manifesto* then, maybe I wouldn't have found my own trajectory so dramatic.)

AV: In Belgrade in the early 2000s you made the performances *Next Step: The Island Project* and *Next Step: The Step Closer*. Because of their collective character, collaborators from abroad, as well as in an aesthetic and poetical sense, they seem crucial to me, for two reasons. First, after a number of shows that you, Dalija Aćin, and Isidora Stanišić did, these shows started to exude the 'spirit of the (contemporary dance) scene'. Second, they explicitly introduced the then current international references to the local scene – from the contemporary (conceptual and choreographic) approach to dance, via its themes (which were based not on fictional narratives but on an attempt to think dance and, from dance, to think the surrounding context), to its (so-called work-) aesthetic. Maybe this is why those shows have been your 'trendiest' works, which fit the now recognisable and the then new dance trends. What did those works mean to you back then and how would you contextualise them now?

BM: The two *Next Steps* were indeed a critical point and a good litmus test for an appreciation of my work in Belgrade. They are a good reflection of, and indeed a reaction to, the entire first period in my work. I find it interesting that you're labelling them 'trendy' in the wider context of European contemporary dance. Because, those were my first performances in which I started to break free from my own 'nightmare' of the need always to be authentic, inventive, different, my own, whereas that 'authentic', 'inventive', 'different', and 'my own' were unconsciously under the influence of wanting to make performances like those of Anne Teresa de Keersmaeker, Angelin Preljocaj, Wim Vandekeybus, Jozef Nadj, Pina Bausch, etc. Let me make this clear: I wasn't copying or engaging these authors as references in my works, but the body of my work was folded up, torn, and entangled in the idea of expecting and pumping out 'geniality' and 'inventiveness' from myself, like those authors did. The *Next Steps* emerged at the moment when my system became

saturated with its own chasing after 'itself' on one hand, and on the other with the influences, techniques, styles, and aesthetics of other authors. These performances (especially *Korak dalje*: *Korak bliže* [Next Step: The Step Closer]) were rather an assurance for a change of my own creative paradigm, than an intervention on the local scene. For Dušan Murić and me, *Next Step 1* was the first experiment of this kind, and a confrontation with the questions of what is collaboration, who is the author, what an incoherent, ad hoc group of artists could or might want to do, etc. Unfortunately, I wasn't yet ready back then to engage precisely those 'internal' questions in the show itself; instead, we engaged some already posited general thematic frameworks: Europe, Identity, Dance, etc. That performance was my definite clashing with my own fears and expectations to be an Author – someone who knows how to lead a process, who has answers to all the questions, and wants to make a show that will satisfy local as well as foreign festival selectors. Whereas *Next Step 2* was my definite turning away from a process of already set themes and from keeping all the elements 'under control', towards a process that has its own dynamics and gives room to all the participants to be responsible for their contributions to that process. From another side, *Next Step 2* was a critical look on the then state of Europe's contemporary dance scene and a self-referential-ironic look on dance as a discipline and on the choreographer as a 'star'. A third important line was a critical look on the neoliberal market mode in which authors, shows, and festivals operate. Our critique and (self)irony were directed at a.o. ImpulsTanz and danceWeb, which funded the project and all its collaborators.

So, that 'trendiest' show of mine emerged as a protest against the trend.

AV: With these shows and then also as one of the initiators of *The Station, Service for Contemporary Dance*, you contributed a lot to the consolidation of the Belgrade contemporary dance scene. And then in 2006 you left Belgrade and moved to Amsterdam. How do you reflect on that break and your present position?

BM: There are two aspects that have determined my stance on the Belgrade scene. In one of them, I am (just) an artist who contributes to that scene with her pieces and performance qualities (until 2005); in the other, I have engaged in contributing to some structural changes on that scene. The former relation is similar to the one I have in Amsterdam. I do my job the best I can at any given moment and thereby participate in micro-forming the world. The latter, somewhat wider context of my Belgrade engagement is something I'm processing at this very moment. It is an emotional and ethical issue for me. It's emotional because I didn't leave that long ago, so my relation to 'home' is becoming blurry and raising the issues of (un)belonging, context, language, foreignness, (non)participation, etc. It's emotional also because I left at a moment when things started consolidating and when the first steps were made to get out of the stalemate, lethargy, and the complicated relations of disrespecting and general incooperativeness among colleagues. It is ethical because I started something but then didn't participate actively enough in following it through, re-formulating, and articulating a frame that would've made real changes possible and could've put them on healthy grounds for further development. Now I'm at a point where I'm beginning to sort things out with myself and to face my responsibility for (non)contributing to the current situation. You're finding me with this question at a moment when I still don't have clear answers as to what my next steps and decisions might be.

Observed from another viewpoint, my answer could be the following: my active participation on the scene does not depend only on my presence there as an author. I'm an actor on that scene inasmuch as I contribute to it with any kind of action (e.g. by distributing information through *The Station's* mailing list, by pronouncing on certain issues related to the working of the Station, by communicating with a few colleagues, etc.). In that sense, there has been no break. It's just that my involvement has different forms and dynamics from those when I'm also making performances there. This is also one of the points where my work and involvement in Belgrade, Amsterdam, or wherever else do not differ. I cease to be an artist who is an artist only when she's producing an artwork-performance. The body of my artistic acting has various manifestations and is, in fact, unlimited.

AV: If you only had ten terms, which ones would you use to outline your work conceptually?

BM: Un-disciplinarity / Questioning / Search for openings / Generosity / Necessity / Selfishness / Desire / Responsibility / Semi-open structures / Games / Convention.

I'm also adding a list of relations that I'm interested in in my own work as well as in the work of other artists: brilliant work vs. market / flexibility of thought vs. intellectual spasm / delicate poetic revolutions vs. artistic constipation / confrontation that alters the world just a little vs. wanting to fit / finding the embodiment of their understanding vs. using fancy stick-words / full-on processes vs. half-a-way products.

AV: I'm going to single out one thing from the list that seems to me especially significant for your current work: finding the embodiment of their understanding vs. using fancy stick-words. I'm

interested in two implied aspects there. The first is: in what ways are surrounding discourses involved in your work? Which ones do you single out as significant, what are their roles, significance, place? Second, I'm interested in your understanding of the body as a basic dance medium. Are you making an opposition between the materiality and the discursivity of the body? Or do you feel closer to the dialectical materialist approach, where the body is neither a signifier nor an extra-discursive reality, but that which in tension constitutively confronts one with the other?

BM: Any attempt to answer these questions would be insecure, not articulate enough, and would miss (its own) point. I'll try answering like this: My understanding of the world is under construction. My construction of understanding is under the world. My world is under an understanding of construction. Note: occasionally replace the words, and with: Language / Body / Identity / Theory / Work / Process / Poetics / Play / Art Complement the list at your own discretion...

FRAGMENTS / REVIEWS

I have a tendency to read these texts fast. My voice starts breaking, my accent becomes stronger, my face goes red. I get nervous. Please, let me know if I am doing the same today. If you are bothered by it, I would be happy to try to read more calmly.

[Bojana Mladenović, www.tretigr.org]

The Duško Radović Little Theatre, seven-thirty PM...—says the first of the eight figures arranged onstage in a line running parallel with the audience. ...Devetnaest-četrdesetpet... Seven-thirty-five... Šest i tritset... Sedam i četrdeset... Devetnaest-eden in tritset... Nineteen-thirty-two... — everybody's looking at their watches, from right to left. ...Bina... Bühne... Stage... At the very beginning of what the programme notes say is a dance, it looks like the eight of us onstage, accompanied by loud live music, are informing the audience, with quite a bit of detail, about the time and place, as well as the relationship of these categories and the individual performers. What ensues is only an even further developing and refining of this introductory stating along the relation of the here-now-performer. But this relation is far from entailing an immediate, literal there-presence... It is a series of choreographic-dramaturgical image-situations, which establish their links not through the logic of narrative chronology, nor even formally, through the unity of approach, but are still connected into a whole by an explicit set of problems, namely – the conditions of performing in a (given) social context. And that means that the 'here-now' is being understood here as a cross-section of the social conditions and political interests in a given spot on the geopolitical map at a given moment, and that the third term of the relation – the 'performer' – entails an institutionally defined social position (role and perspective).

[Marija Škoko, 'Next Step—The Step Closer', *Svaka sličnost sa stvarnim ličnostima i događajima je intencionalna*' [Any similarity with real persons or events is intentional], TRH, No. 7, Belgrade

One Piece

...A person presents herself as someone who is there to be questioned. I would be happy, she says, as is the form in such situations, to answer any of your questions. This anyway is what Bojana Mladenovic says, the first thing she says, some way into her performance *One Piece*, as she sits at one end of the space and invites the spectators to speak to her, and to provoke her into speech. She has entered and exited the space two or three times already, walking slowly down the narrow gap between the two rows of spectators, naked at first: a self-exposure that is at once intimate and blatantly matter-of-fact. Nakedness, nothing to it. When, after her second entrance, she dresses on stage in what look like her ordinary clothes, it is like appearance – whether clothed or unclothed – is something she puts on, like a habit, one of the ways in which she is known to the people who know her, in her life as it were. And one of the ways in which she is unknown to us: her witnesses, her imaginers. ... In a sense, though, the answer to every question is also deferred: deferred to

the prepared answers themselves; or deferred to the audience member who has asked the question to pick an answer from the pack of cards; or deferred to a silence of Bojana's, a with-held thought, a raised finger; and deferred at other times to a band of street musicians who substitute the verbal exchange, when asked to do so, with a Balkan dance tune. The dancing itself we have to imagine. It does not happen today. ...

[Joe Kelleher. 'The Examined Life'.
Drama, Theatre & Performance,
Roehampton University London]

Violet

If any performance during the Something Raw 2009 festival succeeded in showing the rift between theatre and show business, it was *Violet* by Bojana Mladenovic. The starting point for this work is a fait divers. A cousin and youth friend of Mladenovic lives and works in Amsterdam as an artist, just like Mladenovic does. 'Neither of us would want to go back to a regular 9 to 5 job, even if this is a weird way of living', Mladenovic remarks. However, Lilly's 'art', she being a stripper in a nightclub, belongs to another, parallel universe. Both women share the same physical space, and in a sense share the same profession, but nevertheless, they hardly meet, not in an actual and certainly not in a symbolical sense. ... After their performance, both women retreat to the back side of the stage. There they help each other dressing again in a friendly, almost tender way. It makes you aware in a direct way that these two women not only are very intimate from childhood on, but also are probably really fond of one another. This intimacy is different, less intimidating and in its way more endearing than the suggestive enactment of an intimacy between spectator and stripper that, however false it is, is acting upon the male fantasy of the willing female. In this way *Violet* is constantly trespassing the thin borderline between art and show business, real emotion and false effect. It confronts you, as a spectator, with your own gaze and thoughts every time your opinion is asked for through the cards. ...

[Pieter T'Jonck, 'Violet'. Volume, Theatre Frascati Amsterdam]

What is the Necessity of Being Here

some of the questions/instructions for Bojana:

Do you think I can tell from your body that you are in love?

How much do you miss Belgrade?

Do you feel you know me well?

Try to get me where it hurts.

Do you think you have the power in this situation?

Explain Serbia.

Show us the most vulnerable part of you body and move it around.

some of Bojana's questions/tasks to h.g. Guttman:

What is the drive that brought you to Europe?

Which part of your body do you like the most (july: here I could say the audience)

Choose the spot in the room where you feel yourself the most.

Shake your body in the same way you imagine I would do it.

