

Kirsten Maar*

What Choreography Can Do in a Museum

31 dicembre 2020, pp. 251-264

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.6092/issn.2036-1599/11856>

Section: Dossier [peer reviewed]



Articles are published under a Creative Commons Attribution Non-Commercial 3.0 Unported licence (Authors retain copyright in their articles, permission to reuse third party copyrighted content is not included).

Email: danzaericerca@unibo.it

Www: <https://danzaericerca.unibo.it/>

Abstract

Partendo dalle domande: «Cosa può fare un corpo in un museo?» e «Come esso distribuisce e media diverse forme di conoscenza in un'istituzione di economia dell'esperienza?», il saggio sposta l'attenzione su cosa una coreografia possa fare in un museo. Elemento cruciale è il coreografare le relazioni come un modo per assemblare e creare una sfera pubblica. L'autrice analizza tre lavori coreografici sotto gli aspetti di monumento pubblico, di eredità incarnata e del bisogno di contestualizzare. Si domanda come quest'ultimo possa essere soddisfatto andando oltre l'uso logocentrico del linguaggio, che pone la danza nella posizione subordinata di arte silente, affermando, infine, che le istituzioni debbano essere luoghi di pratica a lungo termine, dove creare condizioni specifiche per la danza e per i suoi bisogni al di là di un sistema meramente commerciale.

Departing from the questions: «What a body can do in the museum?» and «How it distributes and mediates different forms of knowledge within an institution of the experience economy?», the contribution shifts to what choreography can do in the museum. Choreographing relations as a mode of assembling and creating a public sphere seems one crucial element. The author examines three choreographic works under the aspects of the public monument, embodied heritage and the need to contextualize. She asks how the latter can be achieved beyond the logocentric use of language, which puts dance in the subordinated position of a silent art, and finishes with a claim for the institutions as sites of long-term practicing which could create specific conditions for dance and its needs beyond a merely product-oriented system.

* Institut für Theaterwissenschaft, Freie Universität Berlin, Deutschland.

Kirsten Maar

What Choreography Can Do in a Museum

The audience has built a circle around the performers, they are watching a bodily exercise of a group of people – the gaze from above, while the performers are moving across the floor. The beholders show a certain incertitude of how to behave – since the performers are as well audience members, participating due to an invitation at the entrance of this event. Watching and being watched: the gaze is directed towards the performers as well as to the other audience members in this room. Not only the performers are moving – we are moving along with them, according to a given, but mostly unknown score. There are certain rules of how to behave, how to move according to the dispositive we are given by the assignments of the space, the configuration of architecture, the constellation of art objects, performers and the other audience members or – one could also say – according to its choreography. And partly we are probably moved, affected by this specific constellation, which nevertheless seems intangible.

In an earlier essay some years ago I put the Spinozean question «What a body can do?» as title, reconsidering the role of the moving body within exhibition contexts in the museum¹. Taking these considerations as point of departure, I further want to ask what choreography can do in that context – taking into account the bodily foundation of any spiritual capacity.

The aim in this earlier context was to ask how different forms of knowledge – implicit and explicit knowledge – are distributed and displayed in the museum, which is part of the growing field of the experience economy, mainly governed by «the cultural logic of the late capitalist museum»². Starting from observations in Boris Charmatz' Musée de la danse, I used the memory of a workshop-situation

1. Kirsten Maar, *What a body can do. Reconsidering the role of the moving body in exhibition contexts*, 2014, online: <https://stedelijkstudies.com/journal/what-a-body-can-do/> (accessed 15/5/2020).

2. Rosalind Krauss, *The Cultural Logic of the Late Capitalist Museum*, in «October», n. 54, Autumn 1990, pp. 3-17: p. 3.

with Shelley Senter, a former dancer with Trisha Brown, as point of departure for my argument. This workshop was the starting point for a choreographed pathway through an old bourgeois apartment, which today serves as a gallery space, and in which the Musée de la danse presented its first show in Berlin in 2014.

Its director Boris Charmatz transformed the former Centre Chorégraphique National de Rennes into the Musée de la danse, which then existed from 2009 to 2018, and during that time invited choreographers, dancers as well as artists and theoreticians from different fields to perform in- and outside the museum, at different venues, switching between the dispositives of theater and exposition. In his opening manifesto³, Charmatz took up the analogy between the body of the dancer and the body of the museum, which should be permeable and open, built by the bodies who move through it, and thus remaining in a constant state of becoming. It would be an eccentric museum without taxonomies, a museum with complex temporalities, transgressive etc.⁴ Charmatz especially focused on the notion of dance instead of choreography and with that statement, positioned the Musée de la danse as a site of practice.

In Berlin the Musée presented two very different formats: *20 dancers for the XX century* took place in the context of a Soviet memorial statue at Treptower Park in the former East of the long time separated city; it was dedicated to issues of the body and the monument as well as to the ephemeral character of history and dance (history), it asked for the neglected Eastern performance history, as well as what the body remembers and how dance and history are always intertwined.

