

How did you come together?

On Contemporaneity in Dance and Performance

By Krassimira Kruschkova

On 7 October 2010 at Tanzquartier Vienna a visitor asked the performers on stage: "How did you come together?" "By train", was Christine De Smedt's laconic answer, accompanied by a disarming smile. This question from the audience came during the brief audience discussion at the beginning of Xavier Le Roy's choreography *low pieces*. "How did you come together?" "By train": as if there only could be togetherness when no reason for it could be taken for granted. A mode of affiliation and testimony that does not require any given group or plural, which rather looks into its own irredeemability, provided that the 'we' will always have been a temporary construct: Just in order to keep together that which is different within artistic work processes, and to welcome the other unconditionally – in the precise vagueness of parallel worlds in which we belong together so strangely and funnily enough. Without ignoring the empty spaces, the rifts, the fissures: *mind the gap!* How, then, to live together in our splintered world – spatially as well as temporally, in contemporaneity, which yet ever contents other tempi, and always also tests the untimely? How to test time together, to testify for it, to testify to it, as contemporary witnesses? How do we tick together? Can our singular inner watch at all tick as the metronome of a *community, communitas, comunità, communauté, a coming together?* "How did you come together?" "By train": laconic which offhandedly throws open the gap of inconclusiveness between the concrete and the abstract, the literal and the figurative.

This inscrutability of the tension literal/figurative also informs Boris Charmatz's *Levée des conflits (Suspension of conflicts)*, a choreography also created in 2010 and consisting of 25 individual movement sequences interpreted by 24 dancers throughout the entire piece. Structured like a canon, the single movement currently missing propels the perpetuum mobile of bodies, i.e., that which is missing activates. Here, an algorithmically connected, congregating body constantly reorganises itself, another 'we'. There are no collisions while the plural dance body keeps reforming itself. Charmatz was inspired to this productive chaos (chaos for our context being an important cue) by Roland Barthes' idea of the neuter. "I call that a neuter which suspends the paradigm"¹, Barthes writes. As a third entity, the neuter subverts the binary structure inherent to the paradigm, i.e., the conflict, and thus eludes dogmatic and hierarchic ways of representation. The neuter is ambivalent and by no means neutral. But do we come together in this way? *Comment?* Does this not-at-all neutral neuter which annuls the binary through differentiation and suspends paradigms,

¹ Roland Barthes: *Das Neutrum - Vorlesung am Collège de France 1977–1978*, Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp 2005. [Roland Barthes: *Le neuter. Cours et séminaires au Collège de France (1977–1978)*, Paris: Traces écrites 2002]

trigger the political in contemporary dance – should the political be conceived as an abrogation, as not-allowing of its own law, as the abandonment of doxa, a demonstration of the paradox?

“This is also us”², Arkadi Zaides in turn says about his choreography *Archive* (2013), an investigation of the conflict between Israel and Palestine that uses film material from B’Tselem (the Israeli information centre for human rights in the occupied areas). The material, filmed by Palestinians in conflict areas, shows persons from Israel in various confrontational situations. The people who are filming stay behind the camera. Nevertheless, their movements, voices, positions are present, determining the perspective. Arkadi Zaides critically involves his own body in the movement material of his Israeli community by isolating and performing gestures, voices and movement sequences of the soldiers and settlers we see as film projection – simultaneous with the film material and then separately, too, without the projection, as isolated choreographic material, as re-enactment which at the same time remembers and examines the context, tests it, rehearses it: once, twice, again, again. By performing exactly its inconceivability, and thus its un-presentability. By cutting image and sound material, again and again differentiating and examining lines of sight, perspectives: in order to develop an invisible live archive from a Palestinian point of view. An archive focussing the question of communities’ potential of violence, control, and guilt.