Put the wig and wiggle close to the audience and describe all our actions until now.

bonus:

what would you rather do than what you are doing at the moment

[I would rather be having sex, I think we would all rather be having sex]

LIST OF WORKS

- 2010** VINCENT AND ME, Something Raw Festival Short Cut, Frascati, Amsterdam
2009 VIOLET, WG Frascati, Something Raw Festival, Amsterdam
2008 ONE PIECE, Final project of studies at DasArts, WG Frascati, Amsterdam
2007 IT MIGHT BE THAT THIS IS NOT EXACTLY WHAT I WANTED TO SAY, DasArts, Amsterdam
2006 NAVIGATORS (RED SOFA TALKS+ TRIANGLE QUESTIONS), DasArts, VCA, Melbourne International Arts Festival, Melbourne
 WHAT IS THE NECESSITY OF BEING HERE, DasArts, Amsterdam
 I WOULD LIKE TO BE LIKE ME, DasArts, Amsterdam
2005 NEXT STEP: THE STEP CLOSER, The Duško Radović Theatre/danceWEB, Vienna, Belgrade
2003/4 SUBMARINE REK, The B92 Cultural Centre, Belgrade
2003 NEXT STEP: THE ISLAND PROJECT, The Duško Radović Theatre, Belgrade.
2002 TOPOGRAFIJA EKSTREMA, The BITEF Theatre, Belgrade
2001 BLANKO II TRBUHOM ZA KRUHOM, The BITEF Theatre, Belgrade
 BLANKO, The KPGT Theatre, Belgrade
2000 BACANJE KOCKE/UN COUP DE DES, The KPGT Theatre, Belgrade
1998 BLACK KITTENS NECK, The National Theatre, Belgrade

NINA MEŠKO

ed. by Rok Vevar

Nina Meško, dancer and choreographer
ARTISTS WORKING IN THE FIELD OF
PERFORMANCE to take part in hour-long private
 conversation with her.
 Follow in the footsteps of acclaimed international
 performance artists who already took part in previous
 encounters for her new work My private archive.
 For more information and to make an appointment, please contact:
 nmesko@hotmail.com or mobile phone +386.40.458.672.

Nina Meško belongs to the generation of dancers and choreographers who began working in the 1990s, when Slovenia withdrew from the federal Yugoslavia story, when the PTL (Ljubljana Dance Theatre) dance guerrilla episode of the 1980s was brought to an end (at the time when Meško signed her first performances, the PTL acquired its own space, namely the dance hall in the Prule area of Ljubljana), and at a time when contemporary dance and theatre production in Slovenia began to expand widely, which gradually contributed to the opening up of the field of stage and dance aesthetics. It is perhaps noteworthy that it was precisely in the 1990s that the creators of the so-called uninstitutional side of the performance arts, a segment which had been present in Slovenia since the late 1950s and which as a rule also comprised Slovenian contemporary dance, began to express the need to break with the theory and criticism that had hitherto been published in monographs and periodicals. With the renewal of the *Maska* magazine, as well as the then current issues of the *Problemi*, and the space that was dedicated at that time to the performance arts by the fortnight periodical *Razgledi* (a magazine tackling cultural, artistic, political, and social issues), the contemporary performance arts, including dance, began to acquire a more accurate, ambitious, and methodologically broader theorisation, while the founding of new festivals at that time, mostly in Ljubljana, suddenly widened the field of dance. At that time, the Ljubljana dance scene managed to produce two recognisable export items (*En-Knap*, *Betontanč*), which greatly boosted the dance artists' self-esteem and announced possible new directions. This was also a moment when foreign and home foundations made it possible for the Slovenian theatre and dance transition to create at home in relative peace and gradually to integrate with international cultural spaces. This was the context of Meško's artistic coming of age, anything but boring, save for some of its fundamental system deficiencies.

Nina Meško's generation of choreographers and dancers also includes Andreja Rauch, Snježana Premuš, Mala Kline, Gregor Kamnikar, Jana Menger, Rosana Hribar, Gregor Luštek, Matej Kejžar, Magdalena Reiter, among others. These are artists of diverse educational backgrounds, aesthetic views and practices, who acquired their dance knowledge even before the establishment of the high-school programme for contemporary dance in Ljubljana; some of them (Andreja Rauch, Snježana Premuš, Matej Kejžar, and Magdalena Reiter) were educated at dance academies abroad. Even though their work is in certain aspects related to some of the main tendencies of Slovenian contemporary dance of the 1980s and early 1990s (its modern and post-modern understanding of choreography as a manifestation of autonomous movement in space and time; theatricalised expressive choreography with narrative elements; improvisational dance formats of spontaneous choreographies), those artists were already distancing themselves from the steady dance aesthetics of that period. One could say that this was the first generation that loosened the relatively monolithic aesthetic image of the contemporary dance of the 1980s and early 1990s.

During the early 1990s, Nina Meško collaborated with Etcha Dvornik, Ingrid Kerec, Fatou Traore, Maja Milenovič Workman, performed in a theatre project by Aleksandra Schuller, where she again worked with Gregor Kamnikar, who was at that time one of her permanent collaborators, and participated in a series of occasional cycles or workshops. Meanwhile, her choreographic debut took place in 1996 with her dance solo 'Watching Alice'. 'In the performance "Watching Alice", I focused on creating spontaneous and incomplete forms of human gestures and passing visual moments, where emotions and thoughts give form to what otherwise remains invisible. In it, I combined video with dancing as two worlds present inside me. Even though both of the represented personae appear in both media, they are differently contextualised due to their different circumstances. For me, the important thing was to make both media share practically the same intensity without balancing or annihilating one another, thus creating new perspectives'. Her very first project already reflected a tendency to reveal the intermediate fields which later changed within their binarism, taking the form of diverse dualities. For example, these could include the intermediate fields between different individual media, different aspects of artistic dance practice, between diverse individual artistic practices, aesthetics or artistic auto-poetics, culture and art, art and cultural production, art and cultural politics. Perhaps it is precisely her work in the creation of art that enables Meško as an artist to relativise her own, single and exclusive perspective and enables her to set asunder the potentialities of which she speaks through her work in choreography.

For if we take a look at the choreographic opus of Nina Meško, we could say that it reflects a tendency for a gradual withdrawal of authorship as a stylistic choreographic manifestation of an authentic language of movement or a specific representation of the kinetic body form. For Meško, the reduction of the settled comprehension of choreographic authorship was a condition for expanding the aesthetic dance register, while simultaneously, a reduction of the kinetic activity of the body, as Meško says, renewed its potentiality. 'A Slovenian choreographer once stated that Slovenian critics and theorists prefer performances with no dancing, because they give them time to think. Personally, I believe that stillness and therefore its potentiality can contain more dancing than the moment when the body starts to move', Meško says.

However, the stillness of the body in Nina Meško's performances, the renunciation of the exclusive representation of the body at the expense of keeping the dancer in her/his potent presence, failed to generate an affirmative response from the audience and critics. *The Little School of Flying* (1999) threw the audience in a state of unease, because the kinesthetic experience in the perception of the performance, which Ljubljana audiences had got used to when watching dance performances, was blocked. In a 1999 article, a Slovenian female critic wrote that Meško 'failed to read the sign on the door', which reads 'Ljubljana Dance Theatre'. The problem was that in *The Little School of Flying*, Meško suddenly replaced body movement with long periods of pure stillness. The concept is the now almost obsolete sign of 'dance betrayal', to which Lepecki affirmatively dedicated an entire monograph in his *Exhausting Dance*. 'In the performance, I waited a lot. For instance, I waited for my shoes to fall from the sky, so I could begin dancing. But when I started dancing, I soon stopped again and went on to the next scene. At such occasions, I somehow took all, almost all of the unnecessary movement away from the body. At the time, I liked to dance and move, even though a lot of the movement seemed to me like an unnecessary ornament of the essence. To the critic's eye, this did not contain enough dancing, so they wrote that I'd failed to read the sign on the theatre's door, saying it was a dance theatre. In *The Little School of Flying*, I already realised it was better to stay still than dance simply for the sake of dancing, just because I like to do it and because it is my occupation.' Meško says that she realised at a very early time that the dancer's private pleasure in watching dance and an artistic dance creation presented in a public space are two different things that may, but are not obliged to, coexist.

What was her prime concern in this performance in the first place? 'In *The Little School of Flying* I developed a fragmentary language that thinks in images and revolves around the theme of love. Basically, I wanted to construct an analogy with film, especially by editing individual fragments. That is why I decided to create a solo performance with two almost identical persons. Contentwise however, I was interested in the different stages of a woman in love. While editing individual fragments, I used time gaps (e.g. one dancer starts to unbutton her blouse, lights go out for a little while [darkness], then come back on again for the same dancer without her blouse) and different perspectives on the same image (e.g. one dancer is approaching the audience and comes up close enough almost to touch them, darkness, while the other dancer is standing by the back wall and starts approaching the audience). Another example of this is the dance on the wall with a projecting image of flowers, which was originally choreographed with the dancers lying on the floor and only then transferred onto a vertical wall. With the help of projected images, new landscapes and surroundings appear on the stage, which along with the music create the desired atmosphere. The sequence of cuts, editing of fragments, continuity of discontinuity, and intense colours create an image flow of an "open" story'. In her questioning of duality and intermediacy, Meško thus poses the question of identity as an issue of the original versus a reprise. 'Nina feels the need to play with different identities. The image of the dances is first accurately defined in such a way that it loses its individual qualities entirely, and then she ruthlessly



Nina Meško,
Deep show,
photo Miha
Fras, 2002
→ →

sets her in front of the audience. This is her permanent, actual and metaphorical willingness to fall', reads the catalogue of the international festival *The City of Women*, which featured the premiere of *The Little School of Flying*.

In the mid-1990s, Nina Meško made her first trip to New York, where she got acquainted with, and excited about, diverse formats of artistic creation. Ten years ago, she became head of the PTL 'Dance Lab' programme, a framework within which choreographers were invited to present their work in progress and share their dilemmas and questions with the audience as well as the experts. 'I wanted to talk more, I was searching for a contact between theory and practice, because I felt it is essential for the development of a medium.' At the same time, it is precisely the laboratory art format that opens the field for generating different ways of cooperation and organisation of dance processes that Nina desired. It seems that with the *Deep Show* project, which was presented at the Kapelica gallery in Ljubljana in 2002, Meško managed to create a format that could be called a dance situation rather than a dance performance – as opposed to the notion of performance, because it seems that the works of Meško were never obsessed with generating the Real in Lacanian terms, but were rather concerned with the differences and parallels between the diverse registers of the symbolical.

A gaze that is directed again and again at the focus of the recording, visualises the life of this static body (Sanja Nešković Peršič). The camera is recording the audience, who are able to see themselves directly on the video projector. Meanwhile, the telemetric system turns the lights on and off following its own heart-beat in the display window, where the lights are showing the movements of another performer (Kiki Lažetić). On this illuminated background the viewers can also see a mirror image of the video recording. A random group of people find themselves in a space, a gallery, furnished with sculptures and performers, which is also surrounded by its own images, so that it simultaneously becomes an active part of the visual and moving scene. *Deep Show*, a complete and technically demanding project, introduces new dimensional perceptions of movement, feeling, and visual space image into the scenery, at the same time offering the viewer a new active possibility of creative improvisation', reads the review of the performance by Daliborka Podboj in the *Večer* newspaper. Meanwhile, this is how Meško comments on *Deep Show*: 'The project is primarily about defining the following elements: body, space, view, and establishing their reciprocal relationships. My starting points were the following: (1) how to take the observers' consciousness towards their own process of looking and perceiving; in traditional performances, the observers identify with the subject of the artwork and lose their self-perception as sexual objects, lose the perception of the moment, social reality, and current location; (2) pointing out the relationship between the observers and the observed, thus creating a model of the relationship between power and control; (3) exploring the boundaries between performance and non-performance, researching terms such as the performing subject, gaze?, presence as opposed to representation; (4) the structure of space is established as an exploration of psycho-social behaviour'.