The other presentation, *Expo zero*, took place at the before mentioned gallery/apartment-space and focused on more detailed and intimate situations. The performative exhibition evoked a trans-disciplinary experiment of meeting, discussing and rehearsing.

Both presentations accumulated diverse approaches to the body's memories and its practices; the practices which traverse the bodies histories, experiences, and sensations and connect us to other bodies and their memories.

Shelley's workshop with its practice based contemplation seemed the culminating point of a turn, which is part of what Krauss mentions in her essay as a turn from the diachronic to the synchronic⁵ and the investigation of a phenomenological experience (for which she sees the roots in minimal arts experience and its non-reproductive character), combined with elements of the participatory turn⁶ and building upon Bourriaud's relational aesthetics⁷.

3. Cf. *Manifesto pour un Musée de la danse*, online: <http://www.museedeladanse.org/fr/articles/manifeste-pour-un-musee-de-la-danse.html> (accessed 15/5/2020).

4. Cf. *Manifesto for a National Choreographic Centre*, online: http://www.museedeladanse.org/system/article/attachments/documents/593/original_manifesto-dancing-museum100401-1512057026.pdf (accessed 11/10/2020).

5. Cf. Rosalind Krauss, *The Cultural Logic of the Late Capitalist Museum*, cit., p. 7.

6. Cf. Claire Bishop, *Artificial Hells. Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship*, Verso, London 2012, pp. 277-278.

7. Cf. Nicolas Bourriaud, *Esthétique relationnelle*, les Presses du réel, Dijon 1998.

And such I remember, while lying at the floor of the apartment and following the instructions of Shelley Senter, a former dancer with Trisha Brown, trying to teach to us some relatively easy, minimalist phrases of *Primary Group Accumulation* (1973), how a dancer's concerns of repetition, memory, synchronizing and alignment become relevant while at the same time being part of a mostly voyeuristic and uncomfortable situation of watching and being watched. Asking myself in the moment of performing together with others in the context of being exposed at the same time: «What changes when the art objects in an exhibition are replaced through living bodies?».

Nearly at the same time in 2014, a conference at Para Site Gallery in Hong Kong asked for the body as a site of resistance: *Is the living body the last thing left alive?*⁸. This insistence on the vitality and liveliness of the body and its capacities was closely tied to the perception of the body as well as to the practices and their public character and to a broader aspect of its re-presentation in the visual arts contexts.

But why was there such an insistence on a phenomenologically based, and seemingly universalist question in a conference, which mainly dealt with questions of a “new performance turn” and the institution in the global contemporary art market?

In his contribution to the catalogue, André Lepecki writes that this second performative turn, in which we perceive a growing interest of art institutions to invite the performative arts into their spaces, should be indeed called a choreographic turn⁹, and he proposes five choreographic concepts for contemporary art. His first argument claims that dance's ephemerality would work against commodification¹⁰. In spite of the long history of this thought and its partial truth – certainly, there is no art object to be collected and archived and sold, and the conditions for dancers are most precarious – this is nevertheless an idea to be suspicious of, since dance and choreography circulate as much in their specific production structures, from festival to festival, and the ephemeral character contributes well to the experience economy. More convincing seems the second aspect, in which Lepecki emphasizes instead dance's speculative (or I would even say fictitious) character, with regards to the parallel interest in re-enactment and re-constructions and the collateral construction of a mode of “as-if”, designing a utopian horizon and a different understanding of our present and our future.

Seen the many exhibitions which put their main focus on aspects of re-enactment or reconstruction and which were tightly intertwined with historiographical questions, questions of dance-heritage,

8. The conference took place at Para Site Gallery in Hong Kong in 2014 and was dedicated to the renewed encounter between dance, performance and the institutions of global contemporary art.

9. Cf. André Lepecki, *Dance Choreography and the Visual: Elements for a Contemporary Imagination*, in Cosmas Costinaş – Ana Janevski (edited by), *Is the Living Body the Last Thing Left Alive? The New Performance Turn, Its Histories and Its Institutions*, Sternberg Press, Berlin 2017, pp. 12-19; pp. 18-19.

10. This argument is inspired by Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked. The Politics of Performance*, Routledge, London-New York 1996. Cf., in particular, the seventh chapter, *The ontology of performance: representation without reproduction* (*ivi*, pp. 146-166).

of documentation and archiving¹¹, this seems to articulate one of the most urgent issues, preventing us from diving too deeply into our past.

Secondly, Lepecki mentions dance's corporeality¹². The factual embodiment not only counts for aspects of alignment, for co-composition or the transformative power between the critical, theoretical, affective, utopian – we could in this frame of embodiment also stress its quality of haunting our stages, our museums, our memories and institutions, not forgetting about past traumata or colonial ghosts, re-telling and re-creating histories and forgotten herstories¹³.

Thirdly, there is Dance's precariousness – deriving on one side from the subaltern position in the canon and the economy of arts and from the other associated with the negation of the body's availability is a crucial bio-political argument. The vulnerability of the human body reminds us of an ethics of performance¹⁴.

