

TRAINING REMEMBERING

I would like to start with an anecdote. When my daughter was five weeks old, she had a blocked neck and turned her head almost only to her left. So, my wife and I went to see an osteopath. The doctor's practice was a family business: Father and son, both of them neurologists and chiropractitioners, work on scores of bodies day by day, manipulating and treating them. The father is also an osteopath, the son is still learning to become one. We saw the son. He treated our daughter, who screamed and turned red and in turn got her back straightened. But not quite as straight as it should have been. So, the son got his father, who showed another knack or two, explained them to his son and to us and left again. Our daughter was now really straight, and the son said: "Well, this is how it goes. I am still learning. While I push and pull and push and pull, my father just needs one grip and the work is done." Our daughter sneezed. "Do we need to come back," we asked. "No, one time is sufficient. Good-by," he replied and left to his next patient.

Our daughter was completely changed. She had more freedom in all of her movements and her gaze seemed to go further out into the world. She wouldn't stop looking, which in turn made her very hungry. The time after the visit at the osteopath's seemed to be one big exchange between visual and food intake. I got very excited. Something had happened here that interests me deeply: Knowledge and skill, that is to say technique, was transferred from one generation to the next. The history of osteopathy and of medicine had contracted into one moment to jump over from father to son and, even moreso, to affect healing through the touch between doctors and our daughter. It was as if this corporeal touch had remembered the whole knowledge of a healing method in only one instant.

Such a moment needs practice and study just like a touching or moving moment in theater or dance needs practice and study, that is to say technique. But: What kind of technique is needed in dance? What does such a technique do? What does it include? What does it exclude?

In her remarkable essay "Chaos, Territory, Art. Deleuze and the Framing of the Earth", Elizabeth Grosz describes the earth as chaos. It is chaos in the sense that it is the milieu of all milieus and thus contains everything, not in an absence of order, but in a presence of everything at once, a plethora of possibilities. Art's task is to claim something from this

plethora, namely heightened perception and sensation. This is achieved through framing parts of the chaos and thus bringing out particular qualities of the base material, forming them and bringing them to the senses. Following Grosz' argument, art's first gesture is therefore an architectural one: the construction of a frame. Through the making of a floor, for example, particular qualities of the earth are framed and brought out, such as gravity and thrust, which let dance emerge. I argue that on the floor that is now a dance floor the body has so many possibilities, that it becomes chaotic itself. On the dance floor, the body needs to be framed as well.

The kinds of framing of the body and of the body on the floor resp. in space are techniques, which can be transmitted, studied, remembered, appropriated and changed. The first half of the 20th century was, as Steve Paxton pointed out in a lecture in February 2009 in Amsterdam, an era, which proofed that dance techniques with whole movement repertoires could be developed by single individuals. Martha Graham is the outstanding example of this theory. But also her former students and dancers Eric Hawkins, Jose Limon and Merce Cunningham, who all appropriated and changed Graham's technique, made important points in the argument. In contrast, I have studied at the end of another era. During the second half of the century another point was made: technique was not understood anymore as the repetition of situations in order to form bodies within a certain movement repertory, in other words establishing certain movement habits, but as the production of corporeal sensations and perceptions. The body not anymore as a style-fullfilling machine to be trained but as an instrument of sensations to be tuned. I am especially thinking of contact improvisation, a movement form instigated by Steve Paxton, who had studied with and danced for Merce Cunningham, and of Trisha Brown's ways of dancing, partially shaped by her studies with Ann Halprin and of the Susan-Klein-technique, whose extreme slowness allows for a rich sensory input while moving. There are many more examples. Since perception is a highly individual affair, the various explorations have led to various, highly eclectic training forms. This has advantages and disadvantages, which would be material for an entire essay of its own. For this one it is important to remark that it was with this eclectic experience and knowledge, with this framing, that I encountered Dore Hoyer or, to be more exact, the video of a black-and-white film that shows her cycle of dances entitled "Affectos Humanos".

This encounter took place in 1999, in a library in Brussels. My colleagues Thomas Plischke, Alice Chauchat and I saw a grey and black figure, Dore Hoyer, who, accompanied by

percussion and piano by Dimitri Wiatowitsch, danced five dances choreographed by herself: “Vanity”, “Desire”, “Hate”, “Fear” and finally “Love”. With white make-up and a dark cap on her head, dressed in wide clothes draped over her body and flowing around her, Dore Hoyer unfolds her choreographies in a grey-white studio that is lit in such a way, that neither corners nor edges are visible: a human being lost in an endless space, solitarily drawing the traces of her affects and emotions. At the same time, we saw an intense physical and sensory presence and a body that was formed by rigorous training and movement research, a body framed.

