

## **Urheben Aufheben, A Tangent and Companion**

In May 2008 I premiered the latest version of my research into reconstructing Dore Hoyer's "Affectos humanos": "Urheben Aufheben". During the course I showed this piece on a more or less regular basis: In November 2008 in Berlin, in June 2009 in Essen, in February 2010 in Leuven and in Nürnberg, in March 2010 in Amsterdam, and finally in May 2010 in Heilbronn. This last performance was in replacement of the originally invited "Repeater – Dance Piece with Father", which is mentioned in 1.1 (p.1) of this report. It could not be performed, as my father suffered hip problems that led to the replacement of his left hip a week before the date. I mention this here, as the two projects, reconstruction and family dances, got more and more connected during the course, which will be elaborated later on in this text. Besides these performances, I also gave a lecture on the reconstruction work during a panel on reconstruction in dance on April 25, 2009, organized by Tanzplan Deutschland in the frame of Move Berlin Festival of Brazilian dance.

Dore Hoyer (1911-1967) belonged to the second generation of Expressionist Dance, which did not go down in dance history as successfully as the first generation, because their careers were hardened by the Nazi regime, the war, and later on by a rigorous turn away from Modern Dance in post-war Germany. Trained with Gret Palucca and temporarily member of the Wigman company, Hoyer was as much formed by Expressionist Dance as she searched for and walked down new paths in dance. Her rigorously formal and abstract movement composition differed strongly from the rather empathetic and ecstatic works of her teachers.

She created the "Affectos humanos" in this vein. It is a cycle of five dances. Each is three to five minutes long and is accompanied live by Dimitri Wiatowitsch, playing his original scores on piano and percussion. As the title indicates, the dances go through human affects. They are associative yet rigorous renderings of Hoyer's reading of Spinoza's "Ethics", in which he describes 48 human affects not so much in the psychological sense of sudden and uncontrollable emotion but rather as energies that affect the mind and the body by making them either grow or shrink in feeling and in turn producing affects that impact other bodies. Out of these 48, Dore Hoyer chooses five – *Vanity, Desire, Hate, Fear, and Love* – and thus creates a dramaturgy that reflects on her condition as a soloist, who wants to be admired. Unfulfilled the affect turns into pure desire, which also remains unfulfilled only to reveal an underlying hate. However, the dancer does not know where to turn with it and after an exhausting four minutes, she is left with fear – of a constant state of unanswered affect, which finally can only be resolved in and through love.

With this cycle, Dore Hoyer tests Spinoza's philosophy within the context of solo choreography that takes place on a stage. In doing so, she places herself and her dances on the border between Spinoza's notion of the affect and theatrical emotion that gets expressed using commonly shared symbols in gestures and facial expressions. She places her body in between a constant unfolding and folding of energies and affects in motion on one side, and a readable gesturality on the other. This lingering between feeling (or sensation) and language is supported by the fact that each dance's title is shown in the film before the dance, relating the abstract dance forms to a sense-making language filter. The spectator's perception of the dances is thus invited to linger itself between making sense and sensing the energy and quality of the dance's movements. In the film we see Hoyer, wearing white make-up and a dark cap on her head, dressed in wide clothes draped over her body and flowing around her. She 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 dancer's body framed, unleashed, transformed and re-shaped in order to connect with its milieu: the stage and the theater (see chapter 2.1 of this report, pp. 15-16).

I had started to reconstruct three dances of the cycle in 1999 within the frame of a piece, together with Alice Chauchat, Joachim Gerstmeier, and Thomas Plischke. Together with Dore Hoyer's friend Waltraud Luley, who is a specialist of Hoyer's work, I worked on *Desire*, *Hate* and *Fear*. As I had been trained in postmodern dance styles that avoid gestural symbolization or emphatic expression of any emotion, it was difficult for me to understand the dances and how they produced their intensities. At the time I tried to achieve this intensity through a high muscular tension, which restricted my movement range and forced me to achieve impulse and rhythm through emphasis on my breathing. However, sources clearly revealed that Hoyer had never worked with high muscular tension or heavy breathing to achieve intensity in her dances. She rather worked with a strong center of her body from which she could extend and retract her spine and limbs. She placed intensity on the lines of this extension and retraction and produced movement that could linger between symbols arrested in gestures, and a continuous flow of movement. The other element that I found difficult to grasp in 1999 was Hoyer's use of and work with gestures. I perceived them as "wooden", and awkwardly stiff, and stressed in my reconstruction the aspect of arresting meaning through certain hand movements rather than letting the gestures pass through my

hands as kinds of movement that hold certain symbolizing powers without holding on to them<sup>1</sup>.