As a fourth aspect, Lepecki refers to dance's inherent capacity for scoring¹⁵, which, according to Jacques Rancière, would contribute to a specific aesthetic regime and a «distribution of the sensible»¹⁶, making visible what before was invisible, and opening up to a specific experience (aspects of availability and diversity included). Rancière argues that art and its way of being presented unfolds its specific modes of access, enabling an aesthetic experience or denying it, including or excluding; in the best sense, it opens up to an experience which changes the beholder and interrupts the usual modes of reception.

Finally – Lepecki adds – dance establishes a contract, or a promise, between choreographic planning and its actualization in movement. Dance contributes to unworking systems of command and obedience and instead working out agential cooperation and collective fugitivity would such be its attempt. It destabilizes the regimes of discipline and control¹⁷.

11. First to mention in this context are the Retrospectives of the Judson generation, first of all Yvonne Rainer (for example, *Body, Space, Language* at Museum Ludwig, Cologne and Bregenz in 2014), Trisha Brown's various reconstructions of her *Early Works* (for example, at MoMA 2011 or at Staatliche Museen zu Berlin Hamburger Bahnhof, Berlin in 2013), Robert Morris' *Body Space Motion Things* at London's Tate Modern in 2009, and even a long time neglected figure as Simone Forti (*Thinking with the Body* at Museum der Moderne Salzburg in 2014) or just finally *Judson Dance Theater: The Work Is Never Done* at MoMA in 2018-2019. Then the work of Tino Sehgal at Guggenheim 2010 and Xavier Le Roy's *Retrospective*, for example at Staatliche Museen zu Berlin Hamburger Bahnhof in 2019. Secondly, since 2011 in Germany a funding tool Dance Heritage contributed to a larger debate about questions of historiography, reenactment, documentation, collecting and archiving in dance. Last but not least also the theoretical field contributed largely to establish a discourse in that field, I cannot name the wide range of publications, but also creating new degree programs as, for example, *Curation in the Performing Arts* between the University of Salzburg and LMU Munich.

12. Cf. André Lepecki, *Dance Choreography and the Visual: Elements for a Contemporary Imagination*, cit., p. 18.

13. Cf., for example, Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire. Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas*, Duke University Press, Durham (NC) 2005.

14. Cf. André Lepecki, *Dance Choreography and the Visual: Elements for a Contemporary Imagination*, cit., p. 18.

15. *Ibidem*.

16. Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics. The Distribution of the Sensible*, Translated with an Introduction by Gabriel Rockhill, Continuum, London-New York 2006.

17. Cf. André Lepecki, *Dance Choreography and the Visual: Elements for a Contemporary Imagination*, cit., p. 19.

Here the double meaning of the German word “Anordnung” comes into account, which designates an assignment, given for instance in a score, a task or a notational (pre-)script, as well as at the same time a tempo-spatial arrangement, which derives from the first, and serves as point of departure to further think about choreography in an expanded way¹⁸. On the one hand, this notion points out a hierarchy between the concept of choreography and its bodily execution in dance, but, on the other, it enables us to free choreography from its tight fixation to the dancer’s body and opens up to another relationality, other agencies and looking differently at our surroundings or environments. Choreography could thus be transferred to other spheres: imagine a choreography of things, a choreography in public spaces, a choreographic system in cybernetics, the choreographies of the economic flow, or let’s think of our daily performed social choreographies.

This aspect of an expanded notion of choreography also plays a crucial role in moving through the museum: how are we directed, how are we choreographed, not only by the rules of the dispositive itself, but also by the architecture, by the specificity of the display structure and the agency of the objects or things? What kind of behavior do they infer? How do they alter the perception of space and our relation to others moving in that same space?

«Choreography as art of command», this paradigm, articulated by William Forsythe¹⁹, to refer to the hierarchic relation of choreography as prescript and dance as subordinated is cited by Lepecki to divide between choreopolice and choreopolitics²⁰, also inspired by Jacques Rancière’s differentiation between a given power structure and the way one could deal with it in a disobedient way²¹. How that could happen depends on how the rules are set up by interweaving both dispositives of theater and museum, their different internalized forms of spectatorship²² as well as their educational complex²³.

18. Cf. Maren Butte *et al.* (edited by), *Assign & Arrange. Methodologies of Presentation in Art and Dance*, Sternberg Press, Berlin 2014, pp. 19-20.

19. Cf. William Forsythe, cited in Mark Franko, *Dance and the Political. States of Exception*, in Susanne Franco – Marisa Nordera (edited by), *Dance Discourses. Keywords in Dance Research*, Routledge, London-New York 2016, pp. 11-29: p. 16.

20. Cf. André Lepecki, *Choreopolice and Choreopolitics: or, the Task of the Dancer*, in «TDR/The Drama Review», vol. LVII, n. 4, Winter 2013, pp. 13-27: p. 16 and pp. 19-20.

21. Cf. Jacques Rancière, cited in André Lepecki, *Choreopolice and Choreopolitics: or, the Task of the Dancer*, cit., pp. 19 ss. In his conception the police ensure conformity and normativity due to a generalized behavioral conformation. This function can be even detached from its specific agents, it does not even need to be embodied, it is the concept of a regulating police function, which guarantees controlled circulation within a given consensus. The choreopolitical instead requires a redistribution and reinvention of bodies, affects and senses, it enables different ways of acting and moving politically.

