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Special issue:
Contemporaneities

Guest editor: Frederik Le Roy

Contents

Contemporaneities. On the Entangled Now of Performance <i>Frederik Le Roy</i>	2
Time on our Hands <i>Rebecca Schneider</i>	28
The Local Prejudice of Contemporary Dance <i>Fabián Barba</i>	46
From Contemporary Dance to Contemporaneous Dance. Choreographic Re-enactment and the Experience of Contemporaneity After (Post-)Modernity <i>Timmy De Laet</i>	64
The Distance with the Present. On Agamben's Notion of the Contemporary <i>Daniel Blanga-Gubbay</i>	90
PORTFOLIO	
A Future History of the Present <i>Thomas Bellinck & Sébastien Hendrickx</i>	101
New Realism and the Contemporary World. The Re-enactments and Tribunals of the International Institute of Political Murder <i>Milo Rau</i>	121

Contemporaneities

The Entangled Now of Performance

Frederik Le Roy

During the second half of the 20th century, the label 'contemporary' has increasingly been used to designate an artistic work's synchronous relation to the present. Today, contemporaneity has become a prerequisite for artistic production, not only in the visual arts but also the performing arts, time-based arts that are often defined by their ontological foundation in the 'here and now.' However, 'contemporaneity' as a notion and as a condition of performance is far from unproblematic or neutral and is in urgent need to be explored further. This collection of texts written by performance theorists and theatre makers examines ways in which performance and the performing arts today reflect on contemporaneity. What does the 'contemporary' in 'contemporary theatre' or 'contemporary dance' stand for? How do these in turn relate to the general notion of 'contemporary art'? How do the performing arts intervene in the world they are contemporary with? And what kind of contemporaneity is produced by the performing arts? What are some of the philosophical, temporal and political assumptions underpinning the contemporaneity of performance and how do the performing arts negotiate, critique and transform these assumptions?

The rise of the contemporary is demonstrated clearly by the proliferation, since the 1980s, of museums, galleries and art centres dedicated to contemporary art. Major museums that have devoted their collections to the eponymous 'modern art' also started to move along with the constantly changing artistic production, taking stock of what is happening in the world of contemporary art in (often temporary) exhibitions. In case of the Tate Gallery of Modern Art in London, the 'contemporary' model of the temporary exhibition even became the standard format to display not only contemporary art but also its collection as a whole.¹ A parallel boom has occurred in academia, where contemporary art has increasingly and firmly been institutionalized as a field of study in art history, cementing the role of the 'contemporary' as a discursive category in and of itself (Grant Kester in Foster et al. 7; Bishop 16).² The rise of the contemporary, however, is not limited to the art world or to art studies. Increasingly, contemporaneity gains currency as a conceptual designator for the present time³ – a welcome alternative to notions like 'modernity' or 'postmodernity' to label

our present-day era (Wegner). Our current “regime of historicity,” to use a phrase introduced by François Hartog, is increasingly ‘contemporary’. While this turn toward the contemporary reverberates throughout academia, artistic practices play a key role in capturing and foregrounding the current historical consciousness. To quote Boris Groys: “the term ‘contemporary art’ does not simply designate art that is produced in our time. Rather, today’s contemporary art demonstrates the way in which *the contemporary as such shows itself*” (71, my italics).⁴ Art not only represents the present-day but also makes apparent, either visually or through experience, what contemporaneity, as a distinctive awareness of the present, is.

The flurry of attention to the contemporary has been limited primarily to the fields of aesthetics and art history that consider the visual arts. Only recently has this debate been carried over to the field of the contemporary performing arts.⁵ The symposium *Contemporaneities. The Entangled Now of Performance* (March 2016) where the texts in this issue originated and this collection of texts itself, is aimed at further opening up this discussion in theatre and performance studies. This all the more necessary, because the visual art’s institutional desire to trace the now is expressed in no important part by the recent interest – if not hype – to document and ‘collect’ ephemeral works of live art, effectively undercutting, at least partly, the object-centred logic of the museum by opening up those spaces that were long dedicated primarily to permanence and materiality to impermanent and immaterial works of art like performance art, theatre and choreography.⁶

Moreover, the performing arts, with their ability to experiment with ‘entangled’, ‘crossed’ or ‘disruptive’ temporalities, seem particularly apt to reflect on the current regime of historicity. The artistic moment of performance, not only produces a distinct sense of presentness, it can also become a porous event that registers *other* times. Theatrical performances, for example, have the ability to endow a past or forgotten reality with presence. The performing arts cite and reenact history, produce a sense of ‘again-ness’, appropriate old-fashioned forms, or extend the life/live of what has supposedly passed. If the contemporary today is, as Peter Osborne states and as we will see later in this introduction, a ‘contemporary’ understood as the “coming together not simply ‘in’ time, but of times (...) by a coming together of different but equally ‘present’ temporalities” (Osborne “Anywhere”, 17) than the performing art’s different contemporaneities are the space *par excellence* to investigate time today. Contemporaneities are here therefore not only understood in epochal or

discursive terms but also point towards performance as a critical practice working in and with time.

A Short History of the Contemporary

To take a closer look at the genealogy of the concept and its relation to historical consciousness, it is helpful to consider the etymological origins of the word 'contemporary.' Derived from the Latin 'contemporarius' which combines 'con-' (meaning 'with,' 'together') and 'temporarius' (meaning 'in time,' from 'tempus'), the notion is linked with temporal categories like simultaneity and synchronicity. This simultaneity, the Oxford English Dictionary informs us, should be understood first as "belonging to the same time, age, or period." Hence, contemporaneity is not the coming together of different times but refers to people, phenomena or events that live, exist or occur at the same time, in the same period, simultaneously and in synch. This original meaning of the contemporary, which is used at least since the 17th century as a neutral designator, became especially meaningful with the rise of the modern "regime of historicity" (François Hartog) at the end of the 18th century.

Philosophers of history have pointed out this modern "regime of historicity" grew out of a sense of loss: the shattering effects of the French Revolution of 1789 and the ensuing ravages of the Napoleonic wars produced the experience that the old world order – henceforth the *ancien régime* – was irretrievably lost.⁷ In this new world, tradition lost its meaning as a foundation of the present identity and the radical break between past and present meant that modern men and women found themselves, as Peter Fritzsche would have it, "stranded in the present." At the same time, however, to witness the world in turmoil together, either through a shared physical presence (hardly any European country was left untouched) or mediated through newly emerging mass media, also had a *synchronizing effect* (Fritzsche 53). Confronted with a radically changing world, the modern became each other's 'contemporaries.' Even if they are spatially apart, they are tied to the same historical time frame, moving on the same timeline towards the future.

The Western modern regime of historicity in the 19th century is a history of synchronisation on different levels. For our current undertaking, three dynamics are relevant here. Firstly, the recognition of the diachronic break with the past emphasizes both the *otherness* of that past and the unique particularity of the present. It is no coincidence that modern historiography is born in this historical era. As Henry Rousso has pointed out in *La Dernière Catastrophe*, historians at

the start of the 19th century already practice 'contemporary history' because their discipline tried to fathom their own time - the present and recent past - either directly or through an exploration of the present's 'other', i.e. the past. (31-32; 56ff)⁸ Importantly, this also gives rise to the concept and practice of periodization: the historicist investigation of historical breaks implied differing, succeeding historical 'contemporaries' each with common cultural, political or socio-economical denominators (e.g. industrialization, secularization, artistic styles and so on) and it is the historian's task to show how historical phenomena are in synch with their historical contexts.⁹

Secondly, the sense of the becoming-other of the past gave rise to the conceptualization of history as a linear chronology of singular moments.¹⁰ The arrival of a panoply of apparatuses of synchronisation – new communication media, mass transportation, the standardization of clock time, and especially the introduction of capitalist factory labour (Doane 221) – further escalated the image of time as a line of consecutive 'nows' that once they have passed, remain in and of the past. Of course, this "maelstrom of modern life" full of promises of progress and adventure was paradoxically also a time of "contradiction, ambiguity and anguish" (Berman 15), but this constantly changing time was experienced *together*, with others, as contemporaries. This modern temporality, thirdly, was also projected on time as a whole to become universalized and globalized.¹¹ Modernization inaugurated a view of the world that distinguished between modern regions and those non-Western regions that were not yet modern, still 'in the waiting room of history' waiting to become the West's contemporary (Chakrabarty 8-9, 12). The temporal logic undergirding colonialism, one could argue, is synchronization.

The performing arts have arguably played a role in both promoting and establishing this modern temporality. Take for example the idea of the non-contemporaneity of past and present: while gone, history was manifestly allowed to reappear, not only in the accounts of historians but also through historical representations in the performing arts. However, as Stephen Bann has argued in *The Clothing of Clio*, while historical realism produced "life-like reproductions of the past," this "illusion of proximity to the past" at the same time also always (re)affirmed the present as distinctly different from that past (237). To use Bann's apt metaphor to describe this paradigm: the historic representations resembles taxidermy, in that the quest to produce "effects of resurrection" eventually shows the past "mummified," life-like but dead, within reach but at once kept at a distance. By performing history in historical dramas and other popular forms of

“historicism in action” (Lütticken 31) like historical parades, the past could (re)appear on stage or in the theatrical space but only in its own temporal zone. The fourth wall, which was introduced with the bourgeois theatre in the course of the 18th century, in these theatrical representations marked a demarcation line not only between stage and audience but also between a past and a present world. Witnessing their history in the theatre, the spectators become ‘Zeitgenossen’ (‘fellows of the same time’). Rather than the past and present coming together, these representations tended to acknowledge the “non-contemporaneous” past (Koselleck 266).

Throughout this issue the authors will time and again question this modern notion of a synchronous contemporaneity and the related notions ‘the non-contemporaneity’ of the past, of periodization, linear chronological time of contingent nows and their colonial underpinnings.

Towards a Dialectical Contemporaneity

Continuing our short history of the contemporary, we see that from the end of the 19th century onward, the semantic field of the word ‘contemporary’ expanded. ‘To be contemporary’ no longer only means to exist at the same time or within the same time span, it also designates that something is ‘characteristic’ of that period. To qualify something as ‘contemporary,’ still according to the OED, is to say that it is ‘modern,’ ‘up-to-date’ or even ‘avant-garde.’ This semantic expansion from the more neutral ‘occurring or existing in the same period’ is significant because it is indicative of the changing use of the term in the twentieth century. To be contemporary does not just mean to be modern but to be at the forefront of modernity - the contemporary as the most modern. It is in this sense that, in the middle of the 20th century, the notion first enters into art’s critical discourse. Philosopher Peter Osborne shows that while the term ‘contemporary art’ in post-war period at first designated the ‘most recent’ or the ‘current modern’ and was thus a continuation of modern art, it gained currency towards the end of the century as an “epochal category” acting *against* modern art. (Osborne “Anywhere” 16-17; Osborne “Temporalization” 41) Especially after the “discrediting of postmodernism as a coherent critical concept ... ‘contemporary’ has begun to emerge into the critical daylight from beneath its commonplace function as a label denoting what is current or up to date” (Osborne “Anywhere” 17).

Osborne's notion of contemporaneity is an important source of inspiration for this issue on *Contemporaneities*. He argues that the current relevance of the 'contemporary' (as captured in the rise of the term 'contemporary art') does not lie in its occurrence as an 'epochal category'¹² marking a supposed stylistic autonomy as a period in art history. What makes the contemporary an important discursive category today, is that "the structuring of contemporaneity ... itself [is] changing" because "the idea of contemporaneity as a *condition* is new." (17) What characterizes this new condition of contemporaneity of which art is "a privileged cultural carrier" (27)? Instead of synchronisation, contemporaneity is a complex state of temporal co-presence, or a coming together not simply 'in' time, but *of* times: we do not just live or exist together 'in time' with our contemporaries – as if time itself is indifferent to this existing together – but rather the present is increasingly characterized by a coming together of *different, but equally 'present'* temporalities or 'times', a temporal unity in disjunction, or a *disjunctive unity of present times*. (17)

Contemporaneity is not just the present or the current, but the interplay of different times that converge in the artwork. This interplay involves both a continuous and transformative dialogue with (art) history, and a coming together of the different social and political times produced by the globalized economy. Therefore, contemporaneity also has a 'heterochronic' quality that potentially disrupts the present rather than simply (re)affirms it. This disruption also stems from the way in which, in the experience of an artwork, the past can suddenly insist in becoming actualized, giving art its particular critical purport as a question (rather than an echo of or response) to the present.

The "disjunctive unity of present times" marks how contemporaneity is different from modernity: while the modern projected "a present of permanent transition, forever reaching beyond itself," contemporaneity, Osborne states, "fixes or enfolds such transitoriness within the duration of a conjuncture, or at its most extreme, the stasis of a present moment." (4) In his essay *From Contemporary Dance to Contemporaneous Dance. Choreographic Re-enactment and the Experience of Contemporaneity After (Post-)Modernity*, Timmy De Laet will develop an in-depth reading of Osborne's definition of the contemporary, unfolding his approach in relation to the work of art historian Terry Smith who was one of the first theoreticians to take on the task of conceptualizing 'contemporary art'. In his text, De Laet also investigates how contemporaneity constantly interacts with the legacy of modernity – a phenomenon he recognizes in the practice of

contemporary choreographers' turn to modern dance as source material for choreographic re-enactments.

The notion 'contemporaneity' as a 'coming together of temporalities' for Osborne helps us to define the way in which our current time tries to make sense of itself *historically* (in relation to the project of modernity but also in relation to the deconstruction of that project in postmodernity). It also invites us to consider how contemporary artworks represent our current time through an assemblage of different temporalities. In this issue, we are interested in how performance and the performing arts *does* this by performing contemporaneity as a dialectical practice of producing the now as a temporal co-mingling of times.

Claire Bishop's book *Radical Museology* makes artistic practice as a dialectical endeavour explicit when she introduces a contrast between two approaches of contemporaneity. Bishop starts from a critique of the current state of contemporary art and the institutions hosting it, where 'contemporaneity' is "the new, the cool, the photogenic, the well-designed, the economically successful" (12). The backdrop for this critique is what she elsewhere calls the "event culture" surrounding contemporary art (Bishop, *The Perils*) which mirrors the current functioning of the market economy – what Rebecca Schneider in this issue will call the "neo-liberal affect culture." At the same time, Bishop is unsatisfied by the recent research on 'contemporaneity' that sees 'contemporaneity' as "the condition of taking our current moment as the horizon and destination of our thinking", which is "underpinned by an inability to grasp our moment in its global entirety" (Bishop "Radical" 6). Reminiscent of Osborne she proposes a "non-presentist, multi-temporal contemporaneity" (23) which does not define the art work's contemporaneity by the degree to which it is *in synch* with the contemporary world around it (even if it might be an expression of the inability to capture that world). The dialectical contemporaneity is not about "an affirmation of the zeitgeist" (23). If our time today is marked by multiple temporalities, it is not just up to the artist or the art critic to simply affirm this. Instead, Bishop writes, "we need to ask *why* certain temporalities appear in particular works of art at *specific* historical moments" (23).

From her terminology, the reader will certainly have recognized that Bishop's dialectical contemporaneity is inspired by the work of Walter Benjamin (who was also an important source for Osborne). She links the idea of a dialectical contemporary with Benjamin's notion of the constellation in *The Arcades Project*: a true art of the contemporary creates collages of historical citations, putting

them together like the scavenger would collect and arrange left-overs, with the intention of creating ‘dialectical images’ that would not only challenge existing historical narratives but also interrogate and move the present. Bishop recognizes this practice in the curatorial philosophies of a few museums for contemporary art – the Van Abbemuseum, the Reina Sofia in Madrid and the Metelkova Museum in Ljubljana – where the museum is no longer a monument to archive and exhibit the cultural treasures upon which the current (often nationalistic) identity is founded, nor a popular temple for the global all-encompassing spectacle of the (art) market, but a critical space where curators engage in “a dynamic rereading of history.” Building on Bishop we could state that the dialectical contemporaneity is not just a discursive category, but also implies a method or practice.¹³ Put differently, the dialectical contemporaneity, rather than taking stock of the now, produces the now from a constellation of past and present. It is the contemporary as a *doing*, as an almost theatrical act of bringing past and present together to perform with and against each other.¹⁴

While developed in response to the current state of the museum, the dialectical contemporaneity is useful to critically reflect on the way contemporaneity is produced and practiced in the performing arts. Indeed, one of the important threads running through the contemporary performing arts of the last decade is the exploration of a dialectical multi-temporality through the strategic juxtaposing of historical and present material. This dialectical entanglement of times is a recurring theme running through this special issue: in the “durational now” of Rebecca Schneider; in Timmy De Laet’s “contemporaneous dance”; in Fabián Barba’s exploration of postcolonial perspectives on the temporality underlying contemporary dance; in Daniel Blanga-Gubbay’s unpacking of Giorgio Agamben’s contemporaneity as interval and anachronism; in Milo Rau’s “new realist” theatre or in Thomas Bellinck’s historization of the present from the standpoint of the future.