It was only in 2007, when I started to work on the two remaining dances *Vanity* and *Love*, that I realized how Hoyer actually achieved intensity and meaning. I hadn't worked on the reconstruction for three years but instead had started to study Tai Chi, a martial art and movement form that pays its attention to relaxing the arms and hands in order to use the power of the body's center, which is nourished by legs and feet that allow the energy of the body's weight to flow or fall into the ground and the resulting thrust from it to travel up to the center and through the spine, shoulders and arms all the way into the hands. The hands thus gain power rather than losing it, as one might assume when thinking of relaxing the hands and arms. Power to push an opponent over then boils down to the ability to coordinate forces. If one grafts this idea onto the symbolizing mechanisms in theater through bodily gesture, we get to understand how Hoyer might have produced meaning not so much by making symbols through tensing her arms and hands into gestures. Instead, she might have gotten there by exactly relaxing her arms and hands and letting the symbols pass through her arms and hands extending from and retracting towards the body's center around the navel. Gestures would then rather emerge than be made.

This new physical understanding of the dances was then nourished by the readings of Elizabeth Grosz (pp. 15-16) and of Suzanne Langer (p.6). While Grosz opened a view on expression generated through certain procedures of framing the body rather than through the body outwardly expressing an inner feeling, Langer made clear that movement in dance needs to be linked to and coordinated with imagination, rendering movement gesture not in the sense of producing readable symbols but in the sense of surrendering to the virtual powers (or sensory and imaginary forces) of dance. The lecture I held in April 2009 talked about the influences of Tai Chi and of Grosz' writings on my understanding of the reconstruction. The studio version shown in Essen in June 2009 picked up on this new understanding and tried to make it empathetically traceable for the audience by inviting them to try some of the gestural movement of Hoyer's dances before dancing them myself. Interestingly it seemed that the sensory information gained through trying some of the dances' movements allowed the audience to engage more openly in the imaginary and sensory aspects of Hoyer's work and my reconstruction of it, even though the audience

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<sup>1</sup> Susanne Linke talked about Hoyer's approach to movement quite vividly during a panel discussion on reconstruction on the first German Tanzkongress in April 2006, with Yvonne Hardt, Susanne Linke, Waltraud Luley, and me. Linke first described Hoyer's strong center and how every movement was always executed with an extension and a simultaneous counter-pull. Then she jumped out of her chair to show how it works and afterwards continued to talk about the rather low tension of Hoyer's hand in her gesture work.

remained seated while trying. For me, this was an interesting experiment as I had so far tried to gain this understanding and empathy through a part of the piece in which I talk about the reconstruction work and how I relate to it, using a blackboard and some of my own dances to enlighten my approach. A play with language had been my choice to share my imagination with the audience. But in Essen another option was revealed, an active physical engagement of the audience.

With the last performance of “Urheben Aufheben” so far, in May in Heilbronn, I discovered yet another option. After I had worked with SNDO4 on miming the body (pp.21-24) and with SNDO1 on gestures of magic (p.24), Suzanne Langer’s theory of dance movement as connected to imagination and thus becoming gesture had been put to a test and explored. I had realized the necessity for imagination with every dance (such as the imagined/remembered movement traces or tunnels with SNDO4) and discovered dance’s virtual powers (through investigating the gestures of illusionism and magic and the shared imaginations they are able to produce with SNDO1). On a physical or practical level, I had discovered the necessity to always relate any hand gesture to the movements of the spine and of the legs and feet for it to surrender to virtual or imaginary powers in a sensory flow rather than holding on to arrested symbolic meaning. This coordination also necessitated the frequent relaxing of the arms and hands (as I had studied it in Tai Chi) to allow for the gesture and the imagination to unfold, expand and retract along the movements of the body. Such a body would then be able to become an index in a Peircean sense: a “sign” that is situated between physical and language experiences, letting both meaning and sensation pass through and beyond it, relating to each other imagination and actualization in the constant flux of its movements. All of this allowed me in Heilbronn to not only relax my arms and hands physically and let each affect actualize in my body but to let the imaginary related to each affect unfold and take on meaning by itself, passing through my body and into space rather than being produced by my body and put into space. As a result my body didn’t move in space and time but it was moved by the affects and their imaginaries. Space and time existed through this movement, and it even felt as if it was the dances that moved them. The forces thus unleashed and transformed the space, made it vibratory and gave the audience an opening to engage in Hoyer’s dances empathetically – without any need to try them out themselves.