↑ Nina Meško, *What a feeling*, photo Simon Schwinge, 2006

The years 2003 and 2004 saw two major performances by Nina Meško: *What a Feeling* (2003) and *The State of Things* (2004). 'Visual and film art exert a powerful influence over my work. In an attempt to expand the possibilities of expressing form and content through the body in motion, the body onstage, I decided to invite visual artists, whose work I find interesting, to create a short solo for me (up to 15 minutes in duration). I asked them to stick to their own subject matter, but to try and express it through a new form. I would then combine the solos into an all-evening performance, much like a music concert. I would introduce each of the solos, present my collaborators and, during the event, change my clothes if necessary, drink water, ... the whole performance would not have an illusionist appeal, but would present an umbrella structure connecting works by different authors.' In her performance Meško conceived her choreographic role as the role of a curator and at the same time performed the work herself. It was a series of very different works, ranging from notating the choreography onto the framed surface onstage, which left an example of visual traces onstage (action painting), to appropriating some iconic sequences from the Hollywood dance movies of the 1980s (*Flashdance*) and problematising major corporate brands in the register of performance; the brands were created for Meško by a visual artist and were connected to the interludes in which Meško addresses the audience in the role of a TV presenter. Even though *What a Feeling* was not received in Slovenia in a way that would match its conceptual broadness, some of the foreign guests at the 2005 *Moving Cake* festival expressed very affirmative views of Meško's work. She also got a residence offer at the Vienna Tanzquartier, where she later began to develop her project called *My Private Archive*.

While the concept of *What a Feeling* touches upon the issues of choreographic production, authorship, and its placement on the (art) market and tries to think the choreographic function outside the notions of generation, arrangement, and giving sense to the dance material, this artistic act is even broader in the dance situation of *The State of Things* (2004). In it, she 'displays the context' of a Slovenian dance (pre)production. One could even say that she ascribes to the context a certain authorial or choreographic function, a certain ideological apparatus that the author cannot avoid.

The project under the working title *The State of Things* (2004) was formally designed as a stage documentary, while its contents were a study of the position of contemporary dance within contemporary society, the field of art, and the production system, as well as the artist's attitude towards her own creative process. The title of the project was a reference to Win Wenders's movie *Der Stand der Dinge*, which showcases the director's personal reflections on the movie industry and the artist's place in it. *The State of Things* thus featured an intense reflection on the context of dance art, for it was a project that tackled the problematisation of conditions and contexts of its own origins.

Another important reference was Boris Groys's project *The Art Judgement Show*, in which students from several arts departments ask him questions. As very rational political subjects, Groys says, who know that nothing can escape the system of capitalist production, they repeat the truths of economic relations with incontestability, characteristic of truisms. Afterwards, Groys speaks about how art is something that acquires its market value in the form of an artwork; if something is declared art, Groys says, it is thereby put on the market; art defines what is accepted on the market, etc. The market, says Groys, means not the commercial value of the product, but the law of supply and demand that also governs the world of art; these are all references to the power of theory, critique, and institutions to manufacture a work of art.

In the interviews, I talked to producers, theorists, and dancers about their relationships to their own work, to the contemporary dance art in Slovenia and other contexts, about their criteria of evaluating artistic creation.

The original idea was that the interviews would be presented in diverse media, such as video, the internet, and even in front of a 'live' audience. The structure of a stage documentary would, besides the interviews, comprise several elements: communicating with the audience, dance excerpts, quoting statistic data, video projections, etc., which would give the entire project the structure of a documentary film.' The project comprised two stages, Nina Meško says. 'In the first stage, I formulated precise questions for the interviewees. The data, acquired through the interviews, would thus serve as a source to form a general image of the state of things, despite the fact that the interviews had no ambition to be methodologically consistent, like surveys serving different statistical needs. It would have thwarted my spontaneous reactions to the statements of the interviewees. In the second stage, I conducted and documented the interviews. Some of the interviewees were invited to the final stage, a stage event in which the recorded material was set in a combination with live stage actions; in this particular case, a dance class.

The purpose of the project was to create a stage performance that would contain a high level of reflection over one's own medium and thus to provide the viewers with an insight into those key segments of contemporary dance practice, which in most projects remain concealed.'

The critics mostly labelled *The State of Things* as a dance installation, with which, however, Nina Meško does not entirely agree. 'I would not dare to claim my individual work as an installation or an exhibit, etc. I am but a dancer and I am concerned with dance, not painting or some other media. I also feel it is important that dance and dance performances be understood in a wider sense and not limited by certain presentation frameworks. Statements about what dance is or is not have always made me angry. Why could a dance performance not comprise a look at the dancers in everyday dance practice? I simply brought the situation from the space of practice into a space onstage.' Now, how to think *The State of Things* performance? In her collection of essays *Against Interpretation*, Susan Sontag writes that 'perhaps the liveliness of an individual art form can be judged according to the broadness it is capable of creating, so that its errors would be less disturbing'. Sontag wrote her essays soon after modernism in the arts had reached its peak, even though theorists and critics were still reading it with their outdated methodologies, setting themselves at the centre of knowledge. She wished to underline the capability of reading different art media. In the case of *The State of Things*, one could say that Nina Meško above all broadens the visibility of a choreographic field: she makes visible those choreographic leftovers that are always dropped from the final product in classical choreographic procedures. Meško sets those leftovers in all their uncertainty, processuality, in lieu of the product, enabling them to unfold as a cultural ideology that is none other than the 'spirit of weight' discussed in Badiou's text 'Dance as a Metaphor for Thought'. Thus, in *The State of Things*, dance in Badiou's sense is actually impossible, because cultural production generates it outside of truth – in the time that passes in the register of the symbolic, in the process of 'normalisation' itself, in which an exclusive totality of 'cultural production' is reproduced. Remember, at the beginning of the performance Meško closes the curtains on the windows of the Ljubljana Dance Theatre, so that darkness envelopes the space where we are watching a dance class, in which bodily singularities are disembodied in the massive choreographic machine of a dance practice – while the producers, choreographers, dancers, theorists, and others talk about contemporary dance in Slovenia. One could claim that the above-mentioned reduction of authorship, as a clearly singular aesthetic standpoint, which manifests itself through modern choreographic procedures first and foremost with different styles of movement, is suddenly replaced by an (invisible) production of authorship through an extremely sharpened (cultural) dispositif. Meško very transparently problematises this dispositive by multiplying certain repetitive frontalities or ideological positions: firstly, through the conventional space frontality between the auditorium and the stage, that is, between the audience and the performance; secondly, through the conventional antagonism between thinking art and practising it; and thirdly, through the hierarchic, authoritarian frontality of a dance teacher with his back turned to the audience and his trainees. All three frontalities unveil a certain false clarity (spatial, aesthetic-productional, pedagogical) of different centres of knowledge, reproducing a certain state of things regardless of how mobile its choreography is. This could give rise to the question whether the state of things (the stillness, immobility, immovability of

things) is not, among other things, a result of a romanticised modern dance obsession with movement, which Meško claims to recognise in the exceptional potentiality of the stillness of the body. *The State of Things* thus materialises a specific emptiness to which dance is attached.

In 2006 Nina Meško spent some time in Visidence in Vienna. There she created an archival format of a dance situation entitled *My Private Archive* (2006) and the performance *Without Any Idea* (2007). Her archive was not about complementing the inadequate memory of an individual, or about keeping track of events, spaces, or moments in their archival potentiality, but again it was about organisation of multiple authorship of mass, dialogical authorship through an arranged protocol of artistic meetings. The idea was born at the moment when Meško got the feeling that upon entering the international production networks, her own creative demands and expectations began making it difficult to have a relaxed process, while her creativity was also blocked by the conditions she had not been used to before: she had a feeling that she had to make the most of her residence. In order to surpass her own expectations, given the ideal creative conditions, and to distance herself from her own artistic pressures, she decided to organise her studio work into talks with the artists who daily frequented the Tanzquartier.

After my last performance, *The State of Things*, I had no new ideas to work with. I was hoping I would get them during my residence at the Tanzquartier Wien. During the first half of my residence, I read books, went over video clips, saw exhibitions and plays, and met new people. Time passed, but I got no new ideas.

Then I decided I wanted to speak to other choreographers and artists from the field of performance about their ideas and artistic decisions. My starting point was a statement by Ian Wilson, a conceptual artist from the 1970s, who said: "Oral communication is about much more than merely language; it is one of the media for spreading ideas". So for the final two weeks of the programme, I talked to people. Most of the time, the talks were really lively exchanges of questions and answers. At the beginning of each talk, I invited everyone to point the camera at the dance studio from their preferred point of view. Then we sat behind the camera and recorded only the empty studio with our voices in the image. Individual conversations were supposed to last for an hour, but usually took longer.

Each conversation was different. Sometimes, it was more like an interview; at other times, it was like a professional debate or an intimate story or a chat or all of those at once. I am almost convinced that in most cases the conversation was beneficial for both parties. And sometimes, after the conversations, I felt excited about the new ideas that came up.

So far, I have prepared 14 conversations and have decided to go on with them. My study has turned into a project that is a work in progress, and I want to go on with the conversations for many years. I would

Nina Meško,
*The State of
things*, photo
Nada Žganč,
2004
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like to invite all artists from the field of dance and performance to take part in an hour-long conversation with me, a conversation with no pre-selection of artists whatsoever. My wish is to collect a large private archive of conversations.' Meanwhile, Meško presented a modification of her private archive in the event *Without Any Idea* (2007), in which she created a space situation for a social event, inviting all the artists who took part in the 'private archive' to choose an artist and invite her/him for a conversation in the situation entitled *Without Any Idea*. With these two projects, Meško opened a new artistic format in her opus, a format of obvious processuality, which touches upon the artist's everyday life with new forms of collaboration and is entirely based on Meško's talks or dialogues with individual artists – one could say a relatively open form of co-authorship.

By questioning, reformulating, and problematising authorship, Meško nevertheless does not completely renounce certain stylistic elements that can be recognised in virtually all of her projects. However, those elements are more about speech acts or performative gestures in her projects than they are about dance elements. Despite the fact that her performances tackle contexts where her authorship in the classical sense is reduced, in Nina's work there is always a personal element that raises temperature.

This personal constant consists of mildly ironical, humorous statements or situations that cannot be read without mixed feelings. For instance, in *What a Feeling*, Nina says: 'We will try to perform in English because we really want to be international'. Her own explanation is the following: 'I do not wish my comments to be direct. As soon as they might become too clear, I prefer taking them into another direction. I like to move along the limits. I like to give statements that come from one side or another. I want the viewers to develop their own attitudes towards a theme or an issue, not to assume my own. Hence the ambiguity, undefinability, different statements in different media. A performance itself is a statement, only with more layers and possibilities of reading'. Humour? 'When you try to be funny, usually you are not. Even with humour, if I am deliberately implying something funny, I am interested in the limits of funny, in the fact that something may not be funny at once – that perhaps it will be, perhaps not, that the same statement might be understood extremely seriously and humorously at the same time. *The State of Things* was such a performance, as Ana Vujanović said, "simple, clear, and serious"; however, a part of the audience had lots of fun watching it'.