Thomas Plischke, Alice Chauchat and I decided with dramaturge Joachim Gerstmeier to work with these dances. After an eight years absence from Germany, especially Thomas Plischke and I took to a search for an artistic home and for what this might mean. We didn't find Dore Hoyer's style particularly interesting, nor did we want to copy it. Rather, we were fascinated by her intensity and by her apparently thorough movement research. To undertake this search I accepted the role of the guinea-pig and to try, probe and test Dore Hoyer's material on and through my body.

To start this research, I first called the German Dance Archive in Cologne, whose director, Frank-Manuel Peter referred me to Waltraud Luley, a then 84-year old dance pedagogue in Frankfurt on Main, who used to be a close friend of the late Dore Hoyer until her death in 1967, and who acts as a sort of guard of the “Affectos Humanos”. The first things she wanted to know, when I called her in 1999, were my age, my height, my weight and whether I was a lyrical or a dynamic dancer. Apparently, she wanted to get a picture of me, and although she found me a bit too young for the “Affectos Humanos”, she said: “Well Mister Nachbar, I suggest you work on one or two of the dances and when you are done, you call me again and we make an appointment to work on the material.” So, I did. I worked with the video and learned the steps and gestures from the tape and tried to transfer them to my body and into space as well as I could. Two months later Waltraud Luley and I finally met at her studio. We worked on the beginning of the dance “Hate”, which works with a refined coordination of high tensions running through the arms and shoulders. But me, in 1999 mostly trained in the above mentioned release techniques and contact improvisation did it rather softly, almost sloppily. As a reaction, Waltraud Luley sprang out of her chair and yelled: “Mister Nachbar, this is hate! The whole body is a cramp!” So, I put myself into a state of rather unrefined, yet

high body tension, only forgetting my little fingers. Waltraud Luley reacted immediately: “The small fingers, Mister Nachbar, the small fingers!”

In the course of the reconstruction, Waltraud Luley and I met regularly. Thanks to her, who had studied and performed modern dance in the 1930's and 40's, and who later had seen Dore Hoyer perform hundreds of times, I got to understand the dances of the “Affectos Humanos”. She showed me exercises and explained to me training methods, talked about Dore Hoyer and her approaches to dance and to stage. She continuously compared the original on tape with the original in front of her in the studio. We often paused the tape, catching Dore Hoyer in her dance and producing the illusion of a position. I would copy this position and Waltraud Luley would correct me as if I exercised some kind of expressionist dance yoga. She insistently pointed out the differences in posture, dynamics and movement details between Dore Hoyer and me. There were many, so many, that I initially couldn't work through all of them. In the first performances of the reconstruction I interpreted Dore Hoyer's intensity and her gestural expression as a work of high muscular tension with strong breathing support. Since I already had a strong tension pattern in my shoulders and upper arms, I compensated by also tensing my chest, stomach and legs. By this I constrained my movement range. I could give impulses only by help of my breath, and reaching with arms and legs into space got difficult. At the time, dance critique Gerald Siegmund wrote that I wore Dore Hoyer's dances like wet clothes, a little bit too heavy to attain her coordination of and play with intensities, but weighty enough to pass as an important experiment: a contemporary exposes himself to dance history and makes it and its differences to today visible.

At the time, I only worked on the dances “Desire”, “Hate”, and “Fear”. My high body tension was in the way of the intricate coordination of reaching and counterreaching in “Desire”, while it helped me to achieve a strong intensity in “Hate”. The dance “fear” seemed to somehow be in my nature. Its basic movements are shivering and shaking, which both release the greater muscles. I could relate this to my experiences in release techniques. In this way, the performances were always a progression from “Desire”, which stood in greatest difference to me, via “Hate” to “Fear”, which I related to with the greatest congruence of all three dances. I showed the dances about 60 times, partially in the frame of “affects/rework” with Thomas Plischke, Joachim Gerstmeier and Alice Chauchat, partially as a lecturperformance

entitled “ReConstruct”. The very last performance of this sow was in February 2005, at this time already under the title “Urheben Aufheben”¹.

Before this I hadn’t danced the dances in a year. Afterwards I wouldn’t dance them for three more years. Instead, I started to study Tai Chi. Then, at the end of 2007, Waltraud Luley asked me , if I didn’t want to reconstruct and perform the two remaining dances “Vanity” and “Love”. In 1999, it was her who had not allowed me to dance these dances. She feared a man would look to effeminate. But in 2007 she wanted (and still wants) that I inherit the role of the guardian of the “Affectos Humanos”, once she dies. To be able to do so I would have to dance all five dances once on stage, she found (and still finds). I accepted under one condition – that the work would be funded. I wanted to reconstruct the last two dances only, if I could frame and stage the whole thing anew.