Of course, this engagement was also enabled by the part of the piece that uses language, the blackboard and my own dances. But it was striking how Hoyer’s work did not feel stuck in their gestures anymore. Suddenly it felt like dance that might use gestures as part of its movement repertoire but not as a way to fix symbolic meaning. Suddenly this dance was

able to transform the space of the theater and the forces within, including the audience's forces of imagination and projection and my own force of embodying meaning. Suddenly all of this continuously escaped me while remaining available to my perception and to my examination. As a performer this feels oddly powerful despite the fact that one literally stops to hold on to producing and controlling the meaning of one's performance and surrenders to the intensity of the movements' forces. Interestingly, this performance in Heilbronn marked a shift in interest in this reconstruction and in reconstruction in general: While in the beginning my main interest lay in reconstruction as an act of remembering by tapping into shared memory (in form of documents and witnesses), I have now begun to look closer at the transformations engendered through working on Hoyer's dances – physical ones as much as transformations of thought and of imagination.

Such transformations were also part of the process towards "Repeater – Dance Piece with Father". During an improvisation of a rehearsal my father copied my movements. At first I was unnerved, secretly lamenting my father's lack of creativity. But then I saw that we both moved our arms with the same line of tension that ran from the thumbs along the topside of the arms and shoulders to the neck. Suddenly I understood that I had copied my father a long time already and through habitual repetition had developed a physical pattern. In a way, I had become a kind of living archive of my father's habit that had become my own. Besides the openings towards the reconstruction work on the level of memory, repetition and reconstruction, I was now also given a problem that I could investigate and research: How do the hands relate to the torso? In relation to some of the material of "Repeater", which heavily yields towards pantomime, there was also an opening to gesture and its relations to language on one side and to (dance) movement on the other.

However, at the time this was not clear to me. Only through my studies of Tai Chi, which I started during the tour of "Repeater" in winter 2007/08, and through the research and reflection during my studies at the AMCh<sup>2</sup> I started to understand that this moment in rehearsing "Repeater" lay the ground. It started the curiosity to find out about and the desire to maybe even transform the pattern. It seems that the performance of "Urheben Aufheben" in Heilbronn was a manifestation of such a transformation. It made me realize the actual arc of my research trajectory at the AMCh, which didn't only span the two years of the course but had started during the process towards "Repeater" in 2007. This involvement of my father in

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<sup>2</sup> I am here especially thinking of my readings of Peirce, Langer and Flusser, of the research during my second residency in December 2008, and of all feedback sessions with peers and tutors, in particular Myriam van Imschoot's comment during the first seminar that my research seems to be about the relation of hands to torso. Moreover, the phases with SNDO4 and SNDO1 were crucial in the development of this understanding.

the findings of the research, if ever so indirect, gives it a somewhat emotional tint that took me by surprise and all the way back to my grandfather. He had learned his trade as carpenter from his father but chose to not give it on to his son, my father, and instead sent him away from the village and to the city to become a businessman. The handing down of the carpentering techniques with its patterns and habits (German: 'Handwerk', hands' work) was suspended, and it seems that the energy of my grandfather's hands working the wood, which was not passed to and through my father and his hands, got stuck in my father's thumbs. It took about 20 years of dancing with all its footwork, 10 years of working with Dore Hoyer's gestural dances, two years of masters studies, and the study of the theoretical work of carpenter and furniture-maker Bernard Cache to release this energy and reconnect the thumb to the index with all its pointing and imaginative capacities as well as to the little finger with its energetic connection to the coccyx, the very base of the spine.