The Entangled Now of Performance

If art history has made a turn towards the contemporary theatre and performance studies always had a great interest in the performing arts produced in their own time.¹⁵ Given the methodological challenges of studying theatre history – as temporal and temporary art form performance always seems inevitably lost to history – it is perhaps not surprising that theatre and performance studies have a fraught relationship with history (e.g. Franko and Richards) which has also given rise to an approach to performance that elevated ephemerality as its defining

characteristic. Performance theoreticians in recent years have questioned this presentist paradigm of performance that is summed up by Peggy Phelan's dictum that "performance's life is only in the present" (146). While they might be tied to the *hic et nunc*, social and artistic performances, they argue, also have the potential to be carriers of history as they store the past in a repertoire of ritual repetitions (Taylor, Connerton). Performances can become "memory machines" that make past performances present in the memory of actors and spectators (Carlson) and performing bodies can become "archives" of past gestures, dances or choreographies (Lepecki). Rather than "becoming itself through disappearance" (Phelan 146), performance allows for the re-emergence, resurrection and reappearance of things past (Schneider). If performance is 'live,' it can also be 'after-live,' carrier of the 'no longer live,' or 'live on' beyond its short existence in the here and now. By interrogating the highly influential presentist paradigm of performance, these critics also open up the possibility of a notion of performance whose temporality is complex, multi-layered and multi-directional.

Rebecca Schneider's 2003 book *Performing Remains. Art and War in Times of Theatrical Reenactment* has been seminal in the shift towards a reconsideration of performance as no longer "composed in a linear temporality that moves from a past through a present to a future in which it dissolves" (Schneider 33). Inspired by the practice of historical re-enactment, Judith Butler's notion of performativity as "sedimentation" (Butler 15) and Elizabeth Freeman's concept of "temporal drag," she argues that the moment of performance can become "punctuated by, syncopated with, indeed charged by other moments, other times" (92). In historical re-enactments for example, the past re-animates the 'live' of the theatrical representation in the present, while the present re-animates realities thought of as long past or death. These examples of "inter(in)animation" (Schneider 7) show that the performative now is not just the fleeting moment between past and future, but is "sticky" – the past sticks to the present, it "drags" it along with it. Herein also lies a potential political impact: the non-chronological temporality of performance offers a framework for the emergence of disruptive counter-memories. If past political or revolutionary actions "stick" to the present – not locked up in history but enduring somehow, without temporal remove (but not, as Schneider will argue in this issue, without an "interval"), insisting in the present – these past events can start to act and act up again in the present.

"How long is the now?" was the question Schneider asked at the end of *Performing Remains*. In the text in this collection she explores this idea of a "durational now" further and asks:

If the past can be open to our questions, then isn't the past in some ways *with us*, and by being with us, also contemporary? Another way to ask this is, if the contemporary needs must be simultaneously historical, the contemporary needs to be paradoxically shot through with that which it is not. The now must be composed of, or in intimate relationship to, the not now.

The “cross- or multi-temporal engagement” (35) she explored in *Performing Remains* (which was an important inspiration for the development of this collection on *contemporaneities*), returns here in the question of what it means for us that the past remains *at the same time* as the present while retaining a temporal interval. This is particularly striking in the description of her encounter with a Palaeolithic rock painting – the negative hand at the prehistoric site of Pech Merle – that “hails her” and “bursts out of the straight march of linear time.” As material remains of a person touching the rock millennia ago, the rock painting is left to perform again (or still) in her presence. To take into account this “extended touch” or the “durational gesture” of the hail, it is also a ‘chronopolitical endeavour’ for Schneider. First of all because the “durational now” contrasts with the “now” in the “neo-liberal affect economy” where nowness is defined by the phrenic pace of the algorithmic high-frequency trading of the financial markets, the jerky-ness of the Twittersphere or the 24/7-economy where every single moment is an opportunity to produce, profit and perform.¹⁶ The “hail” or the “touch” also confronts us with “difference” and “response-ability”: while the hand is recognizable as a hand, it is not a token of the sameness between our hands and the hands of our Palaeolithic ancestors. Schneider’s text is a critique of both the neo-liberalism affect machine, and of approaches to history that collapse historical difference. To think the now differently, to engage with time differently, means to think the interval.

If contemporaneity for Osborne, Bishop and Schneider implies a critique of the temporality of modernity, it does not bar contemporary artistic practices from revisiting their modern, modernist and avant-garde predecessors. The ‘battle of the prefixes’ that emerged in the wake of the demise of postmodernity – is the contemporary still post- or rather postpost-, late-, anti-, neo-, hyper- or meta-modern? – has its merits as it proposes heuristic tools to understand the way in which the first decades of the 21st century can be situated historically in relation to preceding eras.¹⁷ Most of all, this debate is indicative of how the contemporary is still grappling with the legacy of modernity. This is a key element in the text of Timmy De Laet. In his text, De Laet explores “the tendency amongst contemporary

choreographers to revisit dance works from the past as an impetus to reflect on what this retrospective interest might mean for the contemporaneity of dance.” He is particularly interested in those choreographic works that use re-enactment “to the tradition of modern dance and, by the same token, to the historical epoch we have come to call ‘modernity.’” These examples of choreographic re-enactment, De Laet suggest, re-investigate dance’s own history and, in particular the legacy of the idiom and ideology of modern dance. Following De Laet’s text, contemporary choreographic re-enactment seems to explore different ways of ‘moving back’: it ‘moves back’ to a critical reconsideration of modern dance’s appraisal of uninterrupted flow and movement, and of the underlying beliefs in time as linear progress. But these choreographers, through re-enactment, also ‘move back’: they are back to moving, in contrast to the more static investigative modes of certain strands of conceptual contemporary dance. Most importantly, choreographic re-enactment ‘moves back’ in the sense that it assumes a critical distance. While moving again the image of the past, it also engages in taking a step back and considering this modern legacy of movement. In that sense, it combines movement with what Lepecki called the “still-act” of a bracketing movement.

Theatrical Time Beyond the Topical

How do theatre makers respond to the world they are contemporary with? How do they transfer onto the spectator this sense of capturing and reflecting what is current? Even a quick glance at the programs of major theatre venues reveals that choreographers, theatre makers and performance artists, regardless of genre, create work with the intention to seize time today and reflect on the current state of the world.¹⁸ Even when more traditional theatre companies revisit the theatre canon and stage texts of decades, if not centuries ago, they often do so to show how the works of Shakespeare, Racine or Beckett, despite the historical distance between the performance in the present and the moment the text was written, through analogy or adaptation, can still shed light on the world today. Theatre aspires to be topical. ‘Actualiteitswaarde’ (cf. the German ‘Aktualitätswert’), one of the possible translations to Dutch for the English word ‘topicality,’ adequately describes the idea that works receive value from a connection to the ‘actual’: the relevance of the work stems from the perspective it gives on current events. But topicality can be problematic. When topicality is the criterion for artistic production, theatre is tied to the ever-accelerating speed of societal change. It reproduces the pace and rhythm of the news media: rather than opening up a

space for reflection, the topical artwork is paradoxically caught in a spiral of becoming obsolete as quickly as it had become relevant.

Beyond topicality lies another way of making theatre contemporary that rather than closing the gap between theatre and current times, starts from the interval. This was also the point of departure for Giorgio Agamben in his seminal text *What Is the Contemporary?* presented by Daniel Blanga-Gubbay in this issue. He writes that Agamben “seems to withdraw from reproducing actuality in the way topical documentary forms might be grasping the present day. Instead of pursuing actuality in this sense, his use of the contemporary invites us to explore through fiction the possible disjunctions and anachronisms, which are able to make appear the complexity of the present beyond its image.” Under the heading “Portfolio” two theatre makers who are associated with documentary theatre but are also very critical of both the term and the practice discuss how their work creates gaps and intervals with the present.

In *A Future History of the Present* the Belgian artist Thomas Bellinck, together with his dramaturge Sébastien Hendrickx, shows how he couples the urge to make theatre that questions the world we live in with a search for performative strategies that take temporal sideways glances on that world. The way in which he twists traditional documentary formats (verbatim theatre, the museum, oral history) into crafty entanglements of past, present and future, of fiction and reality, merits further extensive attention in this introduction. His 2013 ‘theatrical installation’ entitled *Domo de Europa Historia en Exzilo* (which is Esperanto for “House of the History of Europe in Exile”), which he talked about in his artist’s presentation, exemplifies this approach. For *Domo*, the spectator is invited to enter a museum installed in an abandoned three-story school building in Brussels, a stone’s throw away from the European Quarter where different institutions of the European Union are located. At its entrance, the spectator is informed that the museum is built by the “Friends of a Re-United Europe” in the second half of the 21st century. In this museum time takes a leap to 2063. From the brochure handed out by the slightly greyish and sickly looking custodian in the ticket booth, the spectator learns that the “Friends of a Re-United Europe” have built this museum to shed light on the particular but often overlooked history of the European Union, from its inception until its demise, half a century ago, in 2018. Of this period known as the “Long Peace” or the “Second Interbellum” the museum will focus on the crucial final years, when the ‘Great Recession’ in the wake of the 2008 financial crisis would provoke the project’s eventual downfall. What remains *now* (read: in 2063) is “but a memory of an

intriguing experiment” that is memorialized by this museum. The spectator follows the museum’s trajectory leading through slightly dilapidated rooms with display cases, diorama’s and charts that sketch out a narrative that starts with the European dream to overcome the devastation of nationalism through economic, social and cultural collaboration. It ends when, “in uncertain times” brought forth by the Great Recession, “the evils of the past proved much more contagious than the dream of a united Europe.”

The financial crisis, the neo-liberal economic policy of austerity, the rise of Fort Europa, the rise of right-wing nationalism and euro-scepticism, which produced a “full-blown crisis of trust” are not present as current but as the evils of the past through the speculum of speculative fiction. Bellinck’s theatrical installation doesn’t simply use the device of speculative fiction to hypothesize about the potential real outcomes of the contemporary crisis of the European Union. Instead, the work offers a view on the contemporary by experimenting with temporality. His appropriation of the performative apparatus of the modern museum is key. As Tony Bennett has argued in *The Birth of the Museum*, 19th century museums functioned as “narrative machineries” (Bennett 178) that compress different events of the past into an evolutionary narrative of progress. When museum visitors follow the directional path plotted out by the curator through the spaces of the museum, they both embody and observe this evolution as a coherent and knowable whole: “the museum, rather than annihilating time, compresses it so as to make it both visible and performable” (Bennett 186). Not unlike the concurrently emerging discipline of history, the 19th century museum constructs historical narratives that explain how the present came to be what it is. By appropriating the museum, Bellinck plays the historicists’s game of imagining the past as a historical narrative with a clear beginning and ending. However, the museum’s past is the spectator’s recent past, present and (potential) near future. Put differently, Bellinck’s museum ‘periodizes’ the present by inviting the spectators to think of their own time as a finite historical period.

This strategy of creating a ‘science-fiction history’ reminds us of Frederic Jameson’s reflection on the temporality of science-fiction literature. Rather than offering realist images of the future, Jameson argues in *Archaeologies of the Future*, that the “mock futures” of science fiction “transform our own present into the determinate past of something yet to come” (288). Transporting the reader of science-fiction literature to the present’s posthumous future defamiliarizes the reader’s experience of the present. This “cognitive estrangement” (Jameson xiv)¹⁹ produced by the fictitious leap into the future makes it possible to contemplate

the present anew, alienating the fixed power structures and recognizing the unattested fears, desires and phantasies about a future that is fundamentally uncertain and unimaginable (Jameson 287-289). Likewise, Bellinck invites the spectator to become what he calls in this issue a “mind on legs” and to look at the present “decontextualized” by the standpoint of the future. Nevertheless, unlike Jameson, Bellinck does not recognize a potential utopian impulse in the science-fiction set-up. Perhaps because she is a spectator rather than a reader, physically walking along the old-fashioned dioramas and display cases, makes it so that the spectator is constantly slipping back and forth between what he terms the “historized present” and the “presentified future.” If the 19th century museum allows us to look back at an ordered past to understand the present and science-fiction allows us to look at the present as a historic episode open to the future, Bellinck’s museum is constantly oscillating between looking backwards and forwards. What we see there is not only our current past (i.e. the history of the EU up until, in this case, 2013) but also our own present and potential near future (the demise of the EU) that follows it as a historic past. The melancholic reminiscing to the initial anti-nationalistic dreams of the EU are undercut by the prospect of the coming war that is projected by ominous temporal markers like “the second interbellum” – and vice versa. The spectator’s journey through Bellinck’s museum is marked by an estrangement of time. We are in the present, aware that the museum is a fictional set-up, when at the same time we are transported to the future to look back into the past. But the temporal entanglement does not stop there. In the future historiography of the museum’s present, our current time is confronted with what could have become but never was. It might seem like a temporal blur where past, present and future intermingle without friction, but this is not the case. It feels more like a temporal ricochet, where you are invited to think the present together with its virtual others.

The Swiss theatre maker Milo Rau takes another approach in his work, which he presents in the *New Realism and the Contemporary World. The Re-enactments and Tribunals of the International Institute of Political Murder*. From the re-enactment of the trial against Nicolae and Elena Ceausescu (2009) to his ongoing ‘Europa Trilogy’ (*The Civil Wars* (2014), *The Dark Ages* (2015)) as well as the recent *Compassion. The History of the Machine Gun* (2016), the work of the sociologist turned theatre maker again and again questions our relationship to Europe’s recent past. Even if contested (and often traumatic) histories are evoked, the work of his ‘International Institute of Political Murder’ (IIPM), which was founded in 2007 to allow for a cross-fertilization between artistic work and

academic research, always aims to speak to and from the present by re-doing, re-creating and re-litigating the realities of the past. To do this, he appropriates existing formats that, while coming from outside of the theatre, are inherently theatrical. In this issue, Rau discusses two recurrent dramaturgical devices the IIPM uses in its 'new realist' theatre and film: historical re-enactment and the appropriation of the format of the tribunal (reminiscent of activist uses of the trial, for example in the Russell Tribunals). What happens when the IIPM makes history and the instrument of historiography (the historical document, the witness account, the archive, the historical image, the trial) *perform* in the present? What questions does this 'new realist' theatre provoke? How is our contemporary world marked by processes of cultural remembrance and historical oblivion? The mission of art, Rau explains in his contribution, quoting from the manifesto of the IIPM *Wass ist Unst?*, is to create a literal representation of the present, through the past, for the future. This roundabout way of addressing the present again creates a critical space that defamiliarizes the present from itself while at the same time, in the gesture of re-doing history and re-litigating historical and political injustices of the recent past, capturing what makes that present contemporary. Like others in this collection of texts, Rau's contemporaneity, as he stresses himself, tries to step beyond postmodernist irony. He values 'truth' and 'authenticity.' However, the reconstruction of the past as it really happened is not the end goals of his re-enactments. Instead, he wants to demonstrate, through theatre, that the past in a way keeps on happening. Facts are not just locked up in the past, they remain, and theatre allows them to become present again in the moment of representation.

Both Bellinck and Rau use theatre or theatrical installations to forge a gap between the theatrical present and the contemporary present outside of the theatre. The temporal deviations, the jumps from one time to another and the multiple times coming together in the 'now' of the performance not only embody a state of the contemporary world as a "temporal unity in disjunction" (Osborne 17). If their theatrical present – the present of performance – is shot through with different times, it also produces a sense that the fate of the art work to be contemporary today lies in the movement of constantly gesturing towards but never fully grasping a world in constant movement. This reminds us of the title of a recent collection of essays on contemporary theatre edited by Florian Malzacher: *Not Just a Mirror. Looking for The Political Theatre of Today*. The subtitle "Looking for" is key here: instead of "The political theatre of today," the politically engaged theatre works discussed in the book are characterized by a continuous search to develop ways of looking at the world politically, to test out

artistic strategies that give theatre its political relevance. The contemporary here has an aspirational quality: theatre becomes contemporary when it becomes a space for invention, exploration, experimentation and research of what the now could (but also should not) become.