Over the last fifteen years, Nina Meško has certainly been among the most articulate artists on the contemporary dance scene in Slovenia. This has to be said especially because her works have not resonated in the Slovenian cultural space to the extent that they deserve. Her interest in broadening the dance medium originates from, among other things, her affinity for the contemporary visual arts scene, which she follows regularly and which provide her with a fresh perspective. Over the past few years, Nina Meško has also been involved in pedagogical work with the JSKD, the institutional network of amateur cultural activities, which has been providing a constant influx of young dancers in Slovenia since 1977 and is, according to the number of its participants, more massive than one might think. Furthermore, it has been one of the strategic foundations of Slovenian contemporary dance practice over the past three decades.

LIST OF WORKS

- 1996 solo performance *WATCHING ALICE*
- 1997 performance *IN BETWEEN* ; together with Gregor Kamnikar
- video-dance *WATCHING ALICE*
- video installation *WATCHING ALICE*
- 1998 performance *13 HOURS IN APRIL*
- 1999 performance *THE LITTLE SCHOOL OF FLYING*
- 2000 improvisation *COINCIDENCE HOLDS THE KEY*
- 2000/06 initiation and curation of *DANCE LAB*
- 2001 short piece *POP TRIP*
- 2002 performance/installation *DEEP SHOW*
- 2003 performance *WHAT A FEELING*
- 2004 performance *THE STATE OF THINGS*
- 2006 performance *MY PRIVATE ARCHIVE*
- 2007 performance/installation *WITHOUT ANY IDEA*
- 2010 collaborative work *IF YOU (DON'T) STOP DANCING, I'LL KILL YOU*



ISKRA ŠUKAROVA

ed. by Biljana Tanurovska Kjulavkovski

Iskra Šukarova: a choreographer, leading soloist of the Macedonian Opera and Ballet (MOB), a performer, lecturer, choreographer of stage movement for theatre, choreographer of movement on film, director of Ballet at the MOB, 2002–2004, one of the founders and coordinator of the contemporary dance programme in 'Lokomotiva' NGO–Centre for New Initiatives in the Arts and Culture,¹ initiator of introducing contemporary dance as a subject into the curriculum of the secondary school of ballet in Škopje, initiator of various collaborations, one of the initiators of founding a dance college in Macedonia, one of the founders of the Nomad Dance Academy,² mentor to young Macedonian choreographers...

Her professional profile has never followed a single direction. Her development was conditioned by certain events, collaborations, and her education – constantly transforming her as an author. Her interests, leaps forward, training, changes in her career, the shaping and modifying of her artistic statements may best be observed in those events. Accordingly, I shall attempt to present her through synchronic and diachronic intersections of events that conditioned and inform her artistic profile.

Her education in dance began at the Ilija Nikolovski Luj State School of Music and Ballet in Škopje (classical ballet department). After graduating in 1991 she became a member of the ballet ensemble of the MOB, where she later became a leading soloist.

In 1993 she left Macedonia for France, to study at the Conservatoire national de région de musique and the Conservatoire national supérieur de musique et de danse in Lyon, where she explored and gained additional insight into contemporary dance techniques. In subsequent years, she used her experiences from France in a number of productions that she made for the Macedonian Ballet: *Pastels* (1994), *Inferno* (1995), *The Four Seasons* (1996), and between 1994 and 1997, a few short choreographic pieces: *Due lacrime*, *Risky Zone*, *Through Me...* In those performances she explored the possibilities of relating her choreographic vocabulary and thought to the body of classical ballet, with a systematic, stylized, and synchronized movement conforming to her artistic concepts. In those group works she attempted to introduce the new contemporary kinaesthetic movement into the classical technical vocabulary. At that time, she also tried to implement her physical training and knowledge of contemporary techniques, which, according to her, signified the freedom, flexibility, and open space that she wanted to bring into the institutional context, harmonising it with the body of conventional ballet. During this phase she made certain compromises between what she wanted to accomplish as a choreographer and what was at her disposal, which informed her choreographic approach in that predetermined institutional context. However, she was learning in the process. Generally, in her productions, the set and the costumes are visually defined, while the music responds to the movement, itself in accord with the given space, time, venue... Her works were performed at a number of theatres and festivals throughout the region of the former Yugoslavia, such as the Bitef, the Belef, Budva Grad Teatar, etc.

At the same time, during the 1990s and early 2000s, she continued with her education and received several grants and residencies in Europe and the US. She participated in the P.A.R.T.S. workshops in Brussels, in the Dance Web etc. In 1996, she received the Arts Link Fellowship residency and went to New York, where she worked with Joshiho Chuma, with whom she collaborated until 2007.³ In New York, she got acquainted with the experimental scene there, which was a new artistic environment and challenge for her. In 2000 she graduated from the University of Sts. Cyril and Methodius in Škopje, with a degree in art history and archaeology.

In Macedonia, the 1990s saw a period of indeterminacy, labelled 'transitional', in which ballet, too, was in transition, with many novelties being introduced, such as a modern dance repertory, which has continued to develop along the same lines. At the time, the social conditions in the country favoured the old, inherited system of cultural institutions. This environment had difficulties in recognizing other ways of dealing with ideas, except within institutional frameworks. The civil sector was underdeveloped, and there were virtually no alternatives.

In the emerging climate of support for independent projects, the late 1990s and early 2000s saw the formation of non-governmental organisations with agendas that demanded innovation, difference, new protocols of work, a wholesale new approach – to inform a different production environment.

During the late 1990s Iskra's expression in choreography began to change. According to Sonja Zdravkova Džeparoska, the performance 'Eternal Travel' (1997), with music by Anastasia, 'outlined a new phase of her

Iskra Šukarova,
Formula,
photo Milomir
Kovačević,
2008-9
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¹ www.lokomotiva.org.mk

² www.nomaddanceacademy.org

³ Chuma and Šukarova collaborated on several occasions. In 1997, in Macedonia they presented their work in process – a collaboration for the *Škopsko leto* festival; in 1998, also in Macedonia, they worked on the performance *Bezdušna Neda* and presented it at the *Ohridsko leto* festival. In 2006-7, Šukarova

participated as a performer and co-producer with the Lokomotiva in *Page Out of Order*, a US-Macedonian-Japanese co-production, which was performed in Macedonia (in Škopje, Kumanovo, and Ohrid), Romania (at the National Dance Centre in Bucharest and the International Theatre Festival in Sibiu), and in the US, at the Dance Theatre Workshop in New York.

choreographic preoccupations. She was in search of form. Inventive choreographic parts are supplemented with the presence of actors faced with a complex task – to engage with their personal texts in body practices. This seemingly unusual combination of non-professional and professional performers brought additional qualities to the performance, along with significant innovation – itself the basic and guiding principle of modern theatre. She applied this methodology in her subsequent project *Kub 2* (2001), where in a dance duo with a non-professional dancer they both gave an astonishing performance.⁴ At the time, as a choreographer Iskra began to distance herself from the institutions and her creative work mostly took place outside of them. She began research in various concepts unrelated to the contemporary requirements and output of the codified institutional context. She worked independently, pursuing her kinaesthetic interests in relation to the performing bodies she worked with, exploring form. She used actors and non-professional performers, creating performance contexts in which she questioned the language and form of communication between the performing bodies, and relations to a specific problem, venue, or object.

During the early 2000s Šukarova ‘focused on form, which became her primary concern. “Clichéd plot and a strict dramaturgic framework are atypical of her creative opus. They are not reduced to this element, but are entirely focused on form, movement, and their relations in space [...] In her choreography for the performance *Cetiri slike vo dviženje* (Four Pictures in Movement, 2001) the stage design is related to the living structure of the human body, with a new emphasis on inter-media reference.’⁵

A major turn in her choreographic work followed her MA studies at the Laban Centre in London, made possible by a scholarship from the British Council, where she wrote her thesis, ‘The Dancing Body in Relation to Geometry in Space’.

After her MA studies, she began to articulate her intuitions in relation to time, space, other bodies, and music pro-theoretically. Interested in geometry, the defragmentation of the human body, corporeal space, and body-space relations, she adopted a kinaesthetic approach based on certain postulates of Laban and Forsythe’s research, using her own logic. She applied this methodology in her graduation piece *Off at a Tangent* (2002) premiered at the Bonnie Bird Theatre of the Laban Dance Centre in London and subsequently presented at several international festival, as well as in her next production, *Parabol* (2003). In those pieces she ‘radically departed from the standardized ballet norms – with fresh and inventive solutions as a result’.⁶

In her latest pieces, the *Duch Couch*, *Formula* and *Sphinx (It)*, conceived between 2005 and 2010, she is primarily concerned with exploring body positions, respective discursive relations, and relations with other bodies. She is working with bodily situations, with the changes and construction of the body, which is active and involved, which is a mediator of particular events, conditions, references, meanings, conventions. She is concerned with the processes that condition the transformation of a performing body.

Those latest pieces have been performed internationally, at festivals in France, Italy, Great Britain, Greece, Germany, Sweden, Romania, Ireland, the US, Turkey, etc. and regionally, at the Gibanica festival in Ljubljana, the Dance Week in Zagreb, the Zvrk International Dance Festival and Teatar Fest in Sarajevo, the Red House in Sofia, at the Dom omladine in Belgrade, etc.

Iskra Šukarova lives in Skopje and is currently dedicated to her choreographic work – she has continued her research for *Sphinx (It)*. She is still present in the civil sector as a member of the *LoKOMOTIVA*, where over the last few years she has been working on establishing new conditions for work and production, and new career opportunities for young artists. In addition, she is involved in the activities of the regional project, the Nomad Dance Academy – a platform dedicated to the development of contemporary dance. She is employed at the MOB as a leading soloist and she is working on her PhD thesis, *The Relations of Rudolf von Laban’s Theory of Space to Dance Practice*. Most recently, she has been focused on launching the Skopje Faculty of Dance (Fakultet za tanc), where she is to become a professor in the department of contemporary dance.

⁴ Sonja Zdravkova Džeparoska, *Diskursi na tančevata umetnost na XXI vek* (Skopje: Jugoreklam, 2001), 288.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Sonja Zdravkova Džeparoska, ‘Formiranje i razvoj na sodremen tancov teatar – Novite tendencii na makedonskata tancova scena vo periodot 1991–2005’, in eds. G. Stardelov, J. Lužina, and I. Džeparoski, *Teatarot na počvata na Makedonija XXI vek* (Skopje: MANU, 2007) 365–77.

CONVERSATION: Biljana Tanurovska Kjuļavkovski / Iskra Šukarova

BTK: Iskra, I am interested in the thoughts and focus of the viewpoints you hold today, as an author; specifically, what is the focus of your interests in choreography? Is there a specific reference or position(s) as points of departure in your work process?

IS: My agenda is to establish a relation that will enable a creative dialogue with my collaborators. I am interested in particularity, in otherness.

I come from a classical ballet background that is traditional and based on rules, conventions, and work processes that are different from those of contemporary dance. In the past, I used to connect to contemporary dance by studying various contemporary dance techniques. Today I realise that it does not matter what language (dance vocabulary) one uses, but what one wants to express. I am more mindful today of the individual situation and the individual with whom I’m working, I’m more interested in the context in which I create, and I’m interested in what the present moment as such has to offer. As points of reference, I take into account the past, the story of artists I’m working with. For me, technique is not crucial; the story is – the story of the collaborator, the one who is with me in the creative process.



↑ Iskra Šukarova, *Duch Couch*, 2007

BTK: You are interested in the body of the other, the contexts in which that body is shaped and that it possesses; therefore, as you say, dance vocabulary is not crucial to you. You choose to work with performers of different backgrounds, different profiles. Is this connected with generating different materials, is it a choreography tactic, or something else? Can you tell us about your reasoning behind this issue, your analysis of it?