It is also the guilt of looking away. “I’m guilty of looking away”, Davis Freeman shouts in a verbally and physically escalating recitative in Meg Stuart’s *Alibi*; or “I’m guilty of being an American”. The piece premiered on 17 November 2001, shortly after *Nine Eleven*, but had already been rehearsed since summer 2001. Are we – to just name a few other contemporary titles – *Visitors only*, so Meg Stuart (2003), and yet *all together now* (Stuart, 2008), and that *Until our hearts stop* (2015), Stuarts’ most recent group piece which attempts an enormously physical togetherness in enigmatic animality, innocent insanity, gamy games, confused fusion, tenacious tenderness – with a sensual nonsense and humour, and hesitant legerdemain, in which Eros and Lapsus mutually contaminate and comment each other. “Humour is something totally aggressive”, the performer Kristof Van Boven says. Or: “I used to spend my holidays at the Mediterranean. But now I cannot swim in the Mediterranean.” Or: “Here we transgress all our boundaries.” And they are doing it literally – in a bottomlessly comical scenic obscenity which at times seems to go too far, precisely because intimacy and integrity can never go far enough. Several couples whirl around vertiginously, each their counterpart’s fist in their mouth, the fist in the other’s mouth holding together the rotating couples. Generally the dancers come uncannily close to each other in all kinds of constellations – ménage-à-trois, groups of four, five, six,

² Arkadi Zaides in the course of a public talk on 24 April 2016 in the framework of Tanzquartier Wien’s artistic-theoretical parcours *SCORES#11: Archives to come*.

seven –, before they hastily get out of each other's way, get out of their movement.

But where are our ways today, our accesses to movement? Where are, to quote Ian Kaler's most recent choreography, our *gateways to movement*? Do we live in nobody's time, as in *deufert&plischke's Niemandszeit*? Both works were created in 2015, after Jefta van Dinther's time analysis in 2014 was called *As It Empties Out*, after Clément Laves in 2012 was on the lookout for *Things that surround us* and Mette Ingvarsten for an *Artificial Nature Project*, for a 'non-human' choreography of things as part of our being-with, speculative instead of spectacular. Perhaps because the contemporary dance body is *a Body Not Fit For Purpose* – thus the title of an explicitly political work by Jonathan Burrows and Matteo Fargion (2014, about the fear of fugitives, about Silvio Berlusconi, etc.), which initially again sets out from the insufficiency of the dance gesture with regard to formulating intentions, reasons, grounds, but at the same time addresses the inherent radicalness of that attempt. So, once again the groundless. And again with abysmal, abyssal humour (which unconditionally belongs to the seriousness of the contemporary in dance – to which I will get back later). As if this *Body Not Fit For Purpose* were not able to do anything at all, absolutely *good for nothing*. And just, so the title of a choreography by Philipp Gehmacher, *good enough* (2001) – for rarely less is empty. *Good enough* was developed in the same year as Meg Stuart's *Alibi*. 'Alibi' means 'proof of absence'.

Moving in the rhythm of the contemporary always is marked by the interminability of its own project. "No *numerus clausus* for those who come along, who join"³, one could comment this with Jacques Derrida's *Politics of Friendship* – and this interminability, which moreover excludes nothing and no-one, is so virulent for our zeitgeist, or better: for our zeit-ghosts. My title could have been *On the Choreography of Friendship* (as that which could be called friendship coins contemporaneity over the boundaries of time and space); but it is also a feature of titles future that they have to be announced first – and only afterwards come to, to us. Likewise contemporaneity, which only subsequently will have been produced, gradually – as if aligning to Heinrich von Kleist's *On the Gradual Production of Thoughts Whilst Speaking*. Contemporaneity will have taken place in future II, in future perfect – at the same time as a memory of that which never has been and as research, an opening-up towards something uncertain: For especially when we are researching we do not yet know what we are doing – which by the way would be the contemporaneous in *artistic research*, a constellation of words which rightfully often, but sometimes too often moves the tongue of contemporary dance (a bit like René Magritte's pipe which you cannot take into your mouth – unless as a word).

³ Jacques Derrida: *Politik der Freundschaft*, Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp 2002, p. 3.