The Other('s) Times

From the above, it should be clear that 'contemporary art,' be it dance, visual arts or theatre, is not simply the art produced contemporaneously or at the current moment. While classical ballet is still being produced today and countless hobbyist create paintings in styles that were once recognized as avant-garde, these works are not considered under the rubric of 'contemporary dance' or 'contemporary art.' To attribute to a work of art the adjective 'contemporary' inscribes the work in a broader discourse about what is or is not relevant today within the fields of 'contemporary art,' 'contemporary theatre' or 'contemporary dance.' What is not contemporary, is dismissed as out-of-date, old fashioned, characteristic of another idiom or style, posing questions that might once have been ground-breaking but are so no longer. In *Moving Together*, cultural sociologist Rudi Laermans argues that with regards to contemporary dance, contemporaneity implies the "imperative structuring of the medium dance" based on "*the contingent distinction between the dance-able and the non-danceable, legitimate and illegitimate movements*" (Laermans 57). In that regard, contemporary dance is not different from other historical 'dance cultures' like the baroque court ballets, classical ballet or different trends in modern dance. What these 'dance cultures' do is codifying dance's potential movement material, while at the same time enacting and legitimizing the body ideals that exist in the culture as a whole. Different times and cultures produce different body images and different definitions of what dance is. In (re)affirming certain movements as 'contemporary,' dance cultures inevitably also devalue and repress other movement material. As a dance culture, contemporary dance is in no way different from earlier (or, as we will investigate in a moment, concurrent) dance cultures.

Put differently, we can argue that, rather than a simple descriptive category, the contemporary is thus also a performative category that rehearses "prior delimitations" (Butler 11) about legitimate and illegitimate artistic practices. The contemporary regulates the field. Not only are works framed in relation to the existing preconceptions about what is or is not 'contemporary,' these preconceptions are also embodied in practice. Artists rehearse them because they

are instilled through art education, through the desire to be recognized as belonging to the contemporary art field or through the art market that values what is 'contemporary.' In this performativity also lies dance's political potential, because in each creative process, each dance performance and each collaboration, these prior delimitations can potentially be renegotiated. Laermans argues as much when he states that the relative contingency of the canon of contemporary dance²⁰ also means that dance can explore its "depreciated Other" and unlock the potential of "a realm of aesthetic possibilities" that had to "remain inactivated," "non-actualized" or "virtual" (58). The contemporary danceable holds the promise of the non-danceable becoming contemporary (59-60). Even though not anything is possible in contemporary dance, with each new dance performance the possibility opens up to reconfigure dance's contemporaneity.²¹

In *The Local Prejudice of Contemporary Dance* Fabián Barba explores how contemporary dance not only involves temporal delimitation – What is contemporary or old-fashioned? Contemporary or modern? – but also 'geo-cultural' delimitations. He argues that the contemporary also involves a topography of time, if not always literally, then often in the mental infrastructures and disciplinary mechanisms that support the critical instruments used to delineate what is contemporary and what is not. Barba's account refers back to a profound post-colonialist critique on the modern concept of historicity that, according to him, still underpins the way in which the contemporaneity of contemporary dance can be conceived.

His argument reminds us of Peter Osborne's astute remark that "to be chronologically simultaneous" isn't the same as "contemporaneous." This "differential temporality" is, according to Osborne, one of the crucial characteristics of the modern project of colonialism. ("Politics" 16) "The *non-contemporaneousness of geographically diverse but chronologically simultaneous times*" urges the geographical other to catch up, to enter universal (read: Western) history, to become the West's contemporary. (16) Barba carefully but convincingly explores how contemporary dance today might still be tied up in this colonial logic. This is an important and provocative statement because it questions one of the most influential definition of the contemporary by Terry Smith as an embodiment of "the global contemporary."²² According to Smith, the shift from modern art to contemporary art – a shift that started in the 1980s – brought about a geographical decentralization of the art world when Europe and the United States lost gradually their status as sole cultural centres of the art production and critique. Today, "diversity marks every aspect of the production

and distribution of art,” (Smith “Contemporary” 8) with which Smith not only refers to the thematic, stylistic, methodological and material diversity of works of art, but also to the art world’s greater geographical spread. “Contemporary art,” he states, “is – perhaps for the first time in history – truly an art *of* the world” (8). Not surprisingly, apart from economic globalization and transnationalism, the postcolonial turn contributes to the fundamentally “multiple,” “internally differentiating,” “category-shifting” and “shape-changing” (9) nature of contemporary art.

While he recognizes that major institutions, curators and cultural centres still play an important role as gatekeepers, Smith does acknowledge that the ‘contemporaneity’ of contemporary arts is fundamentally defined by the culturally diverse and geographically dispersed artists. The geographic diversity and spatial multipolarity Smith discerns in the contemporary visual arts seems less obvious in the contemporary performing arts where centre and margin still remain much more defined. Further in this issue, Milo Rau notes that globalization in the theatre often comes down to exporting the work of European directors to other regions of the world – literally, through the network of festivals, but also symbolically, through the discursive apparatus of theatre critique and theatre studies. This movement, he says, is essentially still colonialist. Similarly, Barba states that the internationalism of contemporary dance is not because dance is global but because dance has “become global over time, originating in one place (Europe and the United States) and then spreading outside it.” Nobody will question the global reach of contemporary dance and the diverse cultural backgrounds of the dancers and choreographers that constitute the field, but, as Fabián Barba investigates in this issue, ‘contemporary dance’ has a distinctive performativity that continues to inscribe it within its original Western genealogy. He writes: “To ask about the Western genealogy of contemporary dance and its globalization is to ask about the political economy of this artistic practice, the institutions that support it and the epistemological constructions that build its ground.” His primary focus is on the “philosophical assumptions forged within Western cultural horizon,” “a distinctly western/modern temporality (unidirectional and progressive linearity; sharp distinction between past, present and future.” Contemporary dance, he argues, risks to remain mono-cultural if it doesn’t “open up and take into account different cultural horizons and heritages.” This also begs the question if the political potential of the disciplinary performativity of contemporary dance described above, is enough of a solution to allow the “depreciated Other” (here: dance cultures that are ‘contemporaneous’ to contemporary dance but do not belong to

the same geo-cultural sphere) to emerge and redefine the contemporaneity of dance. How can we think the *contemporary differently* to include *the time of the others*? To think the other within the temporal category of the contemporary, do we not only need to think time differently and allow it to be entangled with other geo-cultural times? To think the now as entangled often also means to think time politically.

Acknowledgements

The texts presented in this special issue are based on the lectures presented during the symposium *Contemporaneities* in March 2016, organised by Ghent University – S:PAM (Studies in Performing Arts & Media) in collaboration with Vooruit and Campo. It is important to note that both the ensemble of texts and the individual contributions in various ways bear the traces of that symposium. Perhaps the most obvious marking indicative of that day is that, while thoroughly reviewed and in some cases significantly reworked, the contributions still retain some of the characteristics of a lecture presented for a live audience on that specific day. Rather than discard them, the distinctive formats of the live presentations (an academic lecture, a theorized account of an artistic trajectory, a performance lecture as introduction to the work of Giorgio Agamben, a prepared interview, an artist talk around specific artistic strategies) were adapted for the journal in such a way that they would suit readers. This also has an impact on the length of the texts. As one of the major concerns of the symposium was how to deal with time, contributors were given the option to decide in advance for themselves how much time they would need to lay out their argument about contemporaneity. Sticking to time, in a way, meant sticking to one's own time. Lengthwise, contributions therefore still differ. For the written version of their presentations, authors have taken the opportunity to elaborate aspects of their presentation that were not yet developed or only touched upon in the presence of the audience. Ideas that were in the air but had not yet solidified have now often found their way to the page (while others inevitably have not). The texts are therefore not only marked by that one event in March, but also record what has happened in the meantime, in between the live performance of a text at the symposium and the text as performance in this special issue. I'm well aware that this last remark might sound obvious and even a bit contrived. However, the deliberate decision to retain something of the live gathering of a symposium is the result of the genuine hope that the texts presented in this special issue of *Documenta* might again (or still?) talk to each other, to and through the reader. As an *assemblage* of texts of different formats and lengths, their significance

hopefully lies beyond the page in the contemporary moment of current and future acts of reading.

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¹ Terry Smith describes the "contemporizing" of Tate Modern extensively in his book *What is Contemporary Art?* (56-67)

² Despite scepticism that “the very idea of contemporary art history would seem to be an oxymoron,” (Kester in Foster et al. 7) art history departments develop course programs, appoint professors specialized in the subject and foster research on living artists and current curatorial practices (Richard Meyer in Foster et al. 18).

³ A turn towards the contemporary can be witnessed across the humanities: scholarship focuses no longer exclusively on the interpretation and transmission of the artistic high points of the past, but increasingly takes to studying literature, music, architecture or theatre of today as its subject. On this shift in literature, see Wegner. In history departments, “contemporary history” (generally understood as history post-1945) not only has acquired a steadfast position since the end of the 1970s, historians today also study the “present past” (Andreas Huyssen). The reverberations of the past in the present – the past in its most contemporary guise, if you will – is reflected in a general interest in cultural memory, heritage, transitional justice and the quintessential role of witness accounts and testimonials in history (e.g. Rousso; Hartog; Huyssen). Paul Rabinow has called for an “antropology of the contemporary.” Giorgio Agamben and Peter Osborne have put the contemporary on the agenda of philosophy and aesthetics. See also the work of the research group on the Contemporary at Stanford (<https://thecontemporary.stanford.edu>) and the conferences “What is the Contemporary” (University of St. Andrews, 2014), “The Contemporary: Culture in the 21th Century” (Princeton University, 2016) or “The Contemporary Contemporary” (Aarhus University, 2017).

⁴ Similar arguments are being made by Claire Bishop, Peter Osborne and Terry Smith: see later in this introduction and in this issue.

⁵ See for example the 2016 German Dance Congress in Hannover with the theme “Zeitgenoss*in sein (Being Contemporary)” (June 2016) and the “Dance Future II. Claiming Contemporaneity” (January 2017, Hamburg).

⁶ On the “performative turn” in the museum of contemporary art, see von Hantelmann. Tate Gallery has been especially active when it comes to collecting live art, which has led to several research projects (Calonje), and the presentation of the work of choreographers in the museum (Bishop “Perils”). See also the special issue of *Dance Research Journal* edited by Mark Franko and Andre Lepecki on “Dance in the Museum” (46.3, 2014).

⁷ This argument was first made extensively by Reinhart Koselleck and further developed by François Hartog who sketches the shift from the pre- and early modern regime of historicity of the *historia magistra vitae* to the futurist temporal regime of modernity. See also Frank Ankersmit's study on the 'sublime historical experience' and Lowenthal's *The Past is a Foreign Country*.

⁸ According to Rousso, the increasing professionalization of the discipline, the demand for strict positivism and an almost technical focus on methodology from the 1870s on led to the dismissal of history as the study of (and informed by) the present and the recent past. According to the historians at the end of the 19th century, focussing on the distant past avoided that politically contentious ideological debates would infuse historiography or open up traumatic wounds. Anti-historicist philosophers like Walter Benjamin would of course take issue with the supposed neutrality of historiography. The return to contemporary history today, according to Rousso, is therefore a return to the foundations of the discipline of history in the 19th century. (Rousso 69-86.)

⁹ On this "periodic contemporaneity" see the recent lecture by Berman.

¹⁰ "Time," Koselleck famously wrote, "is no longer the medium in which all histories take place; it gains a historical quality ... history no longer occurs in, but through, time. Time becomes a dynamic and historical force in its own right." (236)

¹¹ According to Peter Osborne, the logic of totalization of temporal notions (like progress, crisis and revolution) is an inherent attribute of modernity (Osborne "Politics").

¹² As an epochal category, the term 'contemporary art' quickly runs into the same problems as other periodizing terms because when does the era of 'contemporary art' begin?

¹³ This is reminiscent of the work of Walter Benjamin, who, as I have argued elsewhere, advocates for a "performative historiography" (Le Roy, 229ff).

¹⁴ It is probably no coincidence that several art critics stress the importance in contemporary art of moving beyond the individual artwork to focus on formats that emphasize (and foreground) the interaction with spectators and between different works, media or disciplines - characteristic that are inherently linked with theatre and performance. Groys for example claims that “the installation is the leading art form of contemporary art” because it “demonstrates a certain selection, a certain chain of choices, and a certain logic of inclusions and exclusions. By doing so, an installation manifests here and now certain decisions about what is old and what is new, what is an original and what is a copy.” (76) Similarly, von Hantelmann proposes that the “exhibition” is the format par excellence of contemporary art. (von Hantelmann)

¹⁵ Arguably, the intertwining of the academic theatre studies as academic discipline with synchronous theatre practice, has had a profound influence on the development of the discipline. Erika Fischer-Lichte has argued that Max Herrmann developed the foundations of modern theatre study in dialogue with the artistic practice of Max Reinhardt (32-33). The emergence of performance studies was linked to the historic emergence of performance art and the work of the theatre avant-garde working in the US and Europe in the 1960s and 1970s. Richard Schechner considered performance studies as a theoretical avant-garde (360). Likewise, the impact of post-structuralism in theatre studies would likely have been impossible without the concurrent shift from representation to presentation in the theatre practice (an evolution dubbed “post-dramatic” Hans-Thies Lehmann). Perhaps this is one of the reasons why, in performing arts, the reflection on the contemporary has only just begun: as an art form, the performing arts have constantly been dealing with contemporaneity.

¹⁶ I use perform here in the sense of performance as efficiency, as discussed by McKenzie.

¹⁷ Rebecca Boym’s deliberately ambiguous term “off-modern,” which recalls associations with “off the beaten track,” “off the map,” or “off the wall,” might perhaps be the most interesting contribution to this “battle of the prefixes”. An off-modern approach traces “eccentric modernities that are out of synch and out of phase with each other temporally and spatially.” A similar call for a persistent engagement with the ruins of modernity (“social utopia, historical progress, and material plenty for all”) to take on the “historical task of surprising rather than explaining the present” (69) is a central idea in Susan Buck-Morss’ *Dreamworld and Catastrophe*.

¹⁸ A few examples: *Empire* (Superamas), *Our Times* (Michiel Vande Velde), *The Internet* (Marten Spangberg), *The Dark Ages* (Milo Rau/IIPM), *The Middle Ages* (Andros Zins-Browne), *Etrangler le temps* (Boris Charmatz).

¹⁹ Jameson borrows the term “cognitive estrangement” from critic Darko Suvin who in turn was inspired by the aesthetics of estrangement of the Russian formalists and the Brechtian *Verfremdungseffekt* (Jameson xiv).

²⁰ That canonization exists in contemporary dance doesn’t mean that this field is uniform. Far from it: contemporary dance, as Laermans also underlines, is a metaphorical ‘big tent’ that includes varied styles and approaches to what dance can be. However, diverse as it may be, the point of this section is that disciplinary processes do take place.

²¹ Similar arguments about the codification and concurrent repression of movement can be made about “theatre cultures” or “visual arts cultures,” both historical and contemporary, where the visual, auditory or other sensorial material, as well as the images and ideas embodied by this sensorial material, are marked by a similar process.

²² I borrow this term from the title of the exhibition “The Global Contemporary. Art Worlds After 1989” (ZKM, the Museum of Contemporary Art in Karlsruhe from September 2011 to May 2012). Okwui Enwezor’s *Documenta 11* is often cited as a seminal moment in putting this reflection on the Global Contemporary on the agenda. For a critical discussion of this ‘strand’ of contemporary art, see Smith “What” 689ff.

Time on Our Hands

Rebecca Schneider

Note: This essay was originally delivered as a lecture at a conference on 'Contemporaneities' in Ghent, Belgium, in March of 2016. In editing the talk for publication, I have retained many of the formal properties of an oral presentation. If the contemporaneity of the oral event appears removed in this instance, the question at the base of the lecture remains: How long is "now" and what is at stake in extending a hand across time? As such, the talk – composed of a lead-in and two stories – may be considered ongoing, much like a hail in an event of call and response. The interval in call and response that this talk both responds to and again inaugurates should be open, full of hesitation, and without conclusion – much as this essay is written to be.

“We have time on our hands.”