I received the funding, and Waltraud Luley and I started to work on the dances “Vanity” and “Love”. Eight years after the beginning of my exploration of Dore Hoyer’s “Affectos Humanos” I understood a lot more of these dances. I see now that Dore Hoyer’s intensity is not so much caused by a high body tension but rather with an intricate coordination of the spine itself and of the relation between the spine and the limbs. She didn’t achieve expression by putting meaningful gestures into space but rather by coordinating the finely crafted intensities, so that the expression emerged from in between her body and the space around it – a kind of fugitive oscillation rather than a monumental positioning.

Two things were crucial for this understanding: On one hand the fact that I had started to study Tai Chi, a practice that focusses on dropping the weight of the arms and shoulders in order to be able to use them always in relation to the spine, which in turn relates the body’s weight through the hips, legs and feet to the floor. On the other hand, it is exactly the dances “Vanity” and “Love” that accentuate the specifics in Dore Hoyer’s technique: the fine and complex coordination of the undulating spine in “Vanity”, and the continuous carving of the hips into space in “Love”. Both, spine and hips, give impulses to the rest of the body that moves in space. I understood that Dore Hoyer’s technique and apparently the dance of her era was not so different as I had assumed from the dance I had studied: Steve Paxton, e.g., has developed a whole technique evolving around the spine called “Material for the Spine, which

¹ Urheben Aufheben is a play of words and can mean three things: 1. To pick something created up from the floor. 2. To keep it. 3. To suspend the notion of creation and authorship.

also focusses on the coordination of the spine in relation to the rest of the body. Another example is the “carving” of the coccyx to go from bending-over to squatting in Susan-Klein-technique. But also choreographically, there are parallels, when Deborah Hay posits intensities in space with minute attention or when William Forsythe time and time again searches the friction between language and dance.

But, besides these questions around bodily skill and awareness, what does it mean to reconstruct a dance? From the beginning of my research I understood it as a form of remembering within a frame that has always grappled with its quality of being at simultaneously actual an archived knowledge in movement: dance, whose object is always fugitive and dependant on the dancers’ abilities to remember movement in and through movement. But while in the beginning I mostly saw the differences between me, the contemporary with specific training and taste, and a moment in dance history, the “Affectos Humanos”, I am now rather interested in the similarities between present and past – not necessarily the similarities of styles and habits but of that which remains over time and is only brought differently to the senses – as the spine in dance or, to come back to the anecdote from the beginning of this paper, the hands in medicine.

In dance as in architecture, a reconstruction is undertaken when the object to be reconstructed has vanished. But unlike the objects in architecture, the objects in dance have always already vanished. They only survive when practiced continuously and given on from one dancer to the next in repertory sessions or technique classes. This means that a reconstruction in dance takes place when the dance or choreography in question hasn’t been danced for a decade or more and when most if not all of its protagonists have died, meaning that there is a rather big time span between the remembering dancer and the dance to be remembered. For this, aids such as film or notation or eye witnesses are essentially needed, which are not always necessary when a company that has the money cultivates its repertory through specialists or when an established dance technique has enough practitioners that share certain movement patterns, habits and exercises. But once this kind of continuity is interrupted, a jump is needed, namely into a specific zone of the past. From this zone, according to Henri Bergson, images are actualized, which not only address the visual sense but also hearing, touch, and proprioception. This is only possible, because presence and past are not different in kind. While the present continuously actualizes, its past is made at the same time and coexists with other pasts in various states of contraction and actualization. When I remember something, I

don't bring something back from the past to the present, but I contract and actualize it through me and my senses. The archive cannot exist without the remembering, repeating and also differentiating body. In dance this is a repeated experience, when we remember steps in a dance class or whole choreographies while touring a piece – the past of the remembered movement coexists with the present of its performance and in and through the present bodies.

A central idea for me is that of the self experiment, of the bodily text, through which my frames, such as my body with its movement knowledge and experience, become apparent. In reconstruction this frame gets questioned and trained anew. It can be sensed differently. The beauty of this process is that the gesture of making the (dance) floor as an architectural gesture here meets reconstruction, an activity in dance that borrows its term from architecture to describe an almost osteopathic gesture of re-structuring touch.

Martin Nachbar, 2009