"Is the friend the same one or the other one?"⁴ is one of the central questions in Derrida's *Politics of Friendship*. And is the contemporary the same one or the other one? This is about the concept of being-with beyond fraternalism, this side of democracy as a place where everyone is able to be entirely different in equal measure. "Let us ask ourselves what the politics of such a 'beyond the principle of fraternalism' could look like"⁵, Derrida requested. This politics can be short-circuited with the economy of collaboration, the elective affinity, the complicity to which contemporary dance and performance definitely are exposed, in which cohesion often is configured right through its challenge. As if we were together just because we miss cohesion. Like loose stones that yet hold up a vault which otherwise would collapse. So for collaborative work processes any preemptive affirmative community is to be distributed, disappointed – since the irreplevisability of a community also is its constitutive moment.

At issue are the communities of those who are mainly driven by non-affiliation. Dance and performance today are interesting as an exercise in "un-avowable"⁶, "challenged", "un-presentable"⁷, in "coming"⁸ communities, in the composition and sharing of temporary co-structures: as incompleteness become form which discards aesthetic and political phantasms of purity. At issue is the contingency of cohesion, its unstable resistance, its stance of *I would prefer not to* that exactly invalidates any arbitrariness, which would rather not join – exactly in order to be with: in crisis and critique, i.e., as the ability to differentiate, the ability to discriminate, which requires decisions, resolutions, conclusiveness, re-actions, and thus is political a fortiori. For what is the difference between choice and decision, a friend asks, and he answers: we can choose between white and red wine, i.e., between conditions, given facts. But if we decide, then it is for an option not given. But how much of the not-given and the inefficient, the untimely (not as an anachronism but rather something decidedly Different), how much definitive position does contemporary dance bear? And how much does it ask?

"Time is my only contemporary", Milli Bitterli quotes in her choreography *Tausendfüßler (Millipedes, 2016)*, referring to Nietzsche, the thinker of the untimely and of otiosity with his blind crayfish "which incessantly feels around to all sides, and occasionally catches something: however, it does not feel around in order to catch, but because its limbs simply have to move"⁹. When limbs simply move, bustle,

⁴ Ibid, p. 21.

⁵ Ibid, p. 12.

⁶ Maurice Blancot: *La Communauté inavouable*, Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit 1984.

⁷ Jean-Luc Nancy: *La Communauté affrontée*, Paris: Galilée 2001; *La Communauté désavouée*, Paris: Galilée 2014.

⁸ Giorgio Agamben: *La comunità che viene*, Torino: Giulio Einaudi editore 1990.

⁹ Friedrich Nietzsche: *Fragments 1880 – 1882, Kritische Studienausgabe*, eds. G. Colli and M. Montinari, Munich/Berlin/New York: dtv/de Gruyter 1988, p. 17.

budge, stir aimlessly, futilely, idly, then an uncalled longing is dancing, and at the same time its dance longs for a lapse – at the lapel of the body, of time, which shortens and overturns it. Longing for an overturn of time instead of a closed time economy, instead of metaphysical speculation for well-timed refund, symmetry, gift for gift, redemption of a value, of a credit-worthy world of given works and words. Diswording the doxa, working on the paradox, on differentiation instead of the binary – rather not-doing, not-participating in order to be with, a paradoxical economy of our agency that can overthrow the time and order of things (to which I will keep coming back). And it is also – via a possible artistic togetherness as a group *on stage* – about our being-with *off stage*. Always in uncertainty relations.

The momentum of 'with' cannot be determined, it is always coming: communities to come are temporary, uncanny alliances or, according to Michel Foucault, 'egregious families'¹⁰. So, away again from fraternisation, from the family, towards the uncanny elective affinity. And once more on the binding groundlessness of the movement between friends, Michel Foucault: "They face each other without weapons, without arms or fitting words, without anything that might confirm the sense of the movement that brings them together."¹¹ *How did you come together? – By train*, Christine de Smedt says with a disarming smile. A disarming coming together without confirmation, without weapons, sans guarantee and sans guns. A kind of paradoxical *dejà-vu* of that which never was but might have been – a paradoxical procreation of time, contemporaneity which only is convincing in the conjunctive mood. A holding out in the conjunctive mood also in Laurent Chétouane's *Tanzstück #4. Leben wollen (zusammen)*, again created in 2010, in which text and movement only mark options, non-given options: *And here there would be a house [...], and here there would be a river [...] and here there would be a bridge* and so on (the performers are naming, choreo-graphing possible places). The five dancers 'pass' this imaginary river one by one, over an imaginary bridge, in order to find together: *And here we would be together*, the dancer Matthieu Burner says when each of them has reached the 'shore' alone, in common doubting, dubious, hesitant, delayed embarrassment and faulting.