This is an idiomatic phrase. According to the *Cambridge English Dictionary* the phrase means we have “nothing to do.” We are idle, vacant, without occupation, unemployed. Having time on one’s hands can be dangerous. To have “too much time on one’s hands” is to be vagrant, up to no good, wastrel, vagabond, even delusional, and inclined toward mischief or trouble. Time on one’s hands is time in a now that is unaccounted for: We have time on our hands, so what shall we do? Time on one’s hands is both called forth and not yet spoken for. In some ways, time on one’s hands is time that is both now and yet to come. It is open time, outside of time.¹

I am intrigued by the idea of time on hand. Why do we not say *in* hand or *at* hand? Taken literally, *on* hand sounds like skin. On hand suggests a substance that touches or covers, like a glove or something filmy, like soap, or paint – or like a rash or someone else’s blood (as in the idiomatic phrase for guilt: having blood on one’s hands). In this way, time on your hands is *on* you but not *of* you, much as when you touch something it is both on you but not of you. When you have time on your hands, you touch time and are touched by time and thus, in some ways, following Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s thoughts on touch and the interval of betweenness, you might be said to be “beside” time, or have time set aside (8). Time on hand, or time at the touch, might thus suggest what Karen Barad claims for touch more generally: “intra-action.” In this way, now following Barad, touching time becomes a matter of call, response, and “response-ability.”

To have something on hand is also to be at the ready for response or call. It suggests an appendage, like a tool or something spare, not yet needed but there in case of a need anticipated as possible. There are an infinite number of slightly different ways to spin this: Time on hand is spare time. Extra time. Time set aside, to the side, beside. Open for possibility as response-ability. Time on one's hands, both now and not now, is pastpresentfuture time, spoken for in the moment but not accounted for. Like a pause, an interval, it might hover or reverberate – much as an open space between call and response. You get it: We could go on and on in variation stretching this time forward and back and to the side – if we had endless time on our hands.

But here today we are responding to a specific call. The word at the base of our collective inquiry is “contemporaneity,” a word often associated with the “now” of the so-called present time and distinguished by that “now” from all periodization considered, by virtue of distinction with the contemporary, to be “past.” But in fact, one critique of the current neoliberal affect economy, sometimes called the experience economy or the digital economy, is that its trade in nanosecond, twitter-frenzied “nowness” robs us of substantive attention to any past at all, that is, to a time in intervallic distinction to the now. Robs us, that is, of historical critique. Media theorist Michael Betancourt imagines a “Contemporary” that can be distinguished from both newness and nowness:

The Contemporary necessitates historical engagement precisely because the ahistorical nowness of digital capitalism acts to deny continuities between earlier capitalist organization of labor and production and those specific to digital technologies. (17)

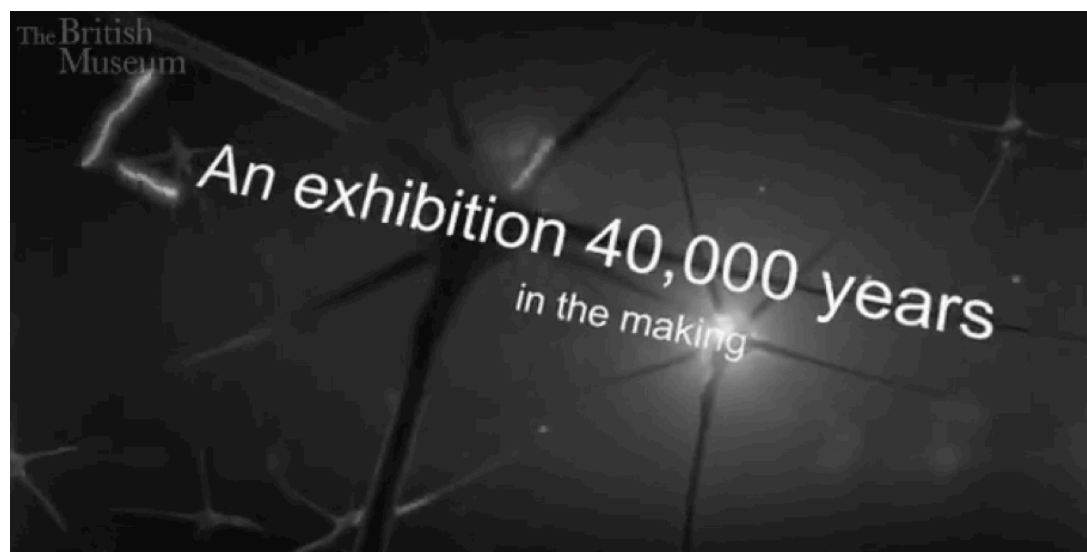
In order to critique capitalism, Betancourt is arguing as many historical materialists before him that one requires historicity, or, as Luce Irigaray might write, an *interval* for “freedom of questioning,” *holding out* possibilities not only for difference and indeterminacy but for change (Irigaray 152).

If we are to insist on historicities that can account for difference and continuity across historical time – that is, if we are to keep intervals open for “freedom of questioning” across time – how are we to parse the duration of the contemporary? If the past can be open to our questions, then isn't the past in some ways *with us*, and by being with us, also contemporary? Another way to ask this is, if the contemporary needs must be simultaneously historical, the contemporary needs to be paradoxically shot through with that which it is not.

The now must be composed of, or in intimate relationship to, the not now. Indeed, perhaps the contemporary is the place where the past *touches* us, or where we find it on our hands. The contemporary might be the place where we say: we have time on our hands, what do we do with it? What do we do, for example, with the past that touches us here?

This is to ask, what is the duration of the “now” that contemporaneity might purport to include in conversation? Think only of recent debates about how long our “now” is as regards recent work in eco-criticism, geontology, and new materialism. As debates in earth sciences instruct, depending on your orientation to climate change, contemporaneity might include a “now” that is the Holocene. Or, if you think that the moment of the Holocene has concluded, then we are “now” in the contemporary of the Anthropocene. Thus, the contemporary may be either A. 11,700 years in duration and ongoing or B. several hundred years in duration and ongoing (though scientists currently debate the beginnings of the Anthropocene). The problem of legislating the duration of the now, whether in science or in art, clearly haunts any notion of the contemporary. A 2013 exhibition at the British Museum titled “Ice Age Art: Arrival of the Modern Mind” presented Paleolithic artwork as contemporary, for example. This might be an exciting thought, of course, and not unrelated to the second story I will tell later in this essay. But the exhibition completely dissolved any space for historical difference between a then and a now in extending the contemporary to the prehistoric and back. In this exhibition, extension did not cross time to allow one contemporaneity to touch or stand beside another, but dissolved time into a reverie of newness and nowness that appropriated everything to human cognition as if awash in a giant selfie machine. All time collapsed as reducible to the “arrival of the modern mind” and Paleolithic art was biologized as the result of molecular evolution and the sparking synapses of the “modern” human brain (Higgins).² In this model, indebted to cognitive science, the contemporary extends, indeed, but it problematically also collapses and becomes ahistorical as the vitalist chasing of a synaptic nanosecond.

If trouble arises at the scene of any attempt to definitively legislate the duration of “now,” so too does trouble arise in conferring direction. Whither contemporary? Where are we going “now”? If “now” can extend to turn a nanosecond into an eon, and an eon into a nanosecond, in what *directions* can “now” extend? Not only backward or forward but ... pause ... to the side? Here the problem of the contemporary gains in complexity. Does the contemporary move only forward from the past into the future? Or, if our course in the Anthropocene is as deadly



Screenshots from the promotional video for the British Museum Exhibition “Ice Age Art: Arrival of the Modern Mind.” The image shows a prehistoric tiger figure running through an image of a sparking synapse in a human brain. Later images in the video overlap prehistoric art with modernist art to claim contemporaneity.

Watch https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n2l_3bqAAME

as science claims, might we turn “progress” around and return to, say, the upper Paleolithic? Not as if time had collapsed, as in the British Museum model, but as time were full of intervallic hesitations, rich with difference and traversable in alternative directions? If direction is changeable, might we take some time to interrupt the forward march of time and move, if we can imagine it, to the side? This has sometimes been called a queering or swerving of history and, as I have explored elsewhere, our troubles with the nowness of now begin with a “now” that bursts out of the straight march of linear time (Schneider *Performing Remains*; Freeman). And maybe that is the promise in a moniker such as “contemporary.” If contemporaneities are expandable or contractible by virtue of a “now” that is flexible, indeterminate, and multi-directional, perhaps possibilities for change can be *on hand*?

Let us return to the idea of “time on one’s hands” in relation to the definition of the idiom as referring to “idle” time, and therefore suggestive of a potentially threatening vagrancy. To have time on one’s hands is actually to have time on one’s *own* hands, when off the clock of labor for the capitalist, say, or otherwise not employed in gainful occupation for profit. When one’s time is one’s own – when one’s hands have not been exchanged as one’s labor time in the framework of industrial capitalism – the historical implication of threat that resides in idleness becomes clear (Weber 104). The threat of idle hands to productivity is a threat to the supremacy of the capital relation that depended, in industrial capitalism, upon time spent only in the interests of capital, whether productive or reproductive of the capital relation (and “leisure” here, as “earned” time to replenish, is reproductive of the capital relation and often, in relation “women’s work,” not leisure at all) (Weeks; Federici).³ Idleness, or too much time on one’s hands, is commonly “wasting or stealing” time that is not “earned” (Khera 41).⁴ In this way idleness would be “stealing time” either directly from the capitalist or from an obligation to reproduce the capital relation. In fact, those who are idle speak of their (non)activities as murderous. They are, speaking in another idiom, “killing time.”

Speaking of killing time, in Marxian terms concerning commodity capitalism, time off the clock for the capitalist is “dead labor.” A laborer not at work is dead labor until he (and the worker is gendered male) returns to work again as living labor. The cycle of capitalist accumulation is threatened if the “interval” between dead labor and living labor becomes too great. That is, if dead labor refuses to go back to work, the interval of idleness could provoke what Marx termed a “crisis” for capital.⁵ It is interesting to ask about this interval these days, as industrial

capitalism has given way in many parts of the world to the experience economy, sometimes called the digital economy or the affect economy. In the digital economy's phantasmagoria of productive activity 24/7 live at the "affect factory," one could argue that the dead labor/living labor rhythm is no longer contemporary.⁶ As already discussed, in the current neoliberal "experience economy" where there is only "now" 24/7, *nowness* appears to extend without recourse to pause let alone to historicity, hoping to vastly minimize the interval available for the crisis Marx identified as both necessary to capitalism and, if the pause is extended too long, its potential Achilles heel. Where those with screens can be plugged into constant interweb connectivity, sirens sing of liveness continually and, without extended pause, consumers are at the fingers of capital every waking and sleeping hour as our information avatars circulate for us. Liveness now streams constantly, and we are at work for capital even while we sleep (which, Jonathan Crary argues, we do not). With social media, if idleness and procrastination have become productive, and possibly even constructive of a new orientation to modes of reproduction of the capital relation, do we have any time on our *own* hands at all?

In exploration of this question, I will now tell two stories about time, hands, and intervals. One story appears to lack all intervals and the other is full of hesitation. Through these stories I will suggest that thinking about differing contemporaneities *as composed of intervals* for response-ability and intra-action may be one way to approach the question of time as open for engagement, heterogeneity, debate, and indeterminacy – however nonproductive that may promise to be.

The First Story of Now (Without Interval)

The first story I aim to tell is a true if embarrassing story of something that happened to me relatively recently. At a slight impasse in my thinking about the "now" of idle time and the matter of time on hand, I engaged in an activity formerly known as procrastination. I downloaded an app to my phone in order to make an bitmoji cartoon of myself.

Now, I am extremely late to this game – selfie emoticons have been around for at least three years, which is forever in the twitter speed of digital time that renders "anyone over 14" obsolete (Parker). I am myself prehistory to bitmoji realism and I blink at the screen as if through a fog of the 20th-century that still hangs about me like the smell of '80s hairspray, '70s patchouli, or '60s flower power. As you no

doubt know, you can make your bitmoji selfie to look like you by selecting skin tone, head shape, eye shape, wrinkle placement, hair color, etc. , and it can often result in quite an uncanny likeness. So, however belated as I may have been to the phone app, I eventually arrived and made my selfie-Frankenstein monster, who, like the one in the 1910 film by J. Searle Dawley, instantly hailed me with a simple hand wave as if to say hello. I was also intrigued to see the further range of activity my cartoon Rebecca could employ in communication. I was soon impressed to find that she could even deliver a lecture about emoji making on my behalf!

This was well and good and after exchanging bimoji selfies with my sister for a while, my apparent idle activity was completed and so, no more time on my hands, I returned to rewriting feeling refreshed.

The story I want to tell really begins a mere two hours after the birth of my bitmoji. After writing for some time, I returned to the web to check on something through Google and noticed instantly what I took to be my selfie, laboring in my absence! I was completely surprised when my own cartoon self showed up in the margins of my search, waving at me and asking me to buy something for myself. She was working, it appeared, for a company that sold window treatments and I was to be her customer. Customer to myself! Even more unnerving, in an image within an ad on the margin of my screen, this selfie-toon was pointing at her watch (though I don't even wear a watch) as if to say stop procrastinating and buy! You/I do not have time on your/my hands!

I was horrified but should not have been surprised. As Andre Lepecki has written, “in performances of the self in neoliberalism, what Foucault had called “care of the Self” has turned into an ongoing *care of the investment on (the future profitability of) my Self(ie)*” (9-10; emphasis in original). Were I to have bought the blinds I was selling myself, my otherwise idle procrastination would have led to a satisfying conclusion for capital. Even dead labor (the worker when idle) is productive labor in a neoliberal “now” that knows nothing but how to extract value for capital even (and perhaps these days *especially*) from the “idleness” of those entitled (and even encouraged) to kill time. No doubt by now you will have guessed that I was mistaken. I thought the blinds company had almost immediately data-mined my selfie, removed my glasses and facial lines and put me to work hailing myself with the claim that *time is running out*. I admit my embarrassment. It's remarkable that I thought that this was theft, even for a moment. But, in another light, the mistaken thought is probably not mistaken at



3 Day Blinds

Buy 1, Get 1 50% Off on our custom blinds, shades, drapes or decorative hardware!

all, given that the activities we engage when “idle,” and perhaps particularly those activities that are (feminized) “personal” or consumptive of “reality,” are exactly the (gendered) mining fields of the experience economy (McRobbie; Skeggs and Wood). The brown haired “lady” working to sell “me” blinds was indeed played back to me as myself, but was also simply the company’s generic “woman of a certain age” who they expected might be, like I was at the time, in search of a commodity (I had accessed their site at some point in the previous weeks). In fact, in emoticoning myself, I had unwittingly shaped myself to pass as some consumer look-alike I may have already been given to be, which of course was an even more horrifying thought to contemplate. I had to ask: Which was older? My bitmoji self-bot or the hail from the sister self-bot siren-singing from the webby intra-margins of capitalism? It didn’t matter that I was late to the screen/scene. The moment I arrived, I instantly fell in and immediately (mis)recognized myself(ie).

But why was I surprised? As a white cis woman from the U.S.A. of comfortable economic means, shouldn’t I have expected to meet an avatar re-assembled and resembled as “myself” to greet me at the site of my quotidian commodity desires? That I was surprised that “I” might be figured as the model consumer, when plenty of folks of different colors and genders and ages and haircuts surely shop for blinds, only underscores the reliance on blinds (in this case blindness) that supports whiteness and commodity fetishism generally. Did I think I fell outside the category of whiteness or consumerism that a bitmoji based on capitalist-biosimilitude would underscore?

Thinking this over in the wake of my thought that my bitmoji had been data-mined, I felt stupid. In greeting my bitmoji, I thought I had been hailed by an uncanny likeness of my own making, but in fact I had created my likeness *as likeness*, permitting me to then misrecognize the source of own interpellation as my self(ie). This is the opposite of consciously “embodied avatars” explicated by Uri Mcmillan in his recent book by that name, in which black women artists practice(d) a purposeful self-objectification, transforming themselves into art objects and redeploying those avatars toward critical awareness. It is even quite different from the dynamic that I myself explored in *The Explicit Body in Performance* in which white women and women of color artists make their own bodies the stage to talk back to primitivization, feminization, and interpellation. So, though I had studied the drama of (mis)identification through Riviere, Fanon, Lacan, Irigaray, Lorde, Althusser, Butler, Munoz et al, nevertheless, from the very midst of my own idle activity, with so-called time on my hands, I fell into the

scene without hesitation, without, that is, a pause or an interval for critical questioning and suspended attention. It was small consolation that I didn't purchase any material blinds – leaving the time on my bitmoji double's wristwatch at a stand still. But I might as well have purchased them, as immaterial blinds to the capital-colonial reproduction of the capital-colonial relation (Coulthard 7-8) had clearly been a matter of my own unwitting investment.