IS: Perhaps it comes from the fact that the collaborators I’ve worked with were not always dancers or performers who knew about contemporary dance techniques. Aware of my classical background, maybe I realised that I should perhaps not use a language that my collaborators cannot speak. I try to communicate with different bodies and to link this communicating with my knowledge as a choreographer; technique should not be the decisive element.

For instance, in the process of creating *Duch Couch* (2005), the main element was the object (an inflatable plastic couch). I was interested in the relation of the performer with the object in a given space. I was working with Danilo Mandić, who had no previous dance experience and for the first time found himself in the role of a professional performer. We tried to find the right balance between my performing potential and his body language.

The same axis – body-space-object – was taken up with professional performers in 2005 at the Dans Stationen in Malmö, Sweden. There, I de-composed an already finished work and re-articulated my idea. The process that I underwent with them was based on their own performing potentials, so the same idea generated different results.

In another project, *The Red Swan*, in 2008, I worked with the oldest still active ballet dancer of the Macedonian National Ballet, who was almost seventy at the time, and the experience was entirely different. The tactic was to find a way to overcome his own performing limits. I applied different approaches and communication strategies to overcome his adherence to the established conventions of classical ballet. Eventually, he managed to get out of his performing limits and formulate a different, new expression. I managed to uncover aspects of his personality and performing qualities that he did not know about until then.

In each of my works, or maybe I should say processes, I re-consider the principles of cooperation or co-authorship. With my collaborators, I constantly try to question the process and its significance.

BTK: Your choreographic opus is diverse and full of works that might be an insight into the different experiences that you've had. On the one hand, you are a part of an institutional system [the National Ballet], where you've been working for some time, yet, on the other hand, you've been increasingly active in the non-institutional system or the civil sector, where you've been trying to expand the field of creation in dance. What has established and formulated your relationship to these systems as a choreographer?

IS: For me, one of the greatest experiences was my stay in New York through the Arts Link program in 1996. There, for the first time I saw how an independent scene actually works. I attended processes where authors created, collaborated, and worked in an entirely different way. It was an art scene that inspired me, especially because I came from a world that functioned quite differently – the world of classical ballet.

That independent scene, if I may express myself metaphorically, was a window into a whole new world for me. At that time, during the 90s, I was just beginning my work as a choreographer, and so my experience in New York remained only as a memory, or knowledge, because there was no way I could apply it in my country. There was no scene, no collaborators I could find in Skopje, Macedonia. I realised that I was left on my own to discover how these mechanisms operate.

Then, the only choice was to work with ballet dancers, with whom the concepts I applied inevitably had to be re-formulated in accordance with classical dance techniques. It was about making compromises, but also it was about mutual teaching through the compromises I made working with the performers of the classical ballet company.

Also, at that time I was able to follow the European scene through various festivals; I was part of many workshops that took place in Europe, such as the Dance Web, for example, and it meant a lot for my development as a performer and author. At that time I was engaged in the study of the working principles of a number of choreographers: Cunningham, Bausch, Forsythe, Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker, Meg Stuart, and others. Each of these choreographers has a distinct working method, to which I did not become attached, but was examining it instead. All their different methods of treating choreographic issues they were dealing with raised many questions for me... I started to wonder what my own choreographic approach towards the body and movement was, and in what way I wanted to create. What was also interesting for me was exploring our own particularity here, in Macedonia, because what was contemporary dance in Europe and the world, was not here, too. For me, that meant finding a way to create my own choreographic language by exploring the possibilities, specificities, and potential of the scene here, at home.

BTK: You are talking about the importance of communication with the performers you are working with, communication between performing bodies. Formula, which you co-authored with Dejan Srhoj, began as an investigation into the communication between you two as authors. Did you also examine in Formula the non-hierarchical relation between the two of you as authors, and what did that relation and communication actually mean?

IS: For me, Formula is a name, a title for communication, freedom, co-authorship. As a process, Formula was a system that was not restricted to the two of us, but one that should open new issues, to include other people as well. We kept working on Formula and changing it for a few years; we presented it as a process in several occasions, in a few of our tours.

When Josef Nadj invited us to perform at the [National] Choreographic Centre in Orléans, as a part of the Festival de Travers in December of 2009, we had to answer how and whether Formula should become a product, namely a piece in a 'completed' form. We invited Ana Vujanović to participate in the process as a dramaturge. She intervened in the process with (as she called them) 'dramaturgical tricks' and gave us directions in relation to the material that we had. All those who were involved in Formula were part of an open process, therefore invited to change the system we had established.

This collaboration was a manifestation of my desire to communicate, and it is related to where I come from – Skopje,

Ishra Šuškurova,
Duch Couch,
2007
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Macedonia, where independent contemporary dance scene is still developing. To reach out to other performers, I consciously developed a desire to communicate. This openness, urge for cooperation, and desire to communicate with others to express what I felt inside me, led me to look at the 'formulae' for the realization of my ideas. These 'formulae' I tried to decode, discover through a variety of principles, methods, strategies, depending on the situation and cooperation.

BTK: In your latest work, the Sphinx (It), you are exploring duality on the one hand and, on the other, you are looking for solutions to exit this condition, this situation of duality. Can you reflect on your work process in this particular piece?

IS: As an author, I have many questions, and I need the time to answer them. I'm looking for my own choreographic language that is associated with my classical influences, with contemporaneity, with the possibilities or inabilities of the body. In this process, which took place in Skopje last April, I collaborated with Ursula Eagly of New York, in her capacity as a performer.

I had to address some of my own intuitive thinking, for instance why I was interested in the Sphinx as a mythological being. In order to answer these questions, I collaborated with Ana Vujanović and we worked in the research phase of the project as a choreographer/artist and a dramaturge/theorist. During this stage, we focused on exploring the relation between the practice and theory of dance.

Throughout the process, we articulated my intuitive thinking with theoretical analysis and explored what the Sphinx as a symbol meant to me and why I was interested in its duality, that is, in the coexistence of the human and the animal in one creature. We reflected on those issues, that is, on the human need to be not exclusively human, but to find a reason for one's existence in connecting with the other. Through this process we came to certain theoretical references that were my guidelines in further realisation of the work.

The Sphinx helped me to delve into the binary, and thus allowed me to get out of the balance of duality. The binary is a logical component that is recognisable, given, known, inherent, while trinity is a system that we hardly comprehend, because it is beyond our logic of understanding. For me, what was interesting in this research was to find the system of the third or the third part, which requires deeper exploration and for me still is an important issue at this point.

BTK: What is the system that allows you to reinvestigate your performing body and what are the processes that affect the forming of your perspective on your body?

IS: The hardest thing for me is to maintain the relationship with my own body. I'm interested in physical memory. I experience my body as disharmonic. Sometimes I do see my body as defined, coordinated, educated, and positioned according to certain conventions. Due to my classical education, my body was to meet certain predetermined ideals in order to become a stage-performing body. At the same time, this ideal is problematic for me. Coordinated and defined body is not always a pleasant body for me, and I wonder why? I strive to change that feeling through different approaches, namely to overcome the conventions, definitions, the coordinates that are imposed on me, most of them by myself. I follow a certain matrix that my body replicates. I want to change my awareness of my body. I think that sometimes one should forsake one's notion of one's own body in order to experience it differently. I'm trying to re-define my own body – that is another important process that I am undergoing at this point.

BTK: Besides being a performer and choreographer, you are also one of the founders and active members of the NGO 'Lokomotiva' and your work there is entirely different from what you do as an author. You are working on the development of a non-institutional contemporary-dance scene in Macedonia, which at this point might not be called a scene yet; still, you are helping create the right conditions, so that the scene may develop eventually. What does this involvement mean to you?

IS: I'm part of a new movement, which I certainly couldn't do by myself. With my collaborators I share the idea that we should invest in the development of a regional and Macedonian con-



temporary-dance scene. At one point I realised that my story as a choreographer will not make sense if I stand alone, isolated as an artist in this country. For me, the need to touch other people with whom we share similar ideas and with whom I can develop something in the here and now is vital.

We are working at Lokomotiva on creating conditions in which new generations of authors will be educated and will have the opportunity to produce in conditions different from those that are institutionally imposed. In other words, we are creating a space in which new generations of authors from Macedonia can work independently. Today I do not feel alone and isolated anymore.

LIST OF WORKS

June 1994: PASTELS (26 mins), music by Mike Oldfield and Enigma; performed at the Macedonian National Theater in Skopje by the ensemble of the Macedonian Opera and Ballet (MOB). Toured in: Belgrade and Budva.

July 1995: Inferno (30 mins), music by Alfred Schnittke; premiered at the Skopje Summer Festival, Skopje, performed by the ensemble of the Macedonian Opera and Ballet (MOB). Toured in: Belgrade and Budva.

October 1996: THE FOUR SEASONS (45 mins) music by A. Vivaldi; performed at the Macedonian National Theater, Skopje by the ensemble of the Macedonian Opera and Ballet (MOB). Toured in: Belgrade and Budva.

Between July 1994 and June 1997, several short choreographic pieces: DUE LACRIME (5 mins), music by A. Vivaldi; RISKY ZONE (5 mins), music by P. Lezobny; THROUGH ME (4 min), music by Prodigy – all performed at the Macedonian National Theater by the ensemble of the Macedonian Opera and Ballet (MOB).

December 1997: ETERNAL TRAVEL (60 mins), music by the band Anastasia, performed at the Macedonian National Theater, Skopje by soloists of the MOB and actors from the Drama Theatre in Skopje. Toured in: London, Thessaloniki, and Athens.

July 2000: FOUR PICTURES IN MOTION (55 mins), music: Byrd, Vivaldi; Electronic music: Association for Music & Dance–Casiel; performed at the Skopje Summer Festival in Skopje, Macedonia.

September 2001: QB-2 (45 mins), music by D. Jovanović and D. Spasović, performed at the MOT in Skopje (the Youth Cultural Center–MKC). Toured in Sofia.

April 2002: PLAY ME (20 mins) – a work in progress, DJ–S. Janićijević, the Youth Cultural Center–MKC, Skopje.

September 2002: OFF A TANGENT (20 mins), graduation piece for the MA in dance programme; music: Strings and Nikola Kodjobasija, performed at the Bonnie Bird Theater in London by Iskra Šukarova. Toured in: Paris, Milano, Belgrade, and Montpellier

June 2003: PAR A BALL (45 mins) (PARALLELS); music: Soni Petrovski, a MOB production in Skopje (the Skopje Summer Festival), performed by members of the MOB ensemble. Toured in Belgrade and Novi Sad.

November 2005: OUCH COUCH (40 mins) premiered at the music festival in Skopje, performed by Danilo Mandić and Iskra Šukarova. Toured in: Malmö, Sarajevo, Dublin, Belgrade, and Sofia.

February 2008: RED SWAN (45 mins), the Macedonian Opera and Ballet, Ekrem Husein.

2008–2009: FORMULA (30 mins), a co-production with Dejan Srhoj and Fico Ballet (Slovenia), performed by Dejan Srhoj and Iskra Šukarova, 'dramaturgical tricks' by Ana Vujanović. Toured in: Ljubljana, Zagreb, Sarajevo, Siena, Athens, Orleans.

April 2010: SPHINK (1t), the Dramski Theatre, Skopje; music by Aleksandar Pejovski, performed by Ursula Eagly (USA).