The fault lines is the title of another choreography created in 2010 (briefly to return once more to the starting year as springboard of this inefficient – how could it be otherwise? –parcours, especially in this simultaneity of the a-synchronous), another choreography of our common fault zones: in the subdued disquiet of the beginning of Philipp Gehmacher's, Meg Stuart's and Vladimir Miller's installative performance *the*

¹⁰ Michel Foucault: "Was ist ein Autor?", in: F. Jannidis / G. Lauer / M. Martinez / S. Winko (eds.): *Texte zur Theorie der Autorschaft*, Stuttgart 2003, p. 201.

¹¹ Michel Foucault: "Von der Freundschaft als Lebensweise", in: *Von der Freundschaft. Michel Foucault im Gespräch*, Berlin: Merve 2005, p. 87. [„De l'amitié comme mode de vie", *Le nouvel observateur*, No. 1021, Paris 1984.]

fault lines something is being foreclosed and revoked at the same time, something that will have been. Something will have happened between the bodies, on the trembling levels between. 'Tectonic' fissures in between, engrossed contact bordering on violence, fierce and casual at the same time, absent-minded, detached and yet ecstatic. Amnesia of gestures, contingency of contact. The peephole projection with which the video artist Vladimir Miller *live, on stage* 'spies on', scans the two dancing bodies, changes the bodies' *live* distance and positioning, sharpens our eye for the invisible distances within the *live* contacts, for the zones of difference, the border zones, for that altogether non-neutral, excessive refinement: as focussing without photo, as a peephole of memory which focusses it differently: bodies and their images which are touching their common boundaries, which are these boundaries. Gestures too big and too small at the same time – so small as if they weren't there at all; so big that they tear apart: exactly at the fault lines, these subterranean fissures in deep rock strata, which, as they say, are supposed to be responsible for our aggressions and depressions, for our intense and tender distances, where we almost disappear and despair, without hold and withheld, in all our counter-moving inconsistency. As fault lines drawn between several, even within their bodies.

"The law of touching is separation. And even more so, it is the heterogeneity of the surfaces that touch each other [...], insofar as the actual strength of a body consists of its ability to touch another body or itself, which is nothing else but its definition as a body"¹², thus Jean-Luc Nancy defines, i.e., de-finalises the body in his book *Being Singular Plural*. Again, a body *Not Fit For Purpose*, more than one. Contemporary choreography touches without sentimentally homogenising surfaces, without a metaphysics of interiority, in all the contingency of a contact that happens, occurs, is imparted – only in partition, in the non-intactness of tactile experience, which does not affect untouched subjects, which takes no immediacy as given, which – aesthetically, ethically, politically – ever opens and closes the quotation marks of 'being-with': like one opens and closes one's eyes, like a contraction, like one contracts friendships: be it as a kind of Chinese whispers or echography, also as figures of friendship between contemporary choreographers, and sometimes between their works and the texts about them, too. Contemporary choreography as a kind of echography of our time, and also as a kind of Chinese whispers – which also is the principle of *A piece you remember to tell – A piece you tell to remember* (Concept: Silke Bake, Peter Stamer, with: Andrea Božić, Angela Gurreiro, Janez Janša, Emily Jeffries, Raphael Hillebrand, Sheena McGrandles, Jochen Roller, Kareth Schaffer, Frank Willens, 19 June 2016, Tanzkongress Hannover).

¹² Jean-Luc Nancy: *Singulär plural sein*, Berlin: Merve, 2004, p. 25. [Jean-Luc Nancy: *Être singulier pluriel*, Paris: Galilée 1996.]