22. Cf. Samuel Weber, *Theatricality as Medium*, Fordham University Press, New York 2004, p. 3.

23. Concerning the *dispositif* of the museum cf. Tony Bennett, *Civic Seeing. Museums and the Organization of Vision*, in Sharon MacDonald (edited by), *A Companion to Museum Studies*, Blackwell, Malden-Oxford-Carlton 2006, pp. 263-281. Concerning specific display structures, cf. Fiona McGovern, *Die Kunst zu zeigen Künstlerische Ausstellungsdisplays bei Joseph Beuys, Martin Kippenberger, Mike Kelley und Manfred Pernice*, Transcript, Bielefeld 2016, pp. 9-19.

Re-... – display and displace

My proposal for this contribution is to look at what *choreography can do* on a productive level, beyond command and control. In her thesis *Choreographing relations*, Petra Sabisch transfers Spinoza's quote from the capacities of the body to the role of choreography²⁴. She examines the relationship between language and choreography and finishes with a long-established prejudice of dance as the speechless art form (and therefore subordinated to choreography as the script), as it was considered from its beginnings. According to Sabisch, choreography is creating an aesthetic regime through movement, in which contamination and articulation play a crucial role. As she argues it is the relation between the materiality of bodily affects and episteme, which form a dynamic ensemble irreducible to one of its components. The role of experience in the constitution of knowledge such derives from choreography's potential to assemble as well as from its transformative power (which is not only rooted in dance as practice).

Each act of transferring choreography/dance/performance²⁵ from the frame of theater to the exhibition has to think about its specific institutional conditions, its means of translation, its forms of display structures²⁶. And each of these acts seems to unfold specific qualities which in the other context would allow totally different meanings and consequences. The complexity of what appears in these intersections has to be experienced and negotiated every time anew. There is a huge potential of bringing forth specific choreographic questions within the context of an exhibition or a museum, its different time regime, and its own rules of how to behave according to a historically grown etiquette of the museum. Some of them have long time been neglected, and I just want to single out one aspect which in my eyes seems quite problematic. It is the way how choreography/dance/performance in the exhibition context seems sometimes still framed by a sometimes quasi paternalistic view of art history on "minor" art forms like dance and performance, who argues with old stereotypes of dance, reducing it to an ephemeral and speechless art form and to its kinesthetic experience, which only would allow for telling the already known Histories (and only few of her Stories). If in the essay *What a body can do* I focused on the potential of mingling different forms of in- and explicit knowledge (knowing-that and knowing-how), I also have to add that in most cases of presenting dance in the exhibition context the experience economy is served very well and the reflection of what the kinesthetic opens up to or how

24. Cf. Petra Sabisch, *Choreographing Relations. Practical Philosophy and Contemporary Choreography in the works of Antonia Baehr, Gilles Deleuze, Juan Dominguez, Félix Guattari, Xavier Le Roy and Eszter Salamon*, epodium, München 2011, pp. 98-115.

25. For a helpful differentiation of these three notions within the contemporary, cf. Bojana Cvejić's introduction to her monography *Choreographing Problems. Expressive Concepts in European Contemporary Dance and Performance*, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke-New York, 2015, pp. 1-27: pp 4-11 and 11-14.

26. Cf. Dorothea von Hantelmann, *When You Mix Something, It's Good to Know Your Ingredients. Modes of Addressing and Economies of Attention in the Visual and Performing Arts*, in Barbara Gronau et al. (edited by), *How to Frame. On the Threshold of Performing and Visual Arts*, Sternberg Press, Berlin 2016, pp. 49-53.

and why certain aspects of dance had developed – the surplus value – is neglected. The highlighting of the value of synchronic experience does in many ways not enable a deeper occupation with the artist and produces a lack of context, which most often places dance again in a minor position within the art canon, neither does it allow to deal with urgent issues like questions of restitution²⁷, nor of decolonizing the institution, or of paying attention to the gender gap in re-presentation, whose negotiation seems still reserved for the visual arts and art historians. Together with a simultaneous interest in Re-enactment or Re-construction dance seemed absorbed in fighting for its own archival past and the transmission of heritage²⁸. The seemingly democratic tendency of the focus on experience primarily aims to open up to an audience without specific connoisseurship, but it often fails to complement this perspective by an adequate mediation program.

New forms and formats have been developed over the last years in a mutual exchange between the both dispositives of theater and museum on the one hand²⁹, and the reflection of the artists' needs on the other. Whether based on a so-called practice turn³⁰ or artistic research³¹, or an opening from the artistic to the activist field³², the dance communities themselves brought along new approaches and new methodologies. Those forms and formats, which have been developed in choreography/dance/performance, are not only inspired by a turn following the years of so called conceptual or Non-dance, but also by object-oriented philosophy and the post-humanist turn, which ascribes agency not only to the human subjects but also to the non-human and to things.