So much for having time on my hands, I thought. What did I do with that time? My dead labor, my idle activity, was clearly (re)productive of the capital-colonial relation. No interval threatened the machinery of exchange. I wasn't dead labor at all! This might lead to the question: where is dead labor now? What has become of the supposed interval between dead labor and living labor Marx elucidated, where crisis can occur and where, *if extended*, intervals of suspended activity, or nonproductivity, might challenge the accumulation of value and foster ideas outside of or against the colonial-capitalist extraction machine? If, as feminists such as Silvia Federici have long argued, there was never such a thing as dead labor for those (women) who worked in the home or/and in the factory, how might we access an idleness we may never have had in order to interrupt the capitalist extraction machine within? Another way might be to ask: How do we access the laboring dead?⁷ We might do this not in order to flexible-ize time for the interests of colonial-capitalist extraction that wants to re-consume the past, reduce it to a synaptic nanosecond, or “cannibalize history” as Fredrick Jameson predicted twenty-five years ago (18), but to think about other ways of being dead to capital, privatization, and the relations fostered by the affect machine of neoliberalism. Other ways, that is, of engaging with time, with each other, with the earth, and with the dead – ways not driven to exploitation.

The Second Story of Now (With Many Hesitations)

My second story is shorter and longer, simultaneously. It comes to even fewer conclusions. In some ways this story is completely different from the first. But in other ways both stories are composed of utter (mis)recognition and/in uncanny doubling. In this story, “time on my hands” really feels like literal time – the living residue or viscosity of thousands and thousands of years between myself and an interlocutor who appeared as likeness in the midst of an ongoing process of call and response. Here's the story:

Several years ago I travelled to the Dordogne in France. I wanted to witness, first hand, one of the many negative handprints made by Paleolithic humans on the cave walls of the region. I didn't set out knowing which hand I might meet first. I

just headed to the caves and signed up for tours. After visiting the caves of Font de Gaume, Rouffignac, and several others, and being considerably moved by the artwork, I finally found myself before a negative handprint in Pech Merle. I would be lying if I said I wasn't moved. "Female," our guide said. "We can tell by the wrist bone size," he said.

Iterations necessarily jump – they jump time, space, and bodies – to become themselves as "gestures" in reiteration. And gestures, such greeting, inaugurate relation, as Avital Ronnel has written.⁸ Standing with the hand and thinking about the sense of greeting – whether a greeting of "hello" or "stop" or some other gesture of intra-relation – surprised me. But as I had traveled thousands of miles to stand where I was standing, why should I have been surprised? First, though I fully expected to find a negative hand, I had not expected the experience of vulnerability that ensued. Standing with the hand was standing with the rock, and standing with the rock was standing with the earth, and standing with the earth was standing *in relation* with no other activity planned (on my part in any case) than, indeed, to stand with. Granted, there was no way in which I could "know" or "recognize" precisely what the hand is/was/will have been intending. But standing with the hand – or, for that matter, standing with the rock on which the hand was imprinted – was in itself a powerful provocateur of questions in and about relation both across time and in time. Indeed, many questions arose for me at the site of the negative hand, and I will be writing about this for a long time I suspect, and telling this story in many different ways. Here, today, let me mention just a few.

When I first headed to the caves I wondered: If I meet a Paleolithic hand (a first hand, say) with a second hand (my own), what would become of first and second? And how do we know which is first and which is second? Why would I be more "live" in responding to, or even recognizing, the Paleolithic hand, than the *first hand* was/is/continues to be in making the hail – casting it, if you will, into the temporal jump required of iterability? And in the logic (if that can be the right word) of call and response, wouldn't response, in reverse, initiate the hail *as* hail? That is, even if the cave hand wasn't "originally" a hail of greeting, does it become one – even illegitimately – by virtue of response?

At the most minimal, the negative hand is simply recognizable as a hand at hand. The "at handedness" of a relationship is striking when standing with one of these hands. Not only is the hand the primary vehicle of touch (the sense that undoes our boundaries, our appropriate distances, dividing self from others) but it is the



Prehistoric negative hand in the Pech Merle grotto (Lot, France)

privileged vehicle of gesture. "Handling" in English has two meanings: 1. the act of taking or holding something in the hands; 2. the packaging and labeling of something to be shipped. Handling in the sense of packaging something is to send something away. At the same time, handling in the sense of taking in hand is to bring something close. Hands that handle are the medium of proximity as well as distance. They also imply a movement: toward and away. With this in mind, I thought, "time on my hands" becomes time between our hands and those hands extend in and as time. As such, a "sticky" sense of simultaneity was remarkable to me across temporal distance and difference could be palpable at the very site of sameness (we both have or will have had hands).⁹ In fact, the matter of touch requires difference and inaugurates the feeling of "besideness" that might well articulate the sense of "standing with" that was embodied or bodied forth for me in the cave (e.g. Sedgwick; Tallbear).

Another question that arose for me was the following, not all that different from the assumption at the base of the British Museum exhibition I referred to earlier: If I fundamentally recognize or misrecognize the Paleolithic hand because I *also have one*, and recognize or misrecognize the gesture of the upheld palm because I also make one or might make one, does likeness and liveness, as a matter of exchange, exist in reiteration, in call and response, and therefore manifest an extend-ability of duration that is almost beyond imagination? It may well be that "recognition" is not the best descriptor for the sense of encounter across sameness and difference that occurs at the chiasmic site(s) of our hand(s) (Coulthard 1-50). Recognition is wrapped up in colonialist appropriations that dissolve difference into hierarchies and submit relation to narratives of "progress" and "development." For me, with the Paleolithic hand, "progress" and "development" were tragedies at the edges of our encounter but not definitive of everything that it was possible to say about what existed between, among, or beside us in encounter. The expanse of violence committed by human hands across time was not vanished into the synaptic sameness of our "modern" brains but rather hovered, like a problem, or like a million echoes of gestural hails: "Hey, you there!" Or, "Move along!"¹⁰ "Time on our hands" became palpable for me as both the vast expanse of historical events that suggested an enormity of difference between "she and I" at the site of our hands, and *simultaneously* brought us to the scene of our hands as there together – as contemporaries. This is simply to ask: Are we not, she and I, both participant in an act we might think of as call and response and thus, together *both* contemporary *and* at a vast historical remove, simultaneously? And if we can think of that sameness while acknowledging our difference (and vice versa) might that be what Dipesh Chakrabarty has termed,

interestingly, “negative universalism”? A way of maintaining sameness and difference in conversation, much as the negative hand is both a hand in outline and the absence of a hand at the face of the rock?

Of course, human hands – which are already inversions of each other – were not the only participants in the scene. Would it be possible to excise the human from the hail entirely and ask whether the rock face itself (regardless of the trace of the human) might be approached as performing a hail, moving, in deep time, with a gesture of its own cast to its own and its others? The hail is, interestingly, what W.J.T. Mitchell implicitly gives to any and all images and objects in *What Do Pictures Want: The Lives and Loves of Images?* (37) and what Jane Bennett gives to matter in general. As Robin Bernstein writes succinctly, “things *hail*” (73, emphasis in original). And I like the notion of the hail, or the gestural call, because it inaugurates an interval, a “hesitation” (to use Bergson’s word), a space for radical heterogeneity, an *open* possibility for response. Response, indeed, may ricochet. Here are a number of possibilities for trajectories: From the hand that is responding to the stone’s hail. From the stone that receives the hail of the hand. From my hand arriving (quite late) on the scene. From the stone again in ricochet. From the pixel and light hand you encounter on the screen or the ink and paper hand that hails you from the journal in hand. From the screen face; from my hand and my face to your hand and your face; and who knows where next? If bits and pieces, likenesses and alterations, selfies and trajectories, have traversed hundreds of thousands of years to recombine in this conversation we are having “now,” what part of this is contemporary? Or is it better to talk about contemporaneities that combine and recombine in relation as they touch and, by virtue of touch, intra-act?

Also palpable, at least for me, was the very real sense that the time on our hands was precious and not to be taken for granted. “Time is running out” is in fact the often heard refrain regarding the threat to the climate and to the earth as a whole triggered by the extractive aggressions of the colonial-capitalist Anthropocene – or Capitalocene (Haraway). In this case, looking at one’s watch might be a call to action against capitalism, not (like the call of my erstwhile bitmoji gesturing in a scene of blinds), a call to purchase and waste.

Interestingly, while in the Dordogne I also visited Lascaux II, the fabricated tourist’s cave built beside the original Paleolithic one. Because the Paleolithic art in Lascaux I is incrementally disappearing – the faux cave, Lascaux II, is remastered like a photograph, and constructed as an immersive replica gesturing

quite clearly to the original cave it stands beside. Fascinatingly, the fake cave is constructed to save the original from the detriments of, precisely, the live. The human living – with all our mold, exhaled CO₂, and bodily movement – have been damaging the stone over the short 70 years since its modern rediscovery. The human live here outlives stone – a startling inverse of the idea that liveness is ephemeral. The implication may even be that the living human standing before the handprint is *older* than the Paleolithic print. Hands, as hands go, reduplicate via DNA. Hands are passed hand to hand. What are vulnerable, in this scenario, are the dead, those hands that have sloughed away like so many cells from the ongoing in-handness of the collective human animal. Thinking about it this way, which comes first, her hand or mine, is less pertinent as a question than the question of what we should do with “our” hands – hers, mine, and the stone’s, earth’s and water’s that surround us in and as our selves.

We have time on our hands? What should we do? How might we better procrastinate to keep this time between us hovering, precious, and careful? Eyes open. Hand out. *Sans* blinds.

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¹ Time outside of time can be related to Bergson's notion of duration as heterogeneous indeterminacy, sometimes also referred to, in Bergson and Irigaray, as the "interval."

² See the promotional video for this exhibition at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n2l_3bqAAME.

³ On the "capital-relation" and reproduction see Karl Marx, *Capital*, chapter 25. That that which appears to be leisure, however, is actually "work" has been a condition of women's labor historically.

⁴ The quote is from a productivity motivator who provides self-help to those interested in profiting through the further development of India for capitalism.

⁵ On the interval and crisis in relation to Marxian theory of the interval, see Schneider "It Seems As If ... I Am Dead': Zombie Capitalism and Theatrical Labor" 150-162.

⁶ The Affect Factory was the title of a conference exploring "Precarity Gender, Labor, and Performance" at New York University in 2012. See <http://affectfactory.blogspot.com/>

⁷ See Schneider "It Seems As If... I am Dead': Zombie Capitalism and Theatrical Time" for a discussion of the dead in the labor of relation.

⁸ "The Greeting first establishes a distance so that proximity can occur." (Ronell 208)

⁹ On the stickiness of affect see Ahmed 29. On simultaneity as not the same as sameness, see the work of Donna Haraway generally.

¹⁰ These are examples of “hails.” “Hey, you there” is taken from Althusser. “Move Along” is taken from Rancière.

The Local Prejudice of Contemporary Dance

Fabián Barba

Once put into prose, a universal concept carries within it traces of what Gadamer would call 'prejudice' - not a conscious bias but a sign that we think out of particular accretion of histories that are not always transparent to us.

(Chakrabarty xiv)

A Mary Wigman Dance Evening and a personal yet collective history

In 2009, I created the performance *A Mary Wigman Dance Evening* (AMWDE), a dance recital composed of the re-enactment of nine short soli originally created and danced by Mary Wigman during 1925 and 1929. These soli were part of her first tour through the United States in 1929-1930 and became the basis of my staging.¹ As I worked in this creation, I encountered for the first time a rather curious phenomenon: certain dances could be said to look old-fashioned. When those dances have been created several decades ago, as in the case of *Ausdruckstanz*, this kind of observation doesn't seem to pose any major problem. However it can become a rather thorny situation when those dances have been made recently and outside of what could be considered the centers of the so-called contemporary dance scene. I seem not to be able to approach this problem without considering my own personal story. Through my dance education in two different places — Quito from 2000 to 2004; Brussels from 2004 to 2008 — I got in contact with two different dance scenes in which this perception of one of them looking old-fashioned in relation to the other has come clearly to the fore.

I started to study dance in Quito with Kléver Viera, one of the modern dance pioneers in the city. I could say that while I was studying with him, I took him as a model that embodied for me both an image/idea of dance and of a good dancer; taking him as a model, I strove to embody those ideals in myself. At least in an initial formative moment I could say that *that* was the kind of dance I wanted to do and *he* the kind of dancer I wanted to become. A similar process took place while I was in P.A.R.T.S. The main difference was that instead of having one teacher to look at, I had several, all of them with their different bodies, different exercises, different skills, all of them actualizing differing ideas of dance and what a good dancer could be.

It took a while before I realized that I was not going to improve my Quito-acquired technique in Brussels. Traveling from Quito to Brussels I actually changed paradigms: I invested myself in a different kind of technical training, I was initiated into commerce with other ideas, I started pursuing and negotiating other ideals. I didn't improve my previously acquired technique; I put it on hold to focus on acquiring a new one. Thinking retrospectively about this, I have become convinced that an education in dance implies not only a technical education, but also an education in a way of thinking, a way of appreciating work (a way of enjoying or disliking dances), a way of interacting with the network in which one is educated: *a dance education is a way of inscribing oneself within a dance culture.*

To recognize the existence of different dance cultures and one's inscription to them through training and education doesn't necessarily pose a problem. The problem appeared for me the moment I couldn't establish a relation between those two dance scenes. Or when every attempt I made to relate them seemed to encounter a hierarchized field in which the dance scene in Ecuador seemed to be old-fashioned in relation to the dance scene in Brussels, an anachronism, somewhat late.

After *AMWDE* I tried to approach these questions through the creation of another performance entitled *a personal yet collective history (apych - 2012)*, which also followed the logic of a dance recital. It combined eight short solo dances created in different contexts: the United Kingdom (1976), Brazil (2003) and Ecuador (2003), to name a few. This compilation didn't aim to present different decades or periods, nor to give a concise, complete and systematic account of history; it simply looked for dances that could refer me to a different milieu than the one I was inhabiting at the time; I wanted these dances to allow me to infer — however phantasmagorically or vaguely — an idea or image of the context in which they were created, a context historically or geographically different from my actual, present one.

One of the dances I was considering for this new dance evening was a short solo created by my former dance teacher Kléver Viera for my colleague Yolanda Endara (*Yoli's solo - 2003*). As I was coming to Europe to visit different dance schools, I asked Yoli to teach me that solo so I could present it during my auditions. I asked her to teach me specifically that solo because I thought it was a most beautiful dance and the best I could offer as my calling card. Nine years later, during the rehearsals for *apych*, my affinity for this dance remained

undiminished; the pleasure of dancing this solo as I retrieved it from the video surfaced to my skin. Nevertheless, I noticed a gap between this dance and my present situation as a dancer in Brussels. Notwithstanding the familiar pleasure and enjoyment, there was a distance that had installed itself, Yoli's solo seemed out of place, or old-fashioned. It was as if traveling outside of what I have come to recognize as a center for contemporary dance (Brussels) could be perceived as a traveling back in time.

Is it so? Can travelling geographically be perceived as travelling back and forth in time? Even my experience with Yoli's solo seemed to indicate so: I had learned to recognize that dance as belonging to the past, even though I had fully identified with it only nine years earlier. Is nine years time enough for something to become part of the past? No, I don't think that the time marked in the calendar can account for this transformation from "present" to "past"; it was the travel from Quito to Brussels, the change from one dance world to another one. The dance tradition into which I was inscribed through schooling in Brussels constituted my present now. But did it necessarily have to transform my previous experience as a dancer into "the past"? Did it have the right to deny the contemporaneity of the dance world I had come to know in Quito and with which I still entertain affective and professional relations?

To complicate things a bit more, there was another solo haunting the creation process of *apych: La mujer de los fermentos* ("the woman of the ferments"). This is a dance I learned directly from my teacher Kléver Viera who had created it for himself in Quito in 1994. To learn this dance was a very special experience for me. It was a transmission that didn't have anything to do with the teaching of a repertory, it felt rather like a bestowal; something was being passed from one body to the other, from one person to the other, with extreme generosity and care. Learning this dance created a strong bond with Kléver, with that specific dance and with that dance world.

Ramsay Burt (who was assisting in the creation of *apych*) asked me why I didn't include *La mujer de los fermentos* in the performance. The immediate answer was that with this dance I didn't have the detachment I experienced with *Yoli's solo*. I was afraid that my affective ties to this dance would dissolve any kind of critical distance, which was very important to me. However, my initial resistance to performing this solo might have been due to my unuttered fear that a dance that I had come to recognize as part of the past could have the power to forcefully invade the present. I was perhaps afraid that I could suddenly discover myself

turning my back to the future and walking to the past right in front of me.