Choreographic Games (2013) by Rémy Héritier and Laurent Pichaud also – in a different way – verbally and through dance investigates echoes of dance history. To this end, Héritier and Pichaud invite various groups of “experts”, choreographers and theoreticians in different cities to guess *on stage* the authorship of dance sequences and excerpts of texts on dance. In this way they especially investigate the contemporaneity of the prevailing dance narratives and anticipated patterns. Here, ‘contemporary’ rather is a tool for analysis that triggers and defines recollection processes. The temporary symmetries dedicated to the problem of testimony here are continuously irritated by moments of hesitation. So much, so little regarding the embarrassment of any claim of symmetry, recovery, coverage in the concept of contemporaneity – in witnessing, testifying, evoking, revoking, which enfolds both gestures of defence and of embrace.

For can an embrace go all out? And how much distortion and fault lines does an embrace bear over spaces and times – and how much does it ask? As a retreat from togetherness, in regard therefor. When contemporary dance is tested as a figure of being-with, it is no rhythmical, synchronous togetherness as a social utopia as in early modern dance, but rather an “idiorythmic” one – conceiving togetherness according to Roland Barthes’ book *Comment vivre ensemble*¹³ as *idiorythmics*. Roland Barthes, whom you may remember as the thinker of the neuter, is interested in *idiorythmics* as an occasional synchronisation of action rhythms which yet remain divergent. So, what does it mean today to move synchronously, executing a movement together, and not just celebrating virtuosity? Again, what is interesting in this is the simultaneity of the a-synchronous, just like a simultaneous translation always implies a shift. Laurent Chétouane in an interview: “The question is how we encounter each other, walk together for a while and then part again, with the pathos of togetherness. And can one operate politically with that? Is not the friend our best enemy?”¹⁴ The artist here explicitly refers to Derrida’s *Politics of Friendship* (and here the question must not be omitted how much discursive reference choreography actually bears and requires): “Ultimately it is very concrete”, says the choreographer, “like a war. It is about borders. Where does war take place? First at the border. At the line between two countries. Between enemies the issue is the shift of borders. But how is it between friends? Does the border disappear that runs through body and space? [...] The stroke of the violin bow is the border that is drawn here”, he says, and asks: “How could one organise cohabitation, the ‘democratic’ in this without operating from a perspective of conflict?”¹⁵

¹³ Roland Barthes: *Comment vivre ensemble. Simulations romanesques de quelques espaces quotidiens. Notes de cours et de séminaires au Collège de France, 1976–1977* Paris: Éditions du Seuil 2002.

¹⁴ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TBdrbd_DfA, 1 September 2016.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

Let us think once more of Roland Barthes' suspending of the paradigm and of Boris Charmatz' *Levée des conflits* – just as if choreography were a kind of *Chinese whispers*, shifted correspondence which does not resolve into an act of interpretation, just like potentiality that does not resolve into actuality. "Some friends of mine call it potentiality [...]. Things waiting to happen", a clown says in *Bloody Mess* (2003) by Forced Entertainment, a performance of repeated soundchecks. As if contemporaneity were just a soundcheck: "One two ... one, two, two": "things waiting to happen", a homophonous short-circuit *two/to* in order to destabilise any causality and linearity, any to simply as test counting. How did you come together? Coming together beyond causality, rather as an enumeration, stringing together, an artifice of lists that lets commonplaces go to pieces instead of claiming mutual availability. Because of this today the mere listing, enumerating, hierarchy-less stringing together or alphabetising of the performative material that avoids the hierarchy of items, names nameless differences, short-circuits parallel articulation levels. The title of an alphabetically sorted 12-hour work by Yosi Wanunu and Peter Stamer (2015) is *The Circus of Life. A – Z*; and in the programme of the 24-hour performance *Who can sing a song to unfrighten me*, Tim Etchells lists the inventory: "Dogs, alphabets, panda bears, fatalities, fairy tales, horror stories, dances and jokes."