SELECTED REVIEWS

In 'A Page Out of Order: M', Yoshiho Chuma is constantly rearranging, layering and shifting to reveal another view – much like the movable cubes that are a staple of her choreography. Using black-and-white film, text, dance, singing and a marvelous onstage band, for 90 minutes she stirs an uneasy brew of war, identity and dislocation. (...) Ms. Šukarova, who functions as the performance's quiet heart, is referring to her country's political situation, both the tedium and upset that come with such upheaval. But, of course, she is also talking about art, how maddening it can be. The pages are out of order, you think. This is impossible. Then something clicks, and you never want the experience to end.

By Claudia La Rocco, New York Times, January 24, 2007

http://www.nytimes.com/2007/01/24/arts/dance/24chum.html?_r=1&partner=rssnyt&emc=rss&pagewanted=all

(...) Ekrem Husein, embodying the three characters co-existing in one – a man, a woman and a creature (swan), danced with the same enthusiasm and same energy he had at the beginning of his career. (...) The Red Swan, the latest piece by Iskra Šukarova, is definitely her most powerful work so far. She announces a new, different, more mature choreographic approach. The intimate life of the star of the day, or the star of Macedonian ballet Ekrem Husein, is brutally disclosed like the reality itself, at the same time maintaining this artistic, surreal fantasy leading the spectators along different roads.

Tina Ivanova, Utrinski vesnik, February 15, 2008

... Ursula Eagly's performance in 'It', Šukarova's choreography inspired by the myth of the Sphinx, is so deeply penetrating, that even the temporary nausea you might eventually feel makes you filled with joy. Each pure, precise movement Eagly makes is fascinating (...) From a stable structure, for a moment she collapses, bursts on the floor, and then again, in the next moment, returns to the old compact state. Concerning her technique, Eagly explains that she approaches the body as a fragment. 'I grew up with classical ballet, where the body is wholly integrated. I was interested in what happens with a disintegrated body, a body about to break, fall apart...', she says...

Mirkica Popović, Utrinski vesnik, April 26, 2010

The renowned Macedonian dance artist Iskra Šukarova joined the Slovene performer Dejan Srhoj (better known as the founder of Fičo balet) in the production Formula. This is a brief, but thoughtful duo exploring the structured improvisation as a working method. Technically powerful Šukarova and Srhoj open up space for fragile moments of conceiving dance, communication, and mutual support between the collaborators in the process of creating choreography, male-female duo as a form, and various formulas for deriving dance material.

Jelena Mihelčić, May 2010, 'Pogled u susjedstvo', 27. Tjedan suvremenog plesa: Tragovi žalutaloga, chor. Nada Kokotović; Formula, chor. Iskra Šukarova and Dejan Srhoj; Ruine, chor. Jasmina Prolić; Solo za tri vizije - Petera Handkea, Samuela Becketta & Virginie Woolf, chor. Miloš Sofrenović.

<http://www.plesnascena.kulisa.eu/index.php?p=article&id=1108>



Iskra Šukarova, Ouch Couch, 2007
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Nikolina Pristaš (1976) is a Zagreb dancer-choreographer and member of the BADco, performing collective, which comprises four dancer-choreographers, two dramaturges, and a philosopher. In this short interview Nikolina describes and articulates the production methods of creating BADco.'s shows; positions, aesthetically and institutionally, BADco. and her work in relation to the recent past and present condition of the international dance scene; and indicates topics that concern her in her current work. More on BADco. and Nikolina Pristaš may be found on www.badco.hr

LIST OF WORKS WITH BADco.

Authored choreographies:

- 2001 2 from 2TRI4
- 2001 SOLO ME
- 2004 FLESHDANCE
- 2007 PROMJENE (CHANGES)
- 2010 SEMI-INTERPRETATIONS

Co-authored:

- 2003 WALK THIS WAY
- 2003 REBRO KAO ZELENI ZIDOVI (RIBCAGE)
- 2004 DELETED MESSAGES
- 2006 MEMORIES ARE MADE OF THIS..
- 2008 1 SIROMAŠAN I JEDNA 0 (1 POOR AND ONE 0)
- 2009 LIGA VREMENA (THE LEAGUE OF TIME)

NIKOLINA PRISTAŠ

ed. by Marko Kostanić

Nikolina Pristaš,
Changes, photo
Božo Raos, 2007

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156 CONVERSATION: Marko Kostanić / Nikola Pristaš

MK: The collective work of BADco. in the production process of its shows is based in non-hierarchical models of the participation of authors of different performing backgrounds. Can you describe and self-analyse methods of generating choreographic material through the relations, fusions, contaminations, and re-articulations with inputs of a different provenance, which are characteristic of BADco., as political, social, or historical?

NP: Methods of generating choreographic material vary from one project to the next, and that variance is mostly conditioned by the division of functions and responsibilities among the people involved in the process, that is, by how much and what type of touching and entangling there is between two types of work: choreographic production and conceptualisation of the problems that the performance is meant to engage. There is also another condition, which definitely concerns the topic of the performance; sometimes, its topic easily lends itself to choreographic treatment, that is, there are no major problems in translating ideas from abstract thought to dance expression, whereas at other times we have a lot of imagining and constructing to do before we can bring dancing to the proximity of the topics that concern us.

Changes' are a good example of an easy transfer. The basic ideas of the performance – the relation between noise and communication, the relation between the parasite and the maker, between languor and labour, the production value of noise – were treated in various ways in an exclusively choreographic production process. But only once we'd got started on the conceptual-dramaturgic construction of the show did elements such as the text, lighting, and sound exert a key impact on the choreography [e.g. the lighting determines the dynamics of the spatial unfolding of the choreography in the first part of the performance, whereas towards the end it almost entirely conditions the dancers' decisions; or, for instance, the text read out through much of the show demands the intensification of the spectator's attention – the spectator must constantly make decisions about what to keep at the forefront of her attention and what to discard as noise etc.]. Dance is thus instrumentalised, its position is one of adjacency to other elements of the performance, not the position of the language-vehicle of the meaning of the performance. Those decisions were made in the final two or three weeks of the working process, through intense conversations with Sergej,¹ and then certainly also with Slaven² [set-design] and Helge³ [sound-design].

In 'I poor and one O' Tomi⁴ wanted to deal with the ideas of deactivation, exclusion from work, disengaged activity, exhaustion and fatigue as the phenomena of endless bondage. The question that immediately arose was, of course, how to treat those political questions choreographically at all. Based on Farochi's thesis ['Workers Leaving the Factory'] that the history of cinema shows that human labour remains hidden to the camera and that the film, story, drama begins only at that moment when the workers step out of the factory gates, when they enter into the field of image from the field of work, Sergej proposed that we deal with historic images of dance. That opened a whole series of problems and determinations on what constitutes a certain image of dance: is it the technique, or embodied experience, or bodily predispositions, or clichéd conceptions...? Furthermore, can a dance image be clearly copied so that an informed audience may recognise the auteur handwriting of the choreographer at stake [e.g. Cunningham, Forsythe, Duncan]? What sort of things must a short-breath, fifteen-second choreography include, which is aimed at presenting a certain historic image of dance? And finally, how to include non-dancing bodies into that image? We spent much of the process trying to solve those issues, only to realise, right before the première, that conceptually they were purely redundant. However, that made us realise that the image of the workers leaving the factory could be choreographically analysed and treated. We developed another line of choreography based on Sergej's suggestion to choreograph manual labour. Analysing the relation between the gaze and the hand – given that in labour, those two organs are organically linked – we became interested in what happens to choreography when we grant autonomy to the gaze, that is, when the eye is not gazing at the work of the hand and, further-

¹ Goran Sergej Pristaš, dramaturge, member of BADco. [M.K.].

² Slaven Tolj, visual artist and set designer [M.K.].

³ Helge Hinterreger, musician [M.K.].

⁴ Tomislav Medak, philosopher, member of BADco. [M.K.].



BADco.,
Fleshdance,
photo Miljenko
Bengez, 2004
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more, when we impose fixed rhythmic conditioning onto those actions. 'Handwork', as we called that scene, later migrated over the entire body as the choreographic logic for three female solos.

A third choreographic line resulted from our desire to choreograph the crowd, the protesting masses. After a few attempts to improvise the crowd, we realised that it was reminding us overwhelmingly of contact improvisation and that we, dancers, had resistance to dancing that at all, mostly because contact improvisation had got so hackneyed through overuse and mutated in ways we didn't want to thematise. But the investigation of that form motivated Tomi to insist on Paxton's contact improvisation (as well as on his Material for the Spine) as an important topic – because it is a form that emerged in a specific political context and historic moment when labour is being more and more internalised – so I suggested that we move the whole thing to language. The various relations that may be produced in the relation between speaking about dance to dancing itself are an element that we've been revisiting all the way since 'Memories'.

On the other hand, in 'The League of Time' we connected through the issue of creating a new man to the Soviet cinema eccentricists, who saw in the cinematic bodies of Charlie Chaplin and Buster Keaton the body of the new man. So then we went into researching the combinatorics of slapstick and communist 'slet'.⁵ In that process, unlike in the other two above, choreographic production developed much more among the performers of the show – Zrinka, Ana, and Pravdan⁶ – and participated in the combinatorics of the operation.

To conclude: our processes substantially differ; they depend on the current interests and dispositions of the individuals involved in working on the performance. In terms of our methods, they're always about an effort we all invest in reflecting the problem through various forms of knowledge (and ignorance) and constant feedback to the point where we've found a perspective on the problem we're dealing with that is operative and interesting to all of us.

⁵ 'Slet' – youth spectacle or parade in honour of the birthday of the communist leader Tito, similar to the parades held in Soviet Union and other communist countries. Pioneers and young students took part in it, performing movements that combined early modern dance, gymnastics, pantomime, and gestures of celebration. Its early precedent is the parade of 'Sokol' [falcons], a youth organisation of the pan-Slavic movement in the 19th century.

⁶ Zrinka Užbinec, Ana Kreitmeyer, and Pravdan Devlahović, dancer-choreographers, members of BADco. [M.K.].



BADco., Semi-interpretations, photo Lovro Rumiha, 2010
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MK: It seems to me that in your work and in the work of BADco., especially in the more recent performances, unlike in some dominant trends, authorial interest resides not in exhausting the institutional regimes of dance, or in endless expanding of the field of legitimate choreographic acting, but in rearticulating dance practices through a precise historic and epistemological addressing of their relations to, for instance, labour, or cinema; to paraphrase Jameson, by revealing the 'choreographic unconscious' in those fields.

NP: It is true that we belong to a scene that deals with the problems you indicated in your question, but we've always had trouble with the kind of opinion-prescription coming from certain curators or colleagues, which would dismiss any dancing that didn't function interpretatively or conceptually. Thus we've often heard stories about how there's too much dancing in our performances, or how our dancing is not clear enough. Like any other aspect of performance, dance has always been a part of our poetics, but it's been differently instrumentalised, or alternatively, it would lose the function of the dominant frame and become noise, redundant, work, intensity, etc. It is also true that our conceiving of choreography is conditioned by the historical thinking about it and so since dance is one of the forms of our work in performance, we were interested not so much in what it means but in how it works. And another reason to re-examine choreographic thinking in other spheres, be they media or social, is bound up with our need to re-examine our relation to dance as labour today, when labour no longer necessarily results in manufactured material objects but rather—in services.

MK: In reference to the comparison with regional as well as European dance scene made in the previous question, can you detect from your Eastern-European perspective of poetics any movements on the institutional as well as aesthetic planes that are important to you and with what kind of projects do you yourself and the rest of the group plan to intervene in that space?

⁷ Zagrebački centar za nezavisnu kulturu i mlade / The Zagreb Centre for Independent Culture and Youth [M.K.].