How to define the present I had to protect from invasion? As that which was happening in 2012 in opposition to what had happened in 2003? No, this present is not defined by chronological time only. The present I was guarding had to do with my current inscription within a dance network in Brussels. It is precisely this inscription that was potentially being challenged by performing *La mujer de los fermentos* in Europe. Had I been invited to dance this solo in Quito, I would have gladly accepted as it would have reaffirmed my inscription within that dance scene. Why did I perceive my concurrent inscription into two different dance traditions as a struggle between that which belonged to “the present” and that which belonged to “the past”? Why is it difficult to recognize two simultaneous dance scenes as contemporary to each other?

Historicism

We can observe how the frontiers between what properly belongs to “the past” and what to “the present” are being guarded also in other situations than the one I am discussing. In Hamburg in 2009 I attended the presentation of a dance performance by a choreographer working in Colombia. At the end of the performance I overheard an important curator saying “that looked very 80s.” For this essay it is not necessary to discuss the quality of that specific work, what is important to my argument is that a work recently made in Colombia was relocated to a past period in Europe. Also in Hamburg I was told about an Eastern European theater festival that took place in that city before my arrival. Apparently the festival “looked 80s” and was not very successful. They explained to me that “they were dealing with questions and concerns that we (in Hamburg) were not busy with *anymore*.” In her article “Politics of Affection and Uneasiness” (2003), philosopher and performance scholar Bojana Kunst, extensively talks about this by critically describing the (deceptive) reception of Eastern European performance art as something *already seen* from the viewpoint of Western European art programmers, as a *déjà vu*.

These concerns invaded most of the creation of *apych* turning it into a thorny and uncomfortable affair. I noticed that I had come to recognize *Yoli's solo* as part of the past because I was thinking of history as a *single linear progression* with a past that is gone, a present that is singular and a future to which we are all heading. At this moment I came upon Dipesh Chakrabarty's book *Provincializing Europe, Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (2000).² Even if this book is not

concerned with dance nor with South America, from the very first pages I found passages that resonated strongly with my questions, especially in the way Chakrabarty understands historicism:

Crudely, one might say that [historicism] was one important form that the ideology of progress or “development” took from the nineteenth century on. Historicism is what made modernity or capitalism look not simply global but rather as something that became global *over time*, by originating in one place (Europe) and then spreading outside it. This “first in Europe, then elsewhere” structure of global historical time was historicist; [...] It was historicism that allowed Marx to say that the “country that is more developed industrially only shows, to the less developed, the image of its own future.” [...] Historicism thus posited historical time as a measure of the cultural distance (at least in institutional development) that was assumed to exist between the West and the non-West. (7)

For Chakrabarty, “to critique historicism in all its varieties is to unlearn to think of history as a developmental process in which that which is possible becomes actual by tending to a future that is singular” (249). Put otherwise, to critique historicism “is to learn *to think the present –the ‘now’ that we inhabit as we speak as irreducibly not-one*” (249, my emphasis). It is precisely the historicist understanding of history as a global single linear progression that underlines the idea according to which the present of Ecuador could be understood as the past of Europe.

During the creation process of *apych* I noticed that I didn’t need to think of history as something we find in books or archives that throw us back to a time we didn’t experience and that is detached from us. The past I was dealing with actually had the capacity to affect/act upon my present, be it through the sensual enjoyment of the dancing or by the capacity and desire to fully inhabit *La mujer de los fermentos*. The past I was dealing with was not something past, but present. In *apych* I wasn’t dealing with pasts that have passed (away), I was busy with pasts that *are*, that are active and necessary. These pasts do not need to be recuperated, at most they need to be acknowledged and given a place. The idea of pasts that *are* is also articulated by Chakrabarty:

Pasts *are* there in taste, in practices of embodiment, in the cultural training the senses have received over generations. They are there in practices I sometimes do not even know I engage in. This is how the

archaic comes into the modern, not as a remnant of another time but as something constitutive of the present. (251)

How to conceive a present populated by pasts that *are*, a present that is not singular, that is not a complete and closed entity into itself, a present that doesn't reify and detach us from the past?

One month before the premiere of *apych*, when I was still struggling with the status of *Yoli's solo* and *La mujer de los fermentos*, I read this anecdote about the Indian Nobel laureate physicist C.V. Raman in *Provincializing Europe*:

Raman, it is said, would rush home from his laboratory in Calcutta in the 1930s to "take a ritual bath ahead of a solar eclipse." When questioned about this, the physicist is reported to have simply quipped, "The Nobel Prize? That was science, a solar eclipse is personal." (254)

This anecdote raised important questions. How could a scientist, proficient in the use of rational thinking, engage in so-called superstitious practices? How could a scientist, as a modern man, engage in practices that could be deemed to be traditional, as not belonging to modern times? Or making use of rough colonial vocabulary, how could "primitive mentality" and "modern rationality" operate in one and the same person?

After reading Raman's story I felt encouraged to give a place, in my present situation as a "contemporary" dancer working in Brussels, to *La mujer de los fermentos*. I understood that I didn't need to disown this dance because of its ties to a dance community that I had learned to perceive as anachronistic. To undo my own historicist constitution meant to unlearn to think of *La mujer de los fermentos* as belonging to an overcome past, and to acknowledge it as a part of my past, a past that *is*, that affects my present, that inhabits the now; it was to acknowledge the *living* relations I maintain with this dance and that dance community.

A shortcoming of this performance was that even though I managed to modify my relation to this dance and to my own past, I didn't manage to involve important parts of the audience in this process. Some people who attended the performance could see in *La mujer de los fermentos* only a part of my past, for they expressed their desire to see how I would dance "now." Their dissatisfaction could be summarized in these words: "you are showing us what you used to dance, but we would like to see how you would dance now." This proved to me

that I didn't manage to share with them the realization that the "now" that I might inhabit as I dance is irreducibly not-one, that the solo Kléver taught me is part of my past as much as it is part of my present, a present that is not singular. Is this a present that I cannot share with every audience? Am I facing once again a present that cannot be defined through temporal coordinates only? Is "my present in Quito" different from "my present in Brussels," presents that I build through the relations I cultivate with those two dance communities? What can all of this tell us about the contemporaneity of contemporary dance?

Contemporary/Modern Dance and the Denial of Contemporaneity³

On a broader level, "to learn to think the present – the 'now' that we inhabit as we speak – as irreducibly not-one" and to dismantle its practical corollaries is something more difficult to do. The very term "contemporary dance" is problematic. On the one hand *contemporary* has a label function. It designates a kind of dance; we can talk of *contemporary* dance as we talk of *modern* dance or *ballet*, or *hip-hop* or *ballroom* dances or *folkloric* dances... On the other hand, though, the adjective "contemporary" refers to something belonging to or occurring in the present, in the now. "Contemporary", when used as an adjective, could be used to describe any kind of dance practiced in the present (*ballroom* dances, *street* dances, etc.) but it happens that these dances are *not* called *contemporary* dance.

As I see it, *contemporary dance*, at least nominally, claims the present for itself and excludes other kinds of dances from it. In my understanding, *contemporary dance* not only says that it belongs to the present, but that the present belongs to it; *contemporary* dance places itself in the "now," it colonizes the "now." Nominally then, *modern* dance wouldn't be contemporary, it risks thus being placed as part of an overcome past. The adjectives modern and contemporary might be used as synonyms in several contexts. However, a prevalent (historicist) way of assessing dance based on historical periodizations tends to posit *modern* dance as previous to *contemporary* dance, as already a remnant of the past.⁴ To say that the dance I practiced in Quito is *modern* is not a problem by itself. The problem arises when the contemporaneity of *modern dance* is denied.

Talking about modern and contemporary dance as genres, it would be possible to describe their differences through an analysis of their technical, esthetic and philosophical premises. In previous texts (Barba, "Research into Corporeality", "Quito-Brussels: a dancer's cultural geography" and "Impure transmissions"),

where I have discussed the re-enactment of the Wigman dances in relation to my formation as a modern dancer in Ecuador, I have outlined several elements describing a physicality that could be set in sharp contrast to the pedestrian facticity of the early years of the Judson Church, a physicality that I would suggest is archetypal to what have come to be understood as contemporary dance. From my perspective, what could mark the decisive difference between these two dance traditions is the idea of a subtext. I understand the subtext as an (sensorial/sensual/emotional/affective) intensity that *is part of the movement*, not an addendum⁵. In pedestrian movement there is a confessed effort to strip this intensity off the movement, as if it was something added, accessory, extraneous to the dance. Technically, the production of a subtext is linked to a certain use of the gaze, the breathing, the muscular tone, etc. Producing a subtext requires a physicality, a use and imagination of the body, that is sharply distinct to the physicality of the “relaxed” and “slack” pedestrian body (Brown and Rainer 36).⁶ On the level of expression and subjectivity, the subtext of European and US historical modern dance rests upon the idea of an inner-self that is expressed through the danced movement, an essentialist understanding of the self that was critiqued by the dancers of the Judson Church (Burt, *Judson Dance Theater* 90-92).

As soon as I outline the possible project of creating a distinction between modern and contemporary dance, I need to make explicit two warnings that trouble the pertinence of undertaking it. The first one is that the technical production of a subtext or of a pedestrian body is not always and univocally linked to either one or the other understanding of expression and subjectivity. I have seen “expressionistic slack” bodies onstage and, as I argue in “Impure Transmissions,” dances that produce a subtext do not necessarily pretend to address “universal problems of the human condition” (Burt, *Judson Dance Theater* 92). The related second warning has to do with the fact that we might never be able to encounter an exemplary dance work or practice that can be said to be purely modern or purely contemporary.⁷

There are at least two instances that challenge the attempt to create a sharp distinction between modern and contemporary dance based on a physicality that channels a subtext or not. The first one is the critique made by left-wing commentators and dancers to Graham’s work in the early 1930s as being too abstract and formalist, lacking the emotional intensity that could move the audience into taking political action (Franko 38-42). The second one is an account of Trisha Brown in which she mentions how she felt “emotion and

internal commotion while performing those early deductive, systematized, withheld pieces. [How she] experienced a rich subjectivity, whereas on the outside the dance looked objective” (Goldberg 6). These examples challenge the notion of an absolute difference between modern dance (with its perceived “emotionalism”) and post-modern or contemporary dance (with its stated “objectivism”). We might need to find a vocabulary to talk about modern and contemporary dance and account for their difference without erecting dichotomous borders, a vocabulary that could bring forth heterogeneity and non-conflating mixture.⁸

Indeed, what we might encounter once we approach a specific work in the richness of its complexity is mixing, tension and confrontation of different premises inherited from different dance traditions or lineages. Thus, I notice that it would be more interesting and constructive to try and dismantle these distinctions, to show its cross-pollination, to show the porosities of its borders and the generative exchange between different dance traditions. However, I have tried to enunciate this distinction, I have talked as if there was a clear-cut distinction between modern and contemporary dance, because in my view it often remains operative in concealed and detrimental ways.⁹ I have strategically used the vocabulary that generates categories that lend themselves to hierarchic classifications in order to make visible the temporal discriminations it sustains. As I try to dismantle and overcome this dichotomous distinction (modern/contemporary) I acknowledge the need to understand how it operates and the specific effects it has in the construction/construal of reality.

Politics of Time and the Definition of Contemporary Dance

The relevance of the discussion therefore does not lie in an ontological question (what is properly modern and what properly contemporary). The relevance of the discussion of the contemporary in dance, which rests upon epistemological productions, is political. The dismissal of a dance practice as not contemporary makes it invisible within the “contemporary” dance field; if a dance practice is not greeted as contemporary dance (in the ambiguity of the term) then it has no place, agency or relevance within the contemporary dance scene. Following Rolando Vázquez’s analysis in his article *Modernity Coloniality and Visibility – The Politics of Time* I recognize that “invisibility is tantamount to de-politicization” where the political is understood “as the coming together to constitute a public space” (np).

Allow me to approach this argument through a concrete example: when I was studying dance in Ecuador I used to say, as many of my colleagues by then, that I was doing contemporary dance. It is only after my studies in P.A.R.T.S. and my familiarization with the contemporary dance world gravitating around Brussels, that I recognized the dance I used to practice in Quito, and many people do nowadays, as modern dance. If we want to step beyond these dichotomous distinctions, which mirror a certain topology, an authoritative answer as to what can be considered modern and what contemporary dance is out of the question insofar it would repeat these distinctions and underlying topological hierarchies. If there is debate upon these questions, if there is a difficulty to bring them down to closure, it is precisely because what is being contested is the political constitution of the public space called contemporary dance. The kernel of the problem therefore is to understand the political stakes of those definitions, and to consistently and continuously pose a different set of questions with regards to them: who produces those definitions? Where? Supported by which institutions? For whom? On the base of which inclusions/exclusions?

To understand the political dimension of the definition of the contemporary as it is used in dance, it is important to highlight an element that can easily pass unnoticed. At first sight, it might seem that the contemporary can be defined in temporal (the present as opposed to the past or the future) or historical terms alone (as in the periodization of the arts in classical, modern or contemporary styles). However, as I have tried to hint at throughout this text, there is a spatial or, to be more accurate, a geo-cultural dimension that plays a central role in this definition. I understand a geo-cultural location as a cultural horizon (a set of values, philosophical assumptions, discourses, practices, etc.) forged through a specific local history that is grounded on the materiality of national or regional institutions, funding, cultural policies and laws. The interaction between local histories and global tendencies - what Mignolo analyzes as the relation between local histories in which global designs are produced and local histories in which global designs “have to be adapted, adopted, transformed, and rearticulated” (278) – needs to be investigated in order to understand the unequal dynamics of power in the interaction between different cultural horizons and the phenomenon of cultural colonialism. When, in what follows, I talk about the West, I will be approaching it as a geo-cultural location: not as a well-defined territory, but as a matrix for the material and philosophical re-production of culturally specific practices and discourses.

I might not encounter much resistance if I say that contemporary dance (as a kind of dance produced for and by the theater as a physical and institutional space) has become an international artistic practice. There are people practicing this kind of dance in South and North America, Europe, Africa, Asia and Australia¹⁰. Contemporary dance might be easily acknowledged as a global artistic practice, indeed. However, and paraphrasing Chakrabarty, I think that contemporary dance might not be simply global but rather it might have become global over time, originating in one place (Europe and the United States) and then spreading outside it.

This is an hypothesis worth of careful consideration. The implications of this proposition are multiple and important. To imply that contemporary dance originated and is rooted in a Western cultural horizon would mean to say that contemporary dance is a specific kind of Western dance; contemporary dance would thus be defined not only on temporal or historical terms, but also on a geo-cultural one. Dance productions grounded on other cultural horizons (non-Western dances) would thus be, ipso facto, not contemporary dance (or, not fully contemporary). This urges us to inquire whether in a historicist understanding of contemporary dance there is a perpetuation of the equation of the West with the contemporary (the present), and of the non-West with the past (an anachronism). Ultimately, this question would ask if the global spread of contemporary dance, its globalization, entails also a process of westernization as a specific kind of cultural colonialism.

The perils we would encounter in approaching this question are many. First, we would need to avoid reinforcing the dichotomy West/non-West insofar as it creates clear boundaries that hide already existing spaces of intercultural exchange. The dichotomy West/non-West, just as the dichotomy modern/contemporary and past/present should not be approached as ontological categories, but as epistemological constructions. If I use those categories it is only to understand how they effectively operate in the construction of a certain order of things, of an image of the world and the differentials of power they sustain.¹¹ Second, we would need to approach this question through concrete cases as to avoid generalizations. The way contemporary dance might be practiced and negotiated in different geo-cultural locations might respond to particularities that need to be carefully considered in order to fully understand how Westernization might operate through contemporary dance. Third, the globalization of contemporary dance in different locations might encounter resistances and appropriations that need to be acknowledged and that could trouble the

understanding of its global spread as an act of unidirectional imposed foreign colonialism. The global spread of Western practices and institutions does not take place over passive populations. The agency and response of non-Western populations need to be acknowledged and strengthened as they resist, appropriate and/or transform Western artistic practices. In this sense, I am thinking of contemporary dance as a field where multiple forces, pulling and pushing in different directions, conflict and interact with one another. The possible colonial dimension in the global spread of contemporary dance is one of those forces and the one I am trying to make explicit here. To have a fair and complete picture of this political play of forces, we would also need to take into account forces of resistance, appropriation, acclimation, etc. And fourth, contemporary dance, as an artistic practice, cannot be said to be by itself colonial or anti-colonial. It cannot be reduced to something that can be univocally condemned or praised. Contemporary dance, as an artistic practice, can operate either as tool for emancipation and critical thinking (as a means to suspend and challenge established values and the status quo¹²), while it can also be used, most of the times unwittingly perhaps, as a tool for furthering cultural colonialism.