We are dealing with a thinking rhythm of the heterogeneous which ever anew disarticulates fixations imminent at articulation, and which is inherently conclusive only if it avoids conclusions and perseveres in the paradoxical. As a continuous depositioning of dispositives – with an aggressive humour, with its tricks, its artifice. ("Humour is something totally aggressive", the performer Kristof Van Boven says in Meg Stuart's *Until our hearts stop*). The artifice of humour hones our being-in-time, does not play anything down provided it is working with its own grounds and abysses, with the non-convergence of motives (*How did we komme together? By plain?*), with the desire and disorder of the different we all are beholden to. For, as Jean Baudrillard formulated his anger against the incestuous concept of the all too slick fraternisation, "who lives from the same will die by the same"¹⁶. Thus the laughing dance's sense might go insane but never loses sight of differencing – even threatening thereby to lose its mind, minding understanding, rather "releasing from understanding as a proof of love"¹⁷. Releasing from understanding as a proof of friendship. Again: "Is the friend the same one or the other one?" Is the contemporary the same one or the other one?

¹⁶ Jean Baudrillard: *Die Transparenz des Bösen. Ein Essay über extreme Phänomene*, Berlin: Merve, p. 72f.

¹⁷ Marcus Steinweg on 3 June 2016 in a discussion with the author in the framework of the series of talks *The pleasure of the text. A Discursive Ménage-à-trois* at Tanzquartier Wien (concept: K. Kruschkova).

Instead of co-understanding, rather problematising the 'with', e.g., the audience's laughing along, whose singular vibrations jolt the automatism of community and identity thinking by continuously laying open new asymmetry. So Tim Etchells instructs his performers: "Split the audience. Make a problem of them. Disrupt the comfort and anonymity of the darkness. Make them feel the differences present in the room and outside of it (class, gender, age, race, power, culture). Give them the taste of laughing alone. The feel of a body that laughs in public and then, embarrassed, has to pull it back."¹⁸ A stratagem that suspends dependences, connections, conjunctures and conjunctions, a stratagem of paratactical instead of ordering listing, which distributes and foils the control and relief functions of collective laughter: instead of conjunction and conjuncture – a conjunctive mood, the mode of possibility of contemporary dance and performance and also of their theory that does not take itself too seriously. Performative humour focusses the calculated missing of time, the bad timing, the rapid standstill of punchlines, the doubt of language about the body, the despair of the body about language, when body and language upend each other, walk past one another, talk at cross-purposes. As an "idiorhythmic" tremor of planes, laughter addresses the vibrating aesthetic intervals, the fault lines between the parallel worlds to which we, strange humans, funnily enough belong, simultaneously.

As strange as that stringing-together instead of ordering classification of animals by Jorge Luis Borges which Michel Foucault cites in *The Order of Things* (and contemporary dance and performance along with their theory are increasingly interested in things and animals). So let us imagine these groups of dance/theory animals which nowadays come together so problematically simply (although it is not simple) alphabetically (according to Borges' list): "animals are divided into: (a) belonging to the Emperor, (b) embalmed, (c) tame, (d) sucking pigs, (e) sirens, (f) fabulous, (g) stray dogs, (h) included in the present classification, (i) frenzied, (j) innumerable, (k) drawn with a very fine camelhair brush, (l) *et cetera*, (m) having just broken the water pitcher, (n) that from a long way off look like flies."¹⁹

In this animal contemporaneity as chaos, the humorous paradoxically short-circuits parallel planes of articulation and problematises witless theories of affiliation and community, makes them falter by getting stuck in them, the desiccated theories, like in one's throat. "Laughter is a chaos of articulation", says Walter Benjamin. So bitterly apposite for our time, this chaos of articulation. The ambiguous, more than obvious gestures of the comical also dis-articulate dance (hi)stories, make their academic dryness twitch. Like that famous "twitching of the upper lip" which in Kleist's *On the Gradual Production of Thoughts Whilst Speaking* allegedly may have sparked the

¹⁸ Tim Etchells: "Not part of the bargain. Notes on *First Night*", Forced Entertainment Contextualising Pack 2001.