Here again we turn back to the issue of what choreography can do and how it can be understood.

Departing from an expanded notion of choreography as it is developed in Forsythe's *choreographic objects* (his choreographic installations) – to free choreography from its implicit relation to the moving dancer's body, as mentioned above³³ – which makes it possible to see choreography beyond its close relation to a moving human body, we have to add choreography's fundamental potential to assemble, or even more specifically, as Bruno Latour specifies to assemble around a «res publica»³⁴. Assembling

27. Benedicte Savoy, *Die Provenienz der Kultur. Von der Trauer des Verlusts zum universalen Menschheitserbe*, Aus dem Französischen von Philippa Sissis und Hanns Zischler, Matthes & Seitz, Berlin 2018.

28. Cf. Boris Buden, *Dance me to the End of History. Art and Performance between History and Memory*, in Cosmaş Costinas – Ana Janevski (edited by), *Is the Living Body the Last Thing Left Alive? The New Performance Turn, Its Histories and Its Institutions*, cit., pp. 82-86: p. 84. Buden refers to that trend on a larger artistic level. In dance, one example for this could be Tanzfonds Erbe, cf. online: <https://tanzfonds.de/en/home/> (u.v. 11/10/2020).

29. Within the large scale of publications in this field I will only name two: Beatrice von Bismarck *et al.*, *Cultures of the Curatorial*, Sternberg Press, Berlin-New York 2012; Barbara Gronau *et al.* (edited by), *How to Frame. On the Threshold of Performing and Visual Arts*, cit.

30. Cf., for example, Marcus Boon – Gabriel Levine (edited by), *Practice*, Whitechapel Gallery and The MIT Press, London-Cambridge (MA) 2018, pp. 12-14.

31. Cf., for example, Lucy Cotter (edited by), *Reclaiming Artistic Research*, Hatje Cantz, Berlin 2019.

32. Cf. Maura Reilly, *Curatorial Activism. Towards an Ethics of Curating*, Thames & Hudson, London 2018, pp. 17-33.

33. William Forsythe, *Choreographic Objects*, in Id., *Suspense*, edited by Marcus Weisbeck and Ursula Blickle Stiftung, JRP Ringier, Zürich 2008, pp. 5-11. Here he asks: «But is it possible for choreography to generate autonomous expressions of its principals, a choreographic object, without the body?» (*ivi*, p. 5).

34. Bruno Latour, *Von der "Realpolitik" zur "Dingpolitik" oder Wie man Dinge öffentlich macht*, Merve, Berlin 2005, pp.

around a thing, or a public issue, as in ancient rituals, means to negotiate this space, and as such it is not just about creating a community (as in the Greek *choros*), but even more about a «public sphere by performance»³⁵ – or a public sphere by choreography.

But the idea of assembling – and even more of participation – became relevant in the arts as a value in itself during the 2000s. Claire Bishop criticizes the so-called relational art³⁶ for its missing outside. If the relation itself, for example in gathering around an invitation for a soup like in Rikrit Tirjvanija's performances, becomes the center of the “art event”, art gets self-sufficient and lacks any commitment or context, it dis-engages from its mandate to fulfil a function in society³⁷.

In looking briefly at three different examples – from Alexandra Pirici's examination of the relation between body, monument and the public sphere to Eszter Salamon's *Monument Series*, and finally Andrea Geyer's installation work, which she showed at the occasion of an exhibition dealing with the ambivalent history of the Derra de Moroda Dance Archive – I want to re-frame my previous thoughts, and, on a second plane, reflect on the different needs of the artists and their working conditions in- and outside the museum or exhibition.

What's public?

Alexandra Pirici's work is centered around the paradoxes of the ephemeral sculptural monument. Together with Manuel Pelmus', she developed *A immaterial Retrospective* and *Public Collection*, which was first presented at the Venice Biennial in 2013, and then as *Public Collection of Modern Art* at several public museums. It asks for the role of the museum as site of collecting, archiving and presenting art history, which thus also provides a space of social reflection. At a first glance, *Public Collection* seems to be a sort of re-enactment: the performers actualize iconic and less well-known works of art history and re-construct them mimetically, with a well-chosen repertoire of gestures and poses. They re-install monuments of history by dancing, singing, reciting and finally dissolving. If it is about human beings and their interpretation of paintings, sculpture, songs and texts, monuments, gestures and acts, this operation alludes at the same time to the iconographic, to the social and to the personal level of memories and their interweaving. Since history is always also embodied history, be it in the traces of the logocentric archives, or in the repertoire of gestures and acts³⁸.

But Pirici denies the notion of re-enactment of already existing images, situations or objects and rather speaks of enactment as a process of producing a reality through acting³⁹. The idea behind is

10-11.

35. Bojana Cvejić – Ana Vujanović, *Public Sphere by Performance*, B-Books, Berlin 2015².

36. Cf. Nicolas Bourriaud, *Esthétique relationnelle*, cit.

37. Cf. Claire Bishop, *Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics*, in «October», n. 110, Autumn 2004, pp. 51-79: pp. 62-63.