To ask about the Western genealogy of contemporary dance and its globalization is to ask about the political economy of this artistic practice, the institutions that support it and the epistemological constructions that build its ground. It is to ask about the production and circulation of contemporary dance at a global scale. Approaching this question would thus help us to understand, for example, why it is that choreographers and dancers based in the periphery of the Western world (as Ecuador) have not managed to expand their field of influence and recognition beyond regional borders, different from dancers and choreographers based in Europe or the United States whose work has been presented and recognized at a global scale.

Striving for recognition and influence in this order of things is, of course, to accept this order of things; it is to conform to the dominant rule of globalization. If globalization takes the form of, or operates as, a homogenizing and universalist project (Estermann 33), then peripheral regions of the Western world are doomed to lose the game from the start, as entering the game requires the erasure of their cultural particularities and difference in the quest for inclusion, assimilation and recognition. While it is important to understand these dynamics of power, it is also important to challenge and question this order of things. Indeed, a different perspective and project can be embraced to influence on the

processes of transnational and transregional connectivity and exchange at a planetary scale in which contemporary dance might participate.

As I hint towards the Western genealogy of contemporary dance, I suggest that the basic premises that have constituted it are grounded on philosophical assumptions forged within a Western cultural horizon and history. Among those basic philosophical assumptions, a distinctly western/modern temporality (unidirectional and progressive linearity; sharp distinction between past, present and future plays a central role. Even when the practice of contemporary dance has challenged this modernist understanding of time (the interest on re-enactment is symptomatic of this), I would venture to say most of the times this critique of modern temporality might be rooted on Western philosophical critiques of modern temporality. Following Mignolo we could say then that contemporary dance's critique of modern temporality is an internal or, in Estermann's vocabulary, a mono-cultural critique.

The grounding of this critique on Western epistemology has to be made explicit if the discussion of the politics of time in contemporary dance pretends not to be enclosed and limited to a prominently Western debate – or to a debate largely determined by Western categories of thought. This is all the more relevant considering the global reach of contemporary dance. If this globalized notion of contemporary dance is not to remain mono-cultural (i.e., a neo-colonial expansion of a predominantly Western practice) it should open up and take into account different cultural horizons and heritages. The questions I have formulated above, then, might now take an added nuance to our ears: who is defining what is contemporaneity? From which cultural horizon? What relations does it establish with other cultural horizons? Strengthening or challenging which differentials of power? Potentiating heterogeneity or buttressing homogenisation?

If we want the global contemporary dance scene not to remain a veiled mono-cultural (i.e., neo-colonial) practice, we need to pay attention not only to the encounter of Western and non-Western cultural productions, we also need to pay attention to the (Western and non-Western) philosophical assumptions in relation to time and the contemporary and, ultimately, to question the very primacy of such a temporal category to define and judge the value of the artworks: the importance and centrality given to the contemporary might already be distinctively Western.

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¹ The first two sections of this text have been drawn from a draft of a chapter that has been accepted for publication by Oxford University Press in the forthcoming *Handbook of Danced Reenactment* edited by Mark Franko due for publication in 2017. While the second part of the present text interrogates the politics of time involved in an un/localized understanding of the contemporary, the chapter in the *Handbook* moves to explore questions of historical distance and their mediation in the practice of artistic reenactment. I would like to thank Mark Franko for his editorial contribution in the first part of these texts.

² I would like to thank Frederik Le Roy for suggesting this reading to me during a workshop that was part of the creation of *a personal yet collective history*.

³ I am elaborating on the denial of contemporaneity after the notion of denial of coevalness developed by Johannes Fabian. I have opted not to use Fabian's notion following the critiques of it advanced by Berber Bevernage and Rolando Vázquez (personal conversation). Both suggest that, despite the value of Fabian's contribution, Fabian considers the contemporary as a singularity and, what's more, a singularity that is defined by Western premises. The creation of coevalness would thus be limited to "granting" or "including" into that Western contemporaneity practices and populations that have been formerly excluded. Both Bevernage and Vázquez point to the need of critiquing that very idea of the contemporary. To talk of the denial of contemporaneity instead of the denial of coevalness does not solve the problem, but it tries to indicate a change of perspective. The important is not the granting or recognition of contemporaneity (which already bespeaks of a differential of power – who has the power to recognize or include to whom?), but understanding how that contemporaneity is being defined and why it has become an important question at all. I would partly agree with those who respond that the contemporaneity of a work of art guarantees a critical response to contemporary events and situations. However, as I will try to show, I do not think that a critical response-ability is an exclusive attribute of contemporary dance (as a genre) while there is the risk of falling into the trap of an empty quest for formal innovation for the sake of reaching towards a historicist ideal of contemporaneity.

⁴ A similar discussion in relation to the ambivalence of the term contemporary in relation to contemporary art can be found in Heinich, "Pour en finir avec la querelle du contemporain."

⁵ In relation to this Katharine Sehnert and Irene Sieben, two dancers who studied in the Wigman school in the late 50s and early sixties, and with whom I worked during the creation of AMWDE, comment: "It is not *about* emotions. *There are* emotions. It is different what I think a feeling looks like to what the body is doing. [At the Wigman School] we didn't work on emotions" (Sieben, my emphases). "Each movement has its own expression. It doesn't need to have a subtext. It *is* a subtext" (Sehnert, my emphasis). Conversations with the author.

⁶ For a description of these distinct physicalities see my suppositional description of a P.A.R.T.S. and a Wigman's student re-enacting a Wigman score in Ramsay Burt's "Ungoverning Dance" (206, 207).

⁷ Its particular features notwithstanding, a general idea of contemporary dance is as elusive, and nonetheless effective, as the idea of “Europe” in the sense of being “an imaginary figure that remains deeply embedded in *clichéd and shorthand forms* in some everyday habits of thought” (Chakrabarty 4) or as terms like “the West” or “third world” insofar “it is not always clear to what these terms refer, [yet] they are used as if there existed a distinct external reality to which they corresponded, or at least they have the effect of creating such an illusion” (Coronil 52).

⁸ I am thinking of heterogeneity, multiplicity and non-conflating mixture (*mestizaje*) despite and through dichotomous thinking guided by the work of Lugones, specially chapter 6 “Purity, Impurity, and Separation” (121-148).

⁹ This distinction might remain operative, and become useful, wherever we can find the “ ‘desire to wipe out whatever came earlier,’ so as to achieve 'a radically new departure, a point that could be a true present' ” (Marshall Berman quoting de Man - quoted in Chakrabarty 244). This desire might structure different levels of dance-related practice and discourse. This desire might become evident in small expressions like “that looked 80s” or “it is not any longer about..., but about...”; in the curatorial eagerness to find “what’s coming next”; in the creative constraint of producing “something that has not yet been done” or in the praising of a performance as “very original.”

¹⁰ This is not to say that there are no important differences given by those different cultural backgrounds. For a discussion of the relation between modern dance in Ecuador and modern dance as practiced in the United States or Europe, see Barba (“Impure transmissions”).

¹¹ For an analysis of the constructed yet effective dichotomy West/non-West see Coronil 1996.

¹² The capacity to critique, challenge and transform established values and the status quo, however, should not be considered an exclusive prerogative of contemporary dance. In Ben Yakoub and Barba (“(Re)framing the vocabulary in performing arts in Flanders”) we discuss four possible meanings for the word “contemporary” as it is used in contemporary dance: 1) as belonging to the same chronological present (the “now”), 2) as being responsive to the context in which the artist works and lives, i.e., as a critical attitude towards established conventions and the status quo, 3) as an imperative for constant innovation or 4) as an artistic genre. When these four meanings conflate into one under the umbrella of “contemporary dance” (as a genre), different problems arise. The first one is the assumption that contemporary dance is the best-suited practice to maintain a critical attitude towards conventions and the status quo, as if other cultural practices (e.g., traditional dances) would not be able to engage in that kind of criticality and responsiveness. The second and related problem is that this kind of criticality is attached to a modern temporality that equates history with a singular and unidirectional development towards a future that calls for constant innovation; critical attitudes and innovation being thus confused as one same thing. Other ways of relating to history might thus come to be seen as retrograde or conservative, foreclosing the possibility of bringing forth a different philosophy and politics of time, for example one that rescues memory as a site of struggle. As stated by Vázquez, the rescue of memory is not necessarily a conservative move. For him, the possibility to experience the past (i.e., not to reify it) is not essentialist, but rebellious.

From Contemporary Dance to Contemporaneous Dance

Choreographic Re-enactment and the Experience of Contemporaneity After (Post-)Modernity

Timmy De Laet

Passing by the Berlin Altes Museum in 2005, the attention of tourists must have been drawn not only to the building's monumental façade, but also to a range of capitalized neon letters that were flickering from behind the gallery of pillars that encloses the entrance. As the brightly red sentence was shouting, "ALL ART HAS BEEN CONTEMPORARY," bystanders could hardly but wonder if the renowned historical collection of ancient bronzes, Greek vases, Roman sculptures, or even the notoriously timeless beauty of Nefertiti's bust hidden behind the museum's walls could indeed be called "contemporary." The seemingly simple but ambiguous phrase was devised by the Italian artist Maurizio Nannucci, who first showed the light sculpture at a gallery in Berlin in 2004. After seeing the work there, the principal of the Egyptian Museum, Dietrich Wildung, invited Nannucci to transfer it to one of Berlin's most prestigious institutions devoted to ancient art.¹ This change of location obviously amplified the puzzling self-consciousness already present in the original statement: as a contemporary work of art, it claimed *contemporaneity* as a presumably universal condition for all works of art, including the historical artifacts belonging to times thought to be long bygone.

Even if Nannucci's phrase is appealing because of its apparent candor, the grammar of the sentence solicits further thought, as it allows for two apparently incommensurable readings. If the emphasis lies on the idea that "*all art* has been contemporary," the notion of "contemporary art" as a general label we commonly use for – roughly speaking – post-war, avant-garde artistic practices is revealed as an empty signifier. That is, if *all art* can be called "contemporary," the word loses its potential to distinguish between the different types or even historical stages that mark the development of art, thereby ruling out contemporaneity as a distinctive feature to structure art history. On the other hand, if one chooses to zoom in on the verbal tense in the sentence that "all art *has been* contemporary," one would discover a paradoxical temporality in Nannucci's statement. His choice for the present perfect of the verb "to be" suggests a duration that extends from the past until now. The expression "has been" thus indicates that contemporaneity might be thought of as a condition that belongs as much to the present as it does to the past. From the moment something is characterized as contemporary, it

already slips into the passing of time (it “was” called contemporary), yet this slipping away does not necessarily mean that it stops being contemporary, insofar as the present perfect tense implies that it continues to be so.

This double reading of Nannucci’s neon-lit sentence is echoed in art theorist Terry Smith’s reflections on the common understanding of so-called “contemporary art.” As Smith points out, “contemporary art” is, quite basically, used as a label for “most – why not all? – of the art that is being made now,” from which it follows that “it is simply, totally contemporaneous” (“Contemporary Art” 683). Yet Smith hastens to trouble this generalizing and all too easy attribution of the hallmark “contemporaneity,” together with its twin term “presentness,” to “contemporary art.” Bringing to mind the *Oxford English Dictionary* definitions of “contemporary,” Smith singles out the fourth lemma, in which the meaning of the word is – remarkably enough – equated with the “modern,” or even the “ultra-modern,” and further extended to “art of a markedly *avant-garde* quality.” This extension, the lemma suggests, stems from the idea that the contemporary-as-modern is not only “characteristic of the present period,” but also “especially up-to-date” (703; original italics). On a closer look, the *OED*’s fourth definition of “contemporary” seems to contain all the complexities that have arisen from the tension between lived time and standardized time, which was essentially an invention of nineteenth-century modernity. From the moment clocks started ticking, according to uniform measures artificially imposed by convention,² it became possible to be ahead of time, or in delay, whereas keeping “up-to-date” – both literally and proverbially – increasingly posed a challenge in world that started to develop at an ever-accelerating pace. According to Smith, however, there is a qualitative difference between the expeditious and largely anticipative time of modernity – which could still march under the banner of progress towards the future – and the temporality characteristic of our contemporary moment. What we have lost along the way, he explains, is the unifying hope in a time yet to come, which leads him to define contemporaneity as follows:

Contemporaneity consists precisely in the constant experience of radical disjunctures of perception, mismatching ways of seeing and valuing the same world, in the actual coincidence of asynchronous temporalities, in the jostling contingency of various cultural and social multiplicities, all thrown together in ways that highlight the fast-growing inequalities within and between them. (Smith, “Contemporary Art” 703)

Rather than a singular temporal dimension in which the “contemporary” equals the “now” or the “present,” contemporaneity marks an era that is out of synch not only with the past and the future, but also with itself. Continuous technological innovations, global migration, or the rise of religious fundamentalism are all phenomena that, for Smith, underlie a new cultural regime in which time and temporality are dazzling rather than directional. Moreover, while the discontinuous nature of contemporaneity exacerbates a societal and subjectively felt condition of estrangement that was already incipiently present in modernity, it also signals a move away from postmodernity, which for Smith was too exclusively a Western affair that has proven its incompetence in accounting for our present globalized culture.³

Even though Terry Smith’s view on contemporaneity is weakened by some serious flaws (to which I come back below), his relatively concise definition of contemporaneity has become a key reference point in art theory, where the underlying implications of the general denominator “contemporary art” have been a topic of recent and ongoing debates.⁴ In this respect, it is rather surprising that the spearheading work in this domain has hardly found entrance in dance and performance studies, even though related questions of time and temporality have been on top of the agenda here as well.⁵ Similarly, the equally tangled issue of how historians deal with the presumed distance between the past and the present has emerged as a central concern in theory of history, but neither in this case are there hardly, if any, cross-disciplinary connections that could contribute to the insights developed in each field.⁶

In this contribution, I can offer only a modest beginning of what might grow into a larger cross-disciplinary dialogue, one that would confront possible answers to the perhaps impossible question of what function time fulfills in art, performance, and history. Here, I will focus on how these three strands coincide in the practice of so-called “dance re-enactment,” as I want to take the tendency amongst contemporary choreographers to revisit dance works from the past as an impetus to reflect on what this retrospective interest might mean for the contemporaneity of dance. Choreographic re-enactment can be easily dismissed as an instance of what Elizabeth Outka has termed the “commodified authentic,” a category she introduces to point out how the current commercialization of cultural heritage tends to turn experience and nostalgia into commodifiable products. While some dance re-enactments can certainly be ranged under Outka’s “commodified authentic,” my starting point here is one specific strand of choreographic re-enactment that takes a different direction. What I want to

explore is the perhaps basic but remarkable fact that quite a few choreographers have been turning to re-enactment as a means to return to the tradition of modern dance and, by the same token, to the historical epoch we have come to call “modernity.” With regard to the complexities of time and contemporaneity, this attraction to modern dance and modernity is particularly meaningful, since it suggests how our “present” cultural condition is still in the process of dealing with the incisive developments that changed the course of Western societies from the nineteenth century onwards. Contemporaneity, as pursued and experienced in dance re-enactment, often sits squarely between modernity and postmodernity, generating an ambiguous temporality that can only be understood by looking *at* as well as *beyond* dance as such.

Modernity Revisited

Looking across the heterogeneous practice of dance re-enactment, one readily stumbles upon several examples that take their source material from the heydays of modern dance: *A Mary Wigman Dance Evening* by Fabián Barba (2008) presents the audience with a dance program as it would have been performed by the expressionist dancer Mary Wigman in the late 1930s; Raimund Hoghe returns to the modernization of classical ballet in pieces such as *Sacre – The Rite of Spring* (2004), or *L’Après-Midi* (2007); Faustin Linyekula’s *La Création du Monde, 1923-2012* (2012) reconstructs a notorious work that came to be known as the “first negro ballet,” created by choreographer Jean Börlin in collaboration with the avant-garde painter Fernand Léger; Olga de Soto’s *Débords* (2012) gives a documentary account of the memories Kurt Jooss’s anti-war ballet *The Green Table* (1934) had left in the people who either saw the piece or performed in it as a dancer; Trajal Harrell’s *Caen Amour* (2016) playfully evokes Loie Fuller’s innovative experiments with dance costumes and the ways in which the often exuberant dresses epitomized her quest for a renewed and allegedly unconstrained dancing style. Regardless of the ostentatious differences between each of these works in terms of aesthetics and approach, they all return to early twentieth century modern dance, a period that in dance history is generally bookmarked as a vivid rejuvenation of choreographic techniques, theatrical staging, and bodily expression.