¹⁹ Jorge Luis Borges in: Michel Foucault: *The Order of Things. An Archaeology of the Human Science*, Vintage Books, Random House, Inc., New York 1994, p. IX.

French Revolution. Kleist: "Perhaps in this way it was eventually the twitching of an upper lip, or a suggestive playing with a shirt cuff that effected the overthrow of the order of things in France."²⁰ Once more, differently, the overthrow of the order of things, of time.

The comical in history as a chaos of articulation, as laughter, as the twitching of an upper lip. Or the irony of lips as quotation marks of what has been said. About which one cannot speak one could perhaps quote. Therefore the previous quotation of Jorge Luis Borges, which secures the traces of our jumps, our *fault lines as laugh lines*. A quote in which our curiously entangled parallels and verticals tremble in order to suspend their oppositions of thought and credibility: as a kind of *Levée des conflits* (Boris Charmatz). *So the astrophysicist Niels Bohr's neighbour hangs up a horseshoe over his door as a lucky charm, and when asked whether he really believes in this he replies, supposedly suspending conflict: "Of course not; but they say that it even helps if you don't believe in it."*

The dog days are over is the ironical proclamation in the title of Jan Marten's choreography, who with his marathon of jumping investigates our group behaviour: Bodies jumping for 70 minutes as incarnated timers, metronomes, actively trying to withstand pretended contemporaneity and the delusion of the spectacle through the extreme act of repetition: through exhaustion in magic moments of senselessness. Jan Martens: "Where lies the thin line between art and entertainment? Who are we as an audience, coming to see dancers suffer as if we are watching bullfights in an arena? Is contemporary dance *striptease for the upper class*?"²¹ However, the poet Ann Cotton, who performed a lecture at Tanzquartier Wien, calls the form the striptease of the story line.²² These inversions are interesting, intensive, tense. *The past, the present and the future walked into a bar. It was tense*, says a pub joke on English grammar.

Of what, then, does the critical tension potential of several time strata in contemporary dance consist – also, e.g., as re-enactment? To what extent does this format procreate another history of dance, another dance of history? How to work artistically and theoretically with reconstruction as a tension between foreignness and selfness without falling for a linear historicism that understands history as generally available – instead of always as reappropriation against the grain? In what way does the repeated resistiveness of the material exponentiate its unavailability? Again and against. Re-enactment opens up the possibility of retroactive reframing,

²⁰ Heinrich von Kleist: "Die allmähliche Verfertigung der Gedanken beim Reden", in: Heinrich von Kleist: *Sämtliche Werke und Briefe in zwei Bänden*, ed. Helmut Sembdner, Munich 1952, vol. 2, p. 321.

²¹ <http://www.janmartens.com/the-dog-days-are-over-2014.html>, 1 September 2016.

²² Ann Cotton's lecture was held on 3 June 2016 in the framework of the series of talks *Die Lust am Text. Eine diskursive Ménage-à-trois* at Tanzquartier Wien.

resumption (if a presumptuous one), a kind of re-animation, re-play of time itself. Once again: "My only contemporary is time." Questions regarding the rewriting and rereading of history in and as performance, the jolting of the original in the vibrating course of its reconstruction, which withdraws it from the authoritarian contour, generally make visible the gap towards the original as well as the gap within the original, do not only open up the possibility of retroactive analysis, but rather the perspective towards a reevaluation, even a revolution, an overthrow of tradition.

Only if dance history leafs through its archives from the viewpoint of the present, it will have made its historical focus visible. In the sense of Benjamin that which happened as history can only be articulated if what was historically possible incessantly appears. "History occurs as a disturbance. Like the gnats in summer", Heiner Müller writes in a letter to Pina Bausch about the spectral, disrespectful erratum of history. Thus dance re-enactment offers possibilities of conceiving history non-deterministically, non-linear, non-homogeneous, possibilities of conceiving dance (hi)stories in their singular plurality. What remains is the never-shown, the performative resit remainder of absence, as an agent of the historically possible, of the potential: *One two, one two, two...* As an agent of the historically submerged, 'sacrificed'. Is that why dance history of the 20th and 21st centuries so stubbornly deals with Stravinsky's *Le Sacre du Printemps*?