NP: On the institutional plane we're interested in how contemporary dance institutions will be developing in Croatia as well as abroad, because we often find ourselves in a situation where we have to collaborate with institutions that keep producing less and less, and pay ever smaller amounts for different forms of presence and activity (researches, workshops, presentations, laboratories, etc.), which is significantly impairing the system of production. The criterion of the mobility of the 'commodity' on the market is being idealised (especially when it concerns dancers, performers), fast-moving production and universal likability. No other art features so much market conditioning and education directed at satisfying all the needs of the market on the one hand and on the other, the disruption of 'non-manual' dance.

Locally, our new institutions and those that are undergoing transformation should be a solution for the precarious local scene, but either they have good models but insufficient financial support (e.g. 'Pogon'),⁷ or tend to adopt models from the Anglo-Saxon market logic of managing cultural resources (e.g. Zagrebački plesni centar / The Zagreb Dance Centre).

On the conceptual, aesthetic plane, there are many things that I want to do now and in the near future, such as issues of the rhetoric and 'communicability' of dance, construction of the populist subject, imperative of comprehensibility, choreography as a relation among bodies, as well as the status of dance in transformed modes of labour and production. In my new solo I'll try to open some of those issues, starting from dealing with the aspects of 'persuasion' in contemporary dance all the way at its earliest roots, François Delsarte's rhetoric lectures, as well as ways of developing a new argumentation for dance.

BADco., 1 poor and one 0, photo Wolfgang Silveri, 2008
↓



As a choreographer Željka Sančanin caught our attention a decade ago with simply structured, but resolutely performed works like *La Primavera* (2000) and *Places Where...* (2001) – the first a collaborative performance with Saša Božić and Andrej Mirčev, her long term collaborators and joint co-founders of collective h.o. - kombinirane operacije, originally established under the name OBEPYU in 1998; the second her first solo, a work that presented her signature progressive range of radical, yet minimal movements, fragmentation and expression of almost traumatic nature. Her early works coincide with the arrival of a new generation of choreographers in Croatia (Irma Omerzo, Nikolina Pristaš, Pravdan Devlahović, Aleksandra Janeva Imfeld, Selma Banich, Sandra Banić Naumovski, Mila Čuljak, just to name a few) and the establishing of *ehscena* in 2001 (Željka is one of the co-founders), an open choreographers' platform for collaboration on joint projects, communication and exchange of information that made possible dance classes for dancers, workshops with local and international choreographers, as well as auditions that, in the absence of higher dance institutions, gave dancers the possibility of further education abroad.

With duet (*Hard To Dig It* (2002) Željka begins an exploration of complex fragmentation of movement and narrative continuity with use of video. The two performers (Željka and Barbara Matijević) 'are placed in an isolated environment and exposed to the different stimuli (music, video) without the possibility to shape the reactions of their bodies into a differentiated and semantically finished movement'.¹ The idea of using the spectators' view of the performer's body as a strategic tool for critical evaluation of public/private encoding of performance space is even more radically presented in her following solo *Private in vitro* (2003).² As a permanent work-in-progress, *Private in vitro* explores its own adaptability to new spaces, undermining determinate conditions of a chosen performance space. By obscuring the spectators' direct gaze upon the performer in action and diffusing perspective using video projection within video projection and with the performer's shadow sometimes in the way of the projector, the materiality and function of the body are questioned. Access is available only through an interface – the performer's identity becoming multiple-singular and the notion of reproduction overpowering that of production.³ *Private in Vitro* is performed in two versions – *absent/introversion* and *ecstatic/live*, performed during one evening for an audience that may join either one or both of them, but also including incidental audience members who may be passing through the space, if that is the case (and it often was – the piece was performed in public spaces as well). These titles describe the assigned relations, the positioning of the performer towards the audience. In *absent/introversion* the performer and the audience are located in separate spaces and the scrutinizing nature of the spectators' view while following the 'absent' performer on the video projection is emphasised, with the spectator aware of her proximity/distance. *ecstatic/live*, the performance that places the audience in the same space with the performer, offers a simulcast of a live body of the performer and the projected live camera feed of that same body viewed from a different angle. The question is, if the live body itself is the *ékotaois* – that which obscures the view of the projection? Or if it is a case of just a different kind of interface – the body as a condition and context allowing a relation to objects.⁴

This line of thought is continued in the collective staged happening *Roland Barthes: Lover's Discourse* (2004), Željka's project with choreographer Selma Banich, theatre director Oliver Frlijić, performer Marko Jastrevski, dramaturg Andrej Mirčev and theatre director, plus in this case happening facilitator, Saša Božić, resulting in a performed rehearsal of serial beginnings, actions and micro-events tested in different modes, sequences and redefinitions of the physical and textual material that is differently structured each time it is performed.

ŽELJKA SANČANIN

ed. by Ivana Ivković

¹ Quoted from the performance programme notes.

² The concept is co-authored by Andrej Vučenović.

³ For further deliberation on *Private in vitro*: Ivana Ivković 'We're Live – Use of Real Time Video in Live Performance', *Frahcija Performing Arts Journal*, #28-29, 2003.

⁴ Elizabeth Grosz, *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994), 86, referring to Merleau-Ponty's *Phénoménologie de la perception*.

Željka Sančanin, *[Misa] za predizborno šutnju*, photo Jasenko Rasol, 200?
→



Using a progressive range of extreme, minimal movement with a stressed repetitiveness, temporal alternation and rhythmic structure, asserting internal control over use of dance movement, Željka's *Solo: Cycle / 1 / Project on Labor* (2005) is a continuation of her unique choreographic expression. 'Repetitiveness helps me to control my choreographic material and the time it builds up on the scene, I have never even tried to do choreographies or performances with very many different elements. I am always trying to repeat what I have done several times in order to see how I can interpret and change the movement in different ways, while preserving some of its elements intact.'⁵ Her more recent ten-minute long miniature with the cryptic name *fame about yesterday, sugar silver flame* (awarded at the 11th Festival of Choreographic Miniatures in Belgrade, 2007), is, another highly controlled choreography, 'movement that has been utterly cleansed from all decorativeness or self-fascination.'⁶ Even though *fame about yesterday, sugar silver flame* begins with a microphone and a simple black chair being brought on stage (never to be used), the key suggestion of the choreography is given with the very entry on to the proscenium. Željka walks diagonally across the stage, loses balance, shifts her weight from one foot to the other – walks in place, occupying a single spot on the stage. Always calm and focused, with a rhythm that increases tension. Her step turns into a sprawl, her hips are activated, her elbows move aside and rotate – and her step becomes a complex choreographed sequence that is reflected even in the muscles of her face, jaws, and neck. The entire movement is functional; there is no adornment, nothing superfluous. Sometimes she is walking along a line, at other times in place, drawing 'figure eights' or a circle, with a halt that ignores inertia, at moments enthusiastically or intensely. One foot is placed before the other, over the other, or beating the air. Her gaze is permanently fixed on something on the margins of the stage, past the audience, and yet concentrated. She may quiver on a single spot and then suddenly leap or turn, her knees trembling, she may raise her hand indicating a gesture that she will never do or bring her entire body down to the floor. The silence is broken at the very end of the piece by the recorded sound of breaking glass, a machine howling while spinning on its axis, then sounds of the rainforest. Eventually, all movement is reduced to facial cramps, frowning, and manipulation of the lips and cheeks – a seismic blow of bodily tremor, unrestrained, yet invisible to us, repetitive quivering of the body in stillness, in becoming, a blow that only broadens the crack between us and the woman before us.⁷

A late starter (she began her dance education at age eighteen in a workshop with Croatian choreographer Milana Broš), Željka Sančanin's training spans a wide field of body practice - from Cunningham to Aikido, from capoeira to Graham, with ballet, release and other modern and contemporary techniques picked up in workshops with Croatian and international dance artists and pedagogues. As performer or choreographer, she has collaborated with many (Ivana Müller, Oliver Frijić, Ivana Sajko, Branko Brezovec, Damir Gamulin, Xavier Le Roy, Boris Charmatz and others), but her focus are her own productions in the context of her collaborative team h.o. (kombinirane operacije). It is with her stint at ex.e.r.ce / 6M1L - Centre chorégraphique national de Montpellier in 2008 (where she trained with Claude Espinassier, Jonathan Burrows, Chrysa Parkinson and Juan Dominguez) that she first enters a more formal educational environment in dance. Although unsatisfied with the 'classic school' system of theory/technique/training there, she speaks of the experience as a valuable one, allowing her to work with a mentor in a framework forcing one to "consider one's own work in a different, more professional way", giving her a "new focus" and 'renewed sense of one's responsibility as an artist'.⁸ Her local context in Croatia has yet to begin an announced B.A. program in dance (at Zagreb's

Academy of Drama Arts), and she notes a lack of criteria and perspective on one's own and others' work of authors left to their own devices both in terms of finding ways of educating themselves and finding funding to escape the semi-professional circumstances most Croatian dancers and choreographers have to cope with. Speaking about the future university programme, one the whole scene seems a bit apprehensive of, yet eager to see start, she stresses her hope that local artistic capital and working models will be integrated into the curriculum alongside mentorship and the expected range of classes.

ex.e.r.ce / 6M1L has also marked the beginning of a new creative phase for Željka, a stepping away from her own body on stage, starting with the

Željka Sančanin, *BLOOM*, photo Charis Ahriviadis, 2006
↓ ↓



Željka Sančanin, *Dog Eat Dog*, photo Damir Žižić, 2006
←

project *Archive of Spaces* (2008) – a long-term project of documenting locations which served as educational, rehearsal or performing spaces from the beginning of her work until the date. The set of empty spaces is presented as an installation of photographs set to the sounds of Samuel Beckett's *The Whole Thing's Coming Out of the Dark*, photographs of 'dance studios, ballet rooms, rehearsal rooms, professionally equipped studios within dance centres and theatres, public open stages, galleries, music halls, clubs, abandoned factories, abandoned cinema spaces, hotels, supermarkets, shops, city squares, schools, centres for culture, streets, passages, private apartments'⁹ – spaces with different architectural, functional and social dynamics that contextualise the performed works, shift perspectives and even instigate unscripted performer-audience relations. Željka takes this strategy of relieving her position of authorship even further in her 2009 project *Measurements*.¹⁰ Searching for a new methodology for her work, she reverts to materials obtained from another medium. Unlike her 'already seen' movement in *BLOOM* (2006) or appropriations of readymade choreographic fragments from cinematic or pop sources in *Dog Eat Dog* (2008), *Measurements* is a performance of detachment. An empty stage, only the sound speakers and lights visible (at one point a lone disco ball in rotation taking on the role of a soloist), it presents its audience with an audio matrix generated from various sources – theatre performances of colleagues, interviews, sounds misplaced or overlapping – composition of a score, not of a dance.

My most recent conversation with Željka Sančanin focused on her plans for 2010, her tenth year on the scene as a choreographer, and the year Zagreb's dance scene is seeing funding cuts of up to 50% compared to 2009. Determined to carry out two planned projects with a reduced budget (one a choreography, the other a continuation of her project *Measurements*), Željka speaks of her need for a break from her past working methods, a need to reflect on collaboration and communication over form in dance, finding ways of expression and visibility as an author outside of the confines of a theatrical production, in more participatory models of seminar or skill sharing session. Željka continues her stepping out from the well-trodden field of theatrical representation into a different economy of presence, investigating performative dispositifs, mediation of one's artistic role and process, and the repercussions of thinking choreography as a political act.

⁵ From an interview with Željka Sančanin, *Fracija*, Nos. 26/27 (2002-3), 134.