38. Cf. Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire. Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas*, cit., pp. 1-33.

39. Cf. Linda Peitz, *Kunst ist niemals autonom*, Performance-Künstlerin Pirici im Interview, 3/10/2017, online:

to interpret the sculptures, paintings or monuments anew, to reduce them, and actualize them, disturbing their history and their symbolic value, to alienate them⁴⁰. What is behind it, is a strong anti-monumental gesture, maybe not surprising for someone coming from a country, whose past has not yet been thoroughly investigated, whose art history has been neglected – and whose actual state is still in flux.

This lightness of the anti-monumental also comes into account when she instructs the performers to re-install Richard Serra's *Tilted Arc* on a public square. With the soft material of moving bodies, the question of scale comes back to a human level. Movement here comes into being in its double sense of moving bodies and the political movement. The Greek notion of *choros* does not only signify the round place, where the choreography is performed, but also the ritual itself. This designates the idea of the community, which is performed in these choreographies, and respectively they ask how the structure of the public is choreographed.

One could describe it as an almost ethnographic gaze, with which Pirici approaches her work. The different histories and practices are arranged in a way, which enables the transformation of the visual art work into a performative and ephemeral artwork, which intermingles specific regional contexts with historical reformulation and actual references. The fieldwork which precedes any of Pirici's works, is based on a deep interest in the becoming and questioning of a seemingly given status quo.

Monuments? Heritage? Practices!

Eszter Salamon's *Monument Series* starts at a different point of origin.

In 2014 she started to work on a series of pieces around the notion of the monument. Her practice is centered around rewriting and speculation about dance histories, in which the borders between the document and the fictional get blurred. Salamon speaks of this practice as «re-thinking the monument» and «re-hallucinating history»⁴¹. Thus, she succeeds to touch at similar questions, for instance issues of cultural heritage like Pirici but does this on a quite different level. In *Lores and Praxes (rituals of transformation)*⁴², performers from four continents engage in a performative transformation of war

<https://www.monopol-magazin.de/alexandra-pirici-interview-delicate-instruments-of-engagement> (accessed 11/10/2020).

40. A similar step is taken by Pirici's work addressing the Greek *Parthenon Marbles*: the Parthenon sculptures, which had its origins at the top of the Athenian Acropolis and were dedicated to the goddess Athenae, are today still displayed at the British Museum and are discussed in the wider debate on restitution. The performance re-enacts their poses and mostly takes place outside on the ancient places, where the monument was situated. With this, Pirici accentuates the fact that these gestures and movements were once performed by human beings in a certain historical situation and contributed to a collective history and memory. By epistemic imperialism, economic developments and ideologically based cultural supremacy the statues have been displaced from their original context. Issues of the monuments' history and discourses around historical memory, embodied histories and narratives are addressed as a public issue during the performance and in the research preceding the performance itself.

41. <https://esztersalomon.net/About> (accessed 15/5/2020).

42. This second part was preceded by *Monument 0: Haunted by Wars (1913-2013)*, a danse macabre reflecting on the

dances and dances of resistance, which was displayed in the spaces of a new exhibition site in a former factory in Berlin-Neukölln. Entering the gallery and walking around in the large spaces on two levels, and looking at the strange and alienating dances, which are performed amongst the audience members in smaller or larger groups, I feel helpless and confused, because what I see, I would probably describe as the politically incorrect citation of a non-existing African dance mixed with whatever other non-recognizable styles of other ethnicities.

Movement is a way of incorporating the world around us. And if the globalized world becomes more and more confusing and disturbing, this might be the outcome. The movements and expressions are not learned in a traditional way, since they do not belong to contemporary dance education. They get layered and defamiliarized several times, so that, in the end, the question arises: what is foreign, what is fictional? How do movements trace their own migration history? Beyond any legitimating academic archival research, the dancers had collected and researched the movement material on the internet and combined it with contemporary forms of Hip Hop and other dances. At first sight, this might seem illegitimate but maybe this illegitimate proceeding is the only way to deal with this situation.

As Pirici, Salamon also deals with the notion of the monument. Since the topic of war is at the centre here and at the same time already quite far from the issues of contemporary dance⁴³, the aspects of a hybrid dance culture ask the question: «What could a contemporary war dance look like?». This sampled movement material seems to highlight a kind of heritage, which does not belong to the canon, it reverses the art-historical categories of local and foreign, which are put into question not only by a difference of written, logocentric archive and practically performed repertoires⁴⁴. Dealing with dance heritage on a different level, not within a pre-established canon of choreographies that have been part of the European avant-garde, but with a non-existing fiction raises a lot of ambivalences. As such the performance creates an ambiguous in-between zone of physical presence and imagination, in which the historical, personal and fictional mingle and produce «a collective fabric of sensitive and reflexive empathy»⁴⁵. Finally, it forces us to think of each one's own multiplicity, which connects different levels of knowledge in a constant flow. Accentuating the meaning of "lores", which signifies as much as dynamic, practical knowledge of societies and is still present in the word folk-lore, it serves a complement to practice as site of research and a denial to create just representational knowledge⁴⁶.

relations between choreography and history and the traces of the other avantgardes modernity has erased.