Contemporaneity takes place when it finds no place. It is in the air. "Hiding means: leaving traces. Invisible ones, though. It is the art of the easy hand. Rastelli could hide things in the air"²³, Benjamin writes about the magician Rastelli. The *present takes place when it doesn't*.²⁴ Between not yet and *no more, ever again failing* to appear, it makes us continue missing and measuring. In the deferred action of an *after* in whose mode any event will have been one after all. An event that will only have taken place in this way – in our uncertainty whether it has been one at all.

But how to take responsibility for "what is already there, even if we cannot yet see it"²⁵, the Lebanese performance artist Rabih Mroué asks. Contemporary dance and performance are not coined by a present held together by causality and calculation, rather by a vacancy beyond any metaphysics of presence, which the more critically questions what they call *zeitgeist* – like the critical empty spaces of the invisible Palestinian people with the cameras in Arkadij Zaides' choreography *Archive*, in his re-enactment: once, twice, again, again... A present which can only be archived

²³ Walter Benjamin: *Gesammelte Schriften: Band IV: Kleine Prosa. Baudelaire-Übertragungen*, ed. Tillman Rexroth, Suhrkamp 1972, p. 398

²⁴ Cf. *It takes place when it doesn't. On dance and performance since 1989* (Eds. M. Hochmuth / K. Kruschkova / G. Schöllhammer, Frankfurt a. M.: Revolver 2006.

²⁵ Rabih Mroué: "I am here but you can't see me", in: S. Gareis / K. Kruschkova: *Uncalled. Dance and performance of the future / Ungerufen. Tanz und Performance der Zukunft*, Berlin: Theater der Zeit 2009, p. 226.

and activated as a probe and problem, as vacancy. "Performance is this vacant space", Rabih Mroué writes in turn: "For absence is a promise of return and declaring the emptiness is a sign of the presence of the absent"²⁶. *As it empties out*, again the a bit louder time diagnosis by Jefta van Dinter. So, how to come together so insufficiently? The good news according to Jan Ritsema: "In the future the community will be that big that artists will live on each other, on the money that is in circulation between them"²⁷, says the founder of the PerformingArtsForum (PAF): Another project under the sign of its own interminability. Like contemporaneity itself. *How did you come together? By boat? "No numerus clausus* for those who come along, who join."

Finally, again the twitching of the upper lip during the national assembly in Paris in 1789, which according to Kleist might have triggered the French revolution: Kleist's dancing, ironical gesture story unsettles the course of history. For "the event is that which 'makes' the datum (Latin 'datum', the 'given')", Nancy writes, "since no datum is already given... If the event has already been dated it does no longer get around to being an event, it is already remembering itself; thus at the moment of their taking place, 17 June 1789 in Paris (national assembly) or 17 June 1953 in Berlin (workers' uprising) are not yet the '17 June': they invent their datum"²⁸. Likewise 17 June 2013 in Istanbul, when the dancer Erdem Gündüz, meanwhile known as *standing man*, decided to stand silently still in the midst of Taksim square, was not yet the "17 June". And likewise today²⁹ certainly is not yet the "17 June". One two... one, two, two...

²⁶ Ibid. Also cf. Krassimira Kruschkova (ed.): *Ob?scene. Zur Präsenz der Absenz im zeitgenössischen Theater, Tanz und Film*, Maske und Kothurn, Vienna/Cologne/Weimar: Böhlau 2005.

²⁷ Jan Ritsema: "No illusions. About the future of art and the arts" in: S. Gareis / K. Kruschkova: *Uncalled. Dance and performance of the future / Ungerufen. Tanz und Performance der Zukunft*, l. c., p. 272.

²⁸ Jean-Luc Nancy: "Theaterereignis", in: Nikolaus Müller-Schöll (ed.): *Ereignis. Eine fundamentale Kategorie der Zeiterfahrung. Anspruch und Aporien*, Bielefeld: Transcript 2003, p. 329.

²⁹ This text was recited in Hannover on 17 June 2016.