⁶ Una Bauer, 'Nezahtjevne i dobre domaće predstave' ['Undemanding and Good Croatian performances'], *Jutarnji list*, 6 June 2006.

⁷ For more on *fame about yesterday, sugar silver flame*, see: Ivana Ivković, 'A Step into the Void: Cracks in Choreography', in *The Art of Making Dances*, eds. Chase Granoff and Jenn Joy (New

York: The Kitchen, 2009.)

⁸ Quotes from a conversation with Željka Sančanin, Zagreb, 27 April 2010.

⁹ Quoted from the exhibition catalogue.

¹⁰ Co-authored with visual artist Nives Sertić and sound artist Damir Šimunović.

164 LIST OF WORKS

2000 LA PRIMAVERA

author(s): Saša Božić, Andrej Mirčev, Željka Sančanin; choreography: Željka Sančanin; dramaturgy: Saša Božić, Andrej Mirčev, Željka Sančanin; sound: Dead Can Dance; performed by: Saša Božić, Andrej Mirčev, Željka Sančanin; production: kombinirane operacije 2000

Based on the motives of the novel 'The Dictionary of the Khazars' by Milorad Pavić. In this choreographic performative trio (Sančanin is joined by Saša Božić and Andrej Mirčev), the structure of Pavić's novel, shaped in a form of lexicographical dictionary which successively develops into a hypertext, is translated into the language of images, a kind of total theatre that equally represents word, movement, sound and light.

2001 PLACES WHERE...

choreography: Željka Sančanin; dramaturgy: Saša Božić; sound: Tortoise 'Onions Wrapped in Rubber'; performed by: Željka Sančanin; production: kombinirane operacije 2001

This solo treats mental illness as a motive and cause for the beginning of movement. The minimal interventions and changes of movement create a new architecture of body through very precise rhythm series – the body remains static, but at the same time activates itself through progressive range of minimal movements. The choreographic idea of 'immobile dance' is realized through foreboding, insinuation and delation, indicating fragile boundaries between stillness and event.

2002 [HARD TO] DIG IT

choreography: Barbara Matijević, Željka Sančanin; dramaturgy: Saša Božić; sound: Hrvoje Niršić, Neočekivana Sila koja se iznenada pojavljuje i rešava stvar, POLE 3, Billy Hollyday; performed by: Barbara Matijević, Željka Sančanin; video: Josip Višković, Andrej Mirčev; production: kombinirane operacije 2002

A duo inspired by certain motives in the writings of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari (*Capitalisme et schizophrénie. L'anti-OEdipe*). The idea of the schizoanalysis of a subject and the nomadic existence of its particles serves as a motive and source of the subject's existence in the performing space. The performers are placed in an isolated environment and exposed to the different stimuli (music, video) without the possibility to shape the reactions of their bodies into a differentiated and semantically finished movement. The form of the piece, made up of isolated fragments, is due to the displacement of the spatial and temporal coordinates. The semantic potential lies in the conflict between the wish for the complete control of the body and the constant impossibility to achieve it. Everything functions at once, but in conjunctions and disjunctions, connections and recordings, breakdowns and failures – in a totality which never unites its parts in a whole.

2003 PRIVATE IN VITRO

choreography: Željka Sančanin; sound: Željka Sančanin; design: Damir Gamulin; performed by: Željka Sančanin; video: Željka Sančanin; camera: Andrej Mirčev; concept: Željka Sančanin; space: Željka Sančanin; thanks to: Diller & Scofidio; production: WATT+EAU / BADco. & ekscena 2003

The solo is based on the idea of using the spectator's view of the performer's body as a strategic tool for critical evaluation of public / private encoding of performance space in two parts: *absent - introversion* and *live - ecstatic*. As a work-in-progress piece, *Private in vitro* explores its own adaptability to new spaces, undermining determinate conditions of a chosen performance space. By obscuring the spectators' direct gaze upon the performer in action and diffusing perspective using video projection within video projection and with the performer's shadow sometimes in the way of the projector, the materiality and function of the body are questioned. Access is available only through an interface. The performer's identity becomes multiple-singular and the notion of reproduction overpowers that of production.

2004 ROLAND BARTHES: LOVER'S DISCOURSE

author(s): Selma Banich, Saša Božić, Oliver Frlijić, Marko Jastrevski, Andrej Mirčev, Željka Sančanin; sound: Damir Šimunović, CD Audio service – Conversations– Archive book - Published by: egoboobits; design: Damir Gamulin, Design Archive Book: Offstudio; performed by: Selma Banich, Oliver Frlijić, Marko Jastrevski, Željka Sančanin; video: Andrej Mirčev, Igor Zelić; facilitator: Saša Božić; production: kombinirane operacije 2004

Conceived as a multimedia happening, freely touching the delicate curves of Barthes's text, the performance questions the modes of author's creativity and collective work in the performative media. The project is defined through the differences between the performers; each performer brings his or her particular approach to the given topics. The process of structuring the exercises is based on Barthes' idea of performing craving through the Other. The Other (be it the partner, the image, the object) serves as a medium that helps realize the desire for me. Within the process of rehearsal the performers moderate the beginnings of given scenic ac-

tions, testing them in different modes, in sequences of delays and redefinitions. Therefore the presentations of the project are each time differently structured, and they postpone the performative sacrosanctity, referring time and again to the process of testing.

2005 SOLO : CYCLE / 1 / PROJECT ON LABOR

choreography: Željka Sančanin; dramaturgy: Saša Božić; lights: Aleksandar Čavlek; sound: k.o. thank to Višeslav Laboš, Damir Gamulin; performed by: Željka Sančanin; set-up: k.o. kombinirane operacije; production: kombinirane operacije and Center for Drama Art 2005

Solo : Cycle/1 explores the normative ideology of choreographical practices, attempting to emphasise the tangibility of the dance medium, its perceptive visibility and semiotic elusiveness. With a minimalistic precision, the performer investigates the (in)visibility of her choreographical material; she manipulates with the sense of producing the dance material in the very moment of performing it. The landscape of choreography is deliberately sculptural, affirming Barthes's idea of the punctum: a detail that escapes every rationalisation. Expanding the territory of manipulation: from performers body, via the performing space and to the perception of the recipients, the *Solo : Cycle / 1* is based on constant transformation of the dance material and is trying to multiply the signifying process, dissolving its own need for conceptual meaning. Instead of a conceptual meaning, what appears is a world of potentiality, associative and metamorphical.

2006 vertigo // BLOOM

choreography: Barbara Matijević (*vertigo*), Željka Sančanin (*BLOOM*); dramaturgy: Saša Božić; sound: Damir Šimunović, thanks to Scriabin and The Trampms; performed by: Barbara Matijević (*vertigo*), Željka Sančanin (*BLOOM*); set-up: Barbara Matijević, Željka Sančanin; co-production: kombinirane operacije, Berliner Künstlerprogramm des DAAD, ASSO Theorem 2006

BLOOM is a choreographical pseudo-festivity taking as its subject a whatever movement as well as its oppressive need to produce a whatever meaning. Unidentifiability, potentiality and multi-personality become a posture, a possibility to transform an ever-fleeting meaning through movement and avoid the representational restrictions. The choreographical procedure is marked by the simultaneous multiplication and exhaustion of gestures, the result of which points to the nondescript quality of the very form of the choreography. The performer indulges in the elegy of her own defeat, affirming a sort of new type of exaggeration.

2007 FAME ABOUT YESTERDAY. SUGAR SILVER FLAME

choreography: Željka Sančanin; lights: Željka Sančanin; sound: Damir Šimunović; performed by: Željka Sančanin; production: kombinirane operacije 2007; made especially for the Festival of Choreographic Miniatures, Belgrade 2007

Created as a choreographic ten-minute interlude based on the method of translating selected ready-mades, consisting of hip-hop, fable, cartoon and soundscape patterns, this solo draws the outline of unfinished performative traces, placing them into the object treated space and forming foolish series of decontextualised actions. The space is defined in a set-up by a knocked-down chair and a microphone which transfigure in to the soundscape pattern at the end of the performance, becomes performative by itself and functions as an interface behind – in front of the performer.

2008 DOG EAT DOG

choreography: Željka Sančanin; dramaturgy: Saša Božić; lights: Saša Božić; sound: Damir Šimunović and k.o. kombinirane operacije; performed by: Marko Jastrevski, Marko Milić, Željka Sančanin, Filip Užarević; set-up and costumes: k.o. kombinirane operacije; production: kombinirane operacije 2008

Inspired by cartoons, silent-films and 70s disco music, *Dog Eat Dog* is a challenging quartet, a choreographic confrontation between different types of performers personalities. The atmosphere of foolishness, illogical and unexpected is complemented with the concept of supremacy of the copy over the original together with aesthetics of comedy, cartoon films and pop tv-show parody. The process of work is based on exercises of generating movement through methods of reconstructions, illustrations and representations of 'something else'. The use of ready-mades, methods of copying, performativity through 'something else', embodiment of mediated realities and the 'other', be it a thing or a person, provokes a striking effect.

ARCHIVE OF SPACES

author: Željka Sančanin; sound: Nives Sertić, Samuel Beckett's 'The Whole Thing's Coming Out Of The Dark', Damir Gamulin; video: Damir Gamulin; photo and video documentation: Željka Sančanin; exhibition layout: Željka Sančanin; production: kombinirane operacije 2008

A long-term project of documenting locations which served as educational, rehearsal or performing spaces from the beginning of Željka Sančanin's work until present (1998-2008). The set of empty spaces: dance

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studios, ballet rooms, rehearsal rooms, professionally equipped studios within dance centres and theatres, public open stages, galleries, music halls, clubs, abandoned factories, abandoned cinema spaces, different types of public buildings: hotels, supermarkets, shops, city squares, schools, cultural centres, streets, passages, private apartments – are spaces with different architectural, functional and social dynamics and are also in various ways positioned towards the context of work and production in the performing arts. With their own specific relationship towards dance and performance media, the collected locations are an inseparable part of Sančanin's artistic creation in past period and of the effect they produced in the process of settlement and communication of physical material with different types of space settings.

2009 MEASUREMENTS

authors: Željka Sančanin, Nives Sertić, Damir Šimunović; lights: Miljenko Bengez; sound: Damir Šimunović, OFFSTUDIO; concept: Željka Sančanin; score: Željka Sančanin, Nives Sertić, Damir Šimunović; production: kombinirane operacije in collaboration with HIPPI 2009

Measurements is a multi-disciplinary dance project aiming to document and produce an audio matrix generated from various variables of dance, performance and theatre templates, and from theoretically directed collaborative dance exploration. The project's multi-sidedness aims to find simultaneous interest in the production of internal and external audio documentation, and establish conditions for research focused on performativity of the sound, physics and dynamics of the contemporary dance and contemporary dance theory, and on the listening process as a political act. The use of sound recordings of the selected theatre performances, and their reconstructions, as exclusively autonomous audio performatives characterizes selected templates, that is, frequency of their audio recordings as a basic score for further choreography of audio matrices, i.e. integration and multiplication of their reconstructed pieces into new levels of performance material. Focusing on several parallel interests: translation of written material (choreography, score, composition) into conceptual template, technical reproductivity of performance templates and models of their reconstruction, erasing of live performance in favor of performativity of its technical reproduction, performativity of perception – listening to contemporary theatre art, *Measurements* aims to explore formal conditions and effects in the process of performance creation, levels of its documentariness and textuality, as well as possibilities for dislocation of live performance into its sound interface surrogate, transforming performative function into a motor drive of audio traces.

www.kombiniraneoperacije.hr



Željka Sančanin,
Measurements,
photo Željka
Sančanin, 2005
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