43. The only exception is an exhibition organized by Bojana Cvejić and Cosmas Costinaş, taking place at the Musée de la danse in Rennes in 2016. Cf. *RECOMMENDATION / DANSE-GUERRE*, exhibition curated by Bojana Cvejić and Cosmin Costinaş / Musée de la danse, Rennes, online: <http://www.newsletters.tkh-generator.net/node/205> (accessed 15/5/2020). And one could further think about the integrated hip-hop styles and their format of the battle.

44. Cf. Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire. Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas*, cit., pp. 1-33.

45. *MONUMENT 0.4: Lores & Praxes (rituals of transformation)*, online: <https://esztersalomon.net/MONUMENT-0-4> (accessed 15/5/2020).

46. Cf. Seloua Luste Boulbina, *Tanz mit Sprengkraft. Eszter Salamon geht Völkstänzen und verborgenem Wissen auf die Spur*, online: <http://magazinimaugust.de/2017/01/12/eszter-salomon-tanz-mit-sprengkraft/> (accessed 11/10/2020).

As stated for Pirici's work, I would also, in Salamon's approach, see a kind of ethnographic touch, ethnographic in a sense of dealing with "lores" and practices on a level of «thick description»⁴⁷.

Contextualize!

As my last example, I want to discuss the archive inspired work of visual artist Andrea Geyer.

Her installation work, *Truly Spun Never*, was presented within the exhibition *Art – Music – Dance – Staging the Derra de Morroda Dance Archives* in 2016 at the Museum der Moderne in Salzburg. Within the video-installation she confronts the spoken language and the language of dance by juxtaposing quotes from Paul Celan, Mary Wigman, Rudolf von Laban, Joseph Goebbels, Fritz Böhm to the videos of six dancers training different forms of spins – a seemingly abstract movement vocabulary. The investigation concentrates on the origins of modern dance in Europe from the 1910s to the 1930s⁴⁸ and especially focuses on Germany, the birthplace of *Ausdruckstanz* and the parallel rise of National Socialism. On the one hand, *Ausdruckstanz* was categorized as degenerate art, on the other hand, dance was misused, for example by Rudolf von Laban, notable as one of the pioneers of modern dance in Europe, who controlled dance throughout Germany as part of Joseph Goebbels' ministry of propaganda. At the same time, he insisted (comparable to others) that dance should be beyond the grasp of politics.

Between the quotes of the dancers there is the figure of the critic, oscillating between a reflection on dance as a form, its potentials and shortcomings, and a contemplative reading of poems by Paul Celan, who is cited as a witness to 1930s Europe. «Through the multilayered interactions of movement and language, *Truly Spun Never* maps the terrain in which cultural expression gets infiltrated by ideological violence»⁴⁹ and asks for the motivation to dance as well as for the social implications of dance, for dance and its legacies. Asking for the problematic relationships between culture and ideology, between expression and ethics, between a body and politics...

As much as I appreciate Geyer's work for its contextualization, at the same time it seems to contain a trap: it refers to the just before mentioned gap between dance and language. Especially within the reading figure of the critic, the "critical" aspect is once more reserved to language. As if dance were *per se* to be infiltrated by an uncritical, unconscious perspective. At the same time, it is exactly that ambiguous in-between-ness, this undecidability, that makes dance so productive in its reception. Whereas the both previous examples do not use language to contextualize their work, they nevertheless arrive at delivering

47. Clifford Geertz, *Thick Description. Toward an Interpretive. Theory of Culture*, in Id., *The Interpretation of Cultures. Selected Essays*, Basic Books, New York 1973, pp. 3-30.

48. Cf. *Truly Spun Never*, online: http://www.andreageyer.info/projects/truly_spun_never/tsn.html (accessed 15/5/2020).

49. *Ibidem*.

a relational setting, which makes the audience aware of the implications of histories and its duties⁵⁰. Even if the way of conceding a specific amalgamation of knowledges to the practice of dance seems not to be fully accepted in the visual art world, the paradox of demanding for contextualization on the one hand and on the other of acknowledging the implicit knowledge in dance itself lies in the framing by the institution.

Requesting the institution

The dilemma of the institutions could be described following art historian David Joselit: «In the age of globalization and digitalization artistic formats are constantly changing». Under terms of remediation and circulation of images, of communication the importance of networking is constantly emphasized in generating visual data and new formats. As such art works arise from building situational dynamics and movement patterns of future users⁵¹. Institutions matter in such constitutional processes: they contribute to create a foundation, a vertical structure, on which something else can be build. They create an objectifying hierarchy of values, which again enables schools and specific styles to emerge, which often were emptied out after a certain time. This was the point for the emergence of 1970s institutional critique⁵².

Today we see creative environments of entrepreneurs, flat hierarchies with independent individuals – mobile, flexible, international. Within these so called *Liquid Modernities*⁵³, they seem as singular floating points within an instable network, always at the border of evaporation. As such they demonstrate their vulnerability, their instability, or volatility, which is granted by the ongoing competition of the singular actors in this field. Only a temporary common goal ties them together for a short time. Hence it seems not for nothing that the independent curator has become the emblematic figure of entrepreneurship. Utopia and imagination are not allowed for within this logic of realism, neither values or identity politics. But without the contemporary, which is not thinkable without a relation to the historic, no future is imaginable.

50. One could criticize the general fetish of the singular artwork, which is presented without its social or political context, and along with that the valuation of experience instead of interpretations. It seems as if the institution would reject the mandate of mediation and the pedagogic, which is necessary to unfold a critical position. Cf. Lara Perry, “A Good Time to Be a Women”? *Women Artists, Feminism and Tate Modern*, in Angela Dimitrakaki – Lara Perry (edited by), *Politics in a Glass Case. Feminism, Exhibition Cultures and Curatorial Transgressions*, Liverpool University Press, Liverpool 2015, pp. 31-47. On the other hand, one could argue as well that in the last years a lot has been done in this field. Especially within *Documenta 12* (2007) Carmen Mörsch has been an investigator in these issues, and in dance a lot of initiatives have been developed or lately established.

51. Cf. the blurb of David Joselit, *After Art*, Princeton University Press, Princeton (NJ) 2013.

52. Cf. Pascal Gielen, *Imagining Culture in a Flat Wet World*, in Biljana Tanurovska Kjulavkovski et al. (edited by), *Modelling public space(s) in culture. Rethinking Institutional Practices in Culture and Historical (Dis)continuities*, Lokomotiva, Skopje 2018, pp. 15-33: p. 18.

53. Zygmunt Baumann, cited *ivi*, p. 23.

From there the idea of an ecology of practices⁵⁴ seems so important and the origin of many new formats. *Practice*, which in Greek philosophy and later with Hannah Arendt was described in opposition to *poiesis*, which aims at a certain telos or product, has its goal in itself as an action performed in public, the *vita activa*. To prepare for the public it needs contemplation as a fundament: private life, or *oikos*. But the ecologies of practice as «a social technology of belonging»⁵⁵ do not serve as a solipsistic withdrawal to the studio, rather they function as a shared and public action, which aims at a change – a change in being together – and this idea of change is what differentiates collective practices from networking structures and sharing economies.

In this regard, practice can be understood as time for experiment, and artistic research as withdrawal from regular performance production, beyond commodification. Practice means a break within the alienated production processes (it is not about creation and creativity!) and therefore can be a site of resistance – it escapes the omnipresent logic of art-projects and enables a form of continuity, which otherwise rests fragmented and dispersed. Ecologies of practice, in which each element is depending on the others, are sites of sharing and negotiating knowledge to formulate a demand for the transformation of social life or another understanding of research.

And that would enable to open up to the issues of urban communities, to invite them, to mediate, to exchange and to learn from them – to engage and to create value beyond the economies. Choreography in that field could contribute to develop formats, which enable us to create an architecture, in which encounters become places of hospitality, based on different forms of knowledge. That becomes perceivable in the works of all three artists above. The challenge for those research- or practice-based formats is thus to create a collective instead of a network, to create one's own open structures, and escape the logic of the product-based economies of actual art funding. Finally, that would also include different ethics of curating – a diverse curatorial activism⁵⁶. It would ask how and with which means to fight for modes of production, that would allow for the structures we want to work in. If institutions like the museum could consider also the needs of the dancer's communities, maybe they would (re)gain another relevance in that field. Maybe they would become workshops or laboratories of the future, as it is formulated in some campaigns – but finally that will most probably remain a utopia⁵⁷.

54. Here I refer to a research project initiated by Silke Bake, Alice Chauchat, Bettina Knaup and Sigmar Zacharias at the Tanzfabrik Berlin in 2016. Cf. *Studio 13: ecologies of practice*, online: <https://www.tanzfabrik-berlin.de/en/events/514> (accessed 15/5/2020).

55. Brian Massumi, quoted in Isabelle Stengers, *Introductory Notes on an Ecology of Practices*, in «Cultural Studies Review», vol. XI, n. 1, *Desecration*, 2005, pp. 183-196: p. 186. Practice here is not thought in opposition to theory, because also theory can be a practice.

56. Cf. Maura Reilly, *Curatorial Activism. Towards an Ethics of Curating*, cit., pp. 17-33.

57. This thought of the Museum as laboratory has been formulated by curator Clémentine Deliss in her recent publication *The Metabolic Museum*, in which she describes her finally failing attempt to transform the Weltkulturenmuseum at Frankfurt am Main into a living institution. In her *Manifesto for the Post-Ethnographic Museum* she mentions four columns her approach was based on: domestic research, remediation over time, curating neighbourhoods and the Museum-University. Cf. Clémentine Deliss, *The Metabolic Museum*, Hatje Cantz, Berlin 2020, pp. 12 ss.

P.S.

In this actual state of emergency, fostered by the commandments of the COVID19-crisis, the question arises how to create value in a situation, where we are all missing the social dynamics of those above described situations of negotiation, proximity and exchange. This would also be a challenge to the question of format.