Listed together, these re-enactments and the pieces on which they draw already indicate that “modern dance” – not unlike the label “contemporary art” – is anything but a homogeneous category and rather encompasses a diverse range of practices that have been emerging from the late 1800s onwards and whose only

common feature might be the continued effort to overthrow the predominance of choreographic classicism that has been shaping the art of dance ever since ballet became the standard form.⁷ Seeking to liberate the body from codified movement and foregrounding the often charismatic persona of the choreographer as dancer, modern dance pioneers – such as Loie Fuller (1862-1928), Isadora Duncan (1877-1927), or Martha Graham (1894-1991) – initiated a wave of artistic innovations that eventually would grow into “postmodern” and, one or two decennia later, into “contemporary dance.” At least, this is how the traditional narrative of dance history goes, which makes it appear as if the succession of different era also find its expression in consecutive choreographic genres, types of dance, or – more broadly – distinct movement paradigms. But this kind of periodization, as dance historian Alexandra Carter points out, rests upon “organizing principles [that] are not neutral,” since “they give rise to meaning as phenomena are interpreted within the critical frames of reference that belong to each period” (41). In the case of dance, this has led to a situation in which “the continuity of modernism is rarely addressed alongside the radical changes of postmodernism” (43). In other words, when it is the label that comes to define the dance, we are easily thrown back into a linear chronology that wipes out internal differences in favor of general categories. This is a story of diversification through unification, insofar as the diachronic picture does not seem to allow for the manner in which synchronic depth is, paradoxically, defined by asynchronous rhythms.

Choreographic re-enactment intends to defy the generic periodization of dance, most basically by attempting to unveil the persistence of the past in the present. It must be admitted, however, that even this intention easily slips into its reverse effect. As some scholars have already warned for re-enactment’s inherent risk to “collapse temporalities” (Agnew 309) or to “flatten certain temporal economies” (Elswit 12), we must be wary of the fact that re-enactment might mimic the effect it endeavors to undermine. This danger becomes all the more acute when re-enactment is characterized, reductively, as a mere contemporary phenomenon that covers up temporal differences rather than exploiting them. In this respect, Terry Smith’s definition of contemporaneity as “the actual coincidence of asynchronous temporalities” (“Contemporary Art” 703) opens up a potentially fruitful perspective to probe how choreographic re-enactment not only aims at a convergence of different times, but also explores their ineluctable divergence. That is, while dance re-enactment might seek to find out how the past continues to influence the field of dance as it stands now, the *representation* of historical works unavoidably marks a difference with times presumably gone by,

establishing an ambiguous, if not liminal, middle zone where the past and the present might meet, yet without losing their respective singularity.

It is precisely from this perspective that the apparent renewal of interest in modern dance amongst contemporary choreographers is not only a salient tendency, but also a theoretically interesting phenomenon. For if modernity is known for inaugurating a new relationship with time and history,⁸ the current return to the cultural and artistic expressions to which this era gave rise might be indicative of a broader change in our attitude towards the past, the present, and the future. As much is suggested by Terry Smith, who claims that contemporaneity retains from modernity the idea of a “pregnant present ... but without its subsequent contract with the future” (703). Innovations continue – technologically, scientifically, and artistically – but the utopian hope in a redeeming time yet to come is what we have lost along the way. The largely unacknowledged problem with Smith’s theorization of contemporaneity, however, is that, even though he asserts that “in contemporaneity, periodization is impossible” (ibid.),⁹ his own account of the most conspicuous features of our time seems to suffer precisely from the inclination to periodize. The paradox that undermines Smith’s position is, more precisely, his assumption that the impossibility to periodize constitutes the period of contemporaneity. In this respect, the overall framework he draws does suggest a linear succession from modernity to postmodernity to contemporaneity, each of which are only in a limited sense related to one another.¹⁰

What Smith seems to be putting aside is the by now famous claim of Jürgen Habermas that modernity is an “unfinished project,” or the later Jean-François Lyotard’s view that postmodernity ought to be understood as a “rewriting of modernity,” rather than as a new cultural paradigm in its own right. Smith’s reluctance to give modernity a more central place in his view on contemporaneity stems from his wariness that to overemphasize the impact of modernity is to relegate all present phenomena to “modernity’s waiting room,” with the result that “you will fall short of grasping the complexities of the present” (“Rethinking Modernism” 312).¹¹ While it is certainly true that drawing a straight line between modernity and contemporaneity can only lead to unwarranted forms of *Hineininterpretierung* that reduce the past to the present and vice versa, downplaying the incisive changes that modernity has primed in western societies would be equally unjustified. The arguably only way in which, according to Smith, modernity and artistic modernism persist in contemporaneity and contemporary art is in a tendency he dubs “remodernism,” which he defines as “the on-going (and market-dominating) recursive renovations of artistic media”

that were first inaugurated by the historical avant-garde and which continue to steer the art world up until today (“Defining Contemporaneity” 162).¹² Even though Smith is anything but depreciative of this so-called “remodernism,” it does seem to entail not much more than a continuous yet sheer recycling of avant-gardist art strategies, akin to Peter Bürger’s diagnosis that the neo-avant-garde can only imitate the once authentic revolutionary gesture of the historical avant-garde (1974). This, in turn, is closely related to Marshall Berman’s assumption, which he develops most fully in his often-cited book *All that is Solid Melts into Air* (1982), that postmodernity can “only re-enact, rather than overcome, modernism’s deepest troubles and impasses” (Berman qtd. in Osborne, *The Politics of Time* 4).

In order to avoid getting hopelessly entangled in the much-discussed distinction between modernity and postmodernity, I want to focus briefly on Berman’s probably inadvertent use of the term “re-enact,” which is at once significant and troubling. In the first place, Berman’s claim feeds into the common contention that the emergence of re-enactment is nothing else than just the latest addition to an already familiar list of typically postmodernist genres or practices, such as pastiche or recycle.¹³ Some dancers, although not many, do align their re-enactment work with postmodernism. Betsy Fisher, for example, writes that “reconstructing dances is intrinsically post-modern because one has to take the dance out of its frame, analyze it, and perform it in a completely different setting than it was originally conceived” (17). Whether these characteristics would count as postmodernist is doubtful, but the point is that equating re-enactment with postmodernism seems to deprive re-enactment from its ability to cause temporal friction, that is, from its potential critical sting that would make it go beyond superficial imitation (and, by the same gesture, beyond the idea that imitation is all there is left) and towards a deeper, perhaps uneasy, co-mingling of times. Even though this latter point is implicit in Berman’s view on the relationship between modernity and postmodernity opens up, he decides not to pursue it. Instead, it is Peter Osborne who in *The Politics of Time* (1995) picks up on Berman’s suggestion, arguing that “if current uses of ‘postmodern’ and its cognates paradoxically remain with the framework of ‘modernity’, they do more than just repeat its existing forms” (4). Denouncing the fact that “a reflexivity about the temporal structure of modernity ... has hitherto been lacking,” Osborne raises the tantalizing question as to “what form of temporality is at stake in the use of ‘modernity’ as a category of historical periodization such that the paradox of the postmodern could arise?” (5).

Many years have already passed since Osborne made these claims and while we might find ourselves beyond possibly worn-out debates on the differences between modernity and postmodernity, it can be argued that there are some unresolved issues we still carry with us, and which reverberate in current discussions on contemporaneity. Osborne's more recent work testifies to this and, as such, it provides a useful entrance to make the notion of contemporaneity more productive for gaining insight into both the stakes and possible impact of choreographic re-enactment.

The Era of Contemporaneity

In *Anywhere or Not at All* (2014), Peter Osborne avows that “the very idea of contemporaneity as a *condition* is new,” but he also alerts us that “the widespread diffusion of the term” and its general usage as “a simple label or periodizing category” ignores the “increasingly complex temporal-existential, social and political meanings” that accrue to the notion of contemporaneity (17). Whereas, for Osborne, contemporaneity does signal a new era, it is – paradoxically – only the specific and inextricable relationship with other times that can define this era as new. Focusing on the prefix “con-” in “con-temporaneity,” Osborne defines the term as “a coming together not simply ‘in’ time, but *of* times,” from which he derives an understanding of “the present” as “a coming together of *different but equally ‘present’* temporalities,” which ultimately leads to “a temporal unity in disjunction, or a *disjunctive unity of present times*” (ibid.). It is not difficult to see how Osborne's understanding of contemporaneity comes close to Terry Smith's definition cited above, as it is the principle of disjunction that brings both their accounts into unison. The main difference between their respective views, however, is that the asynchronic temporality that defines contemporaneity derives for Smith solely from our current globalized world, while for Osborne it is also the legacy of modernity – both as a historical period and a cultural concept that articulates a particular relationship with time – that continues to shape contemporaneity, even though this persistent influence undergoes profound changes in times of globalization. In this sense, Osborne conceptualizes contemporaneity as “the temporality of globalization” that, even if it can be regarded as a “new historical temporality,” importantly “*interacts* with the temporality of modernity – the differential temporality of the new – in fiendishly complicated ways” (“The Postconceptual Condition” 23; italics added).

Particularly useful for my purposes here is that Osborne applies his “historico-philosophical conception of contemporaneity” to art, by tracing how “the

intertwining of modernity and contemporaneity as temporal forms” results in the emergence of what he calls “postconceptual art” (25).¹⁴ Although the notion of “postconceptual art” is somewhat infelicitous due to the suggestion that it chronologically follows after (“post-”) 1960s conceptual art, Osborne emphatically clarifies that he is rather pointing at “an art premised [sic] on the complex historical experience of conceptual art, broadly construed in such a way as to register the fundamental mutation of the ontology of the artwork carried by that legacy” (ibid.). Of the six features that, according to Osborne, characterize this legacy, there is one that is of pertinent importance to the manner in which choreographic re-enactment can be considered a symptom of contemporaneity and which he describes as “the radically *distributive* – that is, irreducibly relational – unity of the individual artwork across the totality of its multiple material instantiations, at any particular time” (*Anywhere or Not at All* 48; italics added).

The seemingly contradictory notion of an artwork’s “distributive unity” reflects the disjunctive coming-together of times that Osborne deems characteristic of contemporaneity. It expresses how art finds its realization in a multitude of media and, consequently, how any artistic work transcends its anchorage in the sheer here-and-now of the present. As such, it comes close to the idea of “dispersion” that Foucault foregrounds in *The Archaeology of Knowledge* ([1969] 2002) and which he uses to undermine the striving towards “total description” in traditional historiography (11). Criticizing the unifying narratives construed by historians who work to streamline the capricious courses of past events by focusing on causal relationships, homogenizing analogies, and periodization, Foucault proposes to embrace the twin ideas of discontinuity and dispersion in order to magnify the archaeological undercurrent in historiography.

Combined with Foucault’s dispersive archaeology, Osborne’s view on the distributive nature of art in the disjunctive era of contemporaneity brings to light what is at stake in choreographic re-enactment. The deliberate intention to re-stage choreographies from the past shows, as also Osborne would contend, that “the” artwork cannot be reduced to a singular and supposedly original instantiation, but rather spreads out across various re-workings that might alter the source material but which nevertheless revive it.¹⁵ As a matter of fact, re-staging is only one part of this virtually incessant distribution, insofar as the practice of re-enactment clearly proves that videos, photographs, drawings, and other archival documents are all equally important for dance to live on. Not only do these media and relics provide choreographers with the necessary resources to

create their re-enactments, but they are also the means by which re-enactment creates, in turn, its own afterlife, which might even be further amplified by the manner in which the work – in the aftermath of its staging – continues to travel through digital recordings, social networks, or academic publications that all in some way touch upon the “original” event.

Admittedly, this is a fairly basic observation, but it does exemplify how the existence of the artwork is predicated on multiple mediations that each, in one way or another, contribute to its appearance and significance. Together with Foucault, then, we can begin to see how the constitutive dispersion of art should also spill over into the manner in which art is historicized. Rather than aiming for neat narratives in which periodization precedes the characterization of past events, the migratory dynamics of “the” artwork – which re-enactment only intensifies – should result in an archaeological historiography that acknowledges and incorporates the multiple sources that give existence to art.

Thus, in general terms, re-enactment can act as a driving force behind the wheel that spins the threads of dance history, weaving together an ever expanding network of events, residues, and remnants in which the past overlaps with the present. What remains to be accounted for, however, is the specific relationship with modernity that re-enactment allows to explore and which seems to exert a renewed appeal to contemporary choreographers. If, for Osborne, the distributed conditions of contemporary art reflect the current era of contemporaneity, it also marks the transition from nineteenth-century modernity to what he terms “global modernity,” which is the name Osborne attributes to the present-day world. This global modernity is, on the most concrete level, propelled by the accumulative expansion of capitalism across the world, which simultaneously connects and divides different populations who all expect, hope, or are required to jump on the same train towards the promised land of prosperity. While this common direction projects a fictional *unity* on the disjunctive inequalities that continue to exist between distinct cultures, it also establishes a transnational *differentiation* that affirms “a multiplicity of subjects, constituted by relations of temporally-coded spatial difference, within a self-consciously coeval time” (“Global Modernity and the Contemporary” 83).¹⁶ It is precisely because of this dialectical dynamics between actual differentiation and projective unification that Osborne regards global modernity as an “operative fiction” that is nevertheless palpably real.

According to Osborne, global modernity thus continues – and perhaps even amplifies – the grand project first inaugurated by historical modernity (the era when the sworn belief in capitalist progression took shape). Yet it also alters the modalities by which the continued adherence to progress steers the era of globalized contemporaneity. Elucidating the difference between these two types of modernities, Osborne eventually resorts to the function of the image in contemporary culture:

If modernity projects a present of permanent transition, forever reaching beyond itself, the contemporary fixes or enfolds such transitoriness within the duration of a conjecture, or at its most extreme, the stasis of a present moment. Such presentness finds its representational form in the annihilation of temporality by the image. It is in the photographic and post-photographic culture of the image that the contemporaneity of the contemporary is most clearly expressed. The image interrupts the temporalities of the modern and nature alike. (Osborne, *Anywhere or Not at All* 24)¹⁷

For Osborne, it is the temporary stasis of the (post-)photographic image, together with the moment of presentness it provokes, that exemplifies the condition of contemporaneity, which is no longer geared towards a future-to-come, but rather takes the present as the sole measure for the constitution of historical time. “The present of the contemporary is becoming shorter and shorter,” Osborne writes (*ibid.*). It is especially this hallmark of contemporaneity that is visualized through photography’s supposed ability to provide a snapshot of reality, which seems to freeze the image beyond the ravages of time. In addition, with the digitalization of photography and its production of what Osborne calls post-photographic images, this condensation of time is even exacerbated, insofar as the translation of the image into binary codes has the effect that “time is not immobilized or engorged so much as obliterated” (130).

At this critical juncture, we are confronted with the limitations of Osborne’s view on contemporaneity and his suggestion that the standstill is the preeminent figure that defines the temporality of the present. For if we are to transfer Osborne’s stance on contemporaneity to the field of dance in general and to the practice of re-enactment in particular, it appears that his emphasis on the momentary stillness of the image as an interruption of modernity’s penchant for movement highlights only one side of contemporaneity’s alleged reconfiguration of modernity’s temporal structures. To elucidate this claim, it is useful to consider how also dance studies has devoted specific attention to stillness or to the so-

called “still-act,” which from the 1990s onwards began to play an increasingly prominent role in choreographic composition.¹⁸ Different theorizations of the meaning of stillness show that the same figure allows for diametrically opposed views on dance’s temporality, which suggests that stasis in itself is not sufficient to account for choreographic contemporaneity. In the section that follows, I will trace these divergent lines of thought in order to argue that the rise of re-enactment necessitates a revision of dance’s relationship with time and to re-introduce movement into the structure of contemporaneity.

Modernity and Movement

In dance studies, it is primarily André Lepecki’s 2006 book *Exhausting Dance* that offered one of the first and most thorough accounts of how predominant views on dance are indebted to the cultural legacy of nineteenth-century modernity. According to Lepecki, the common equation of dance with dynamic flow and uninterrupted movement can be traced back to modernity’s exalted glorification of mobility and progress as the vital forces that pushed the present towards the future.¹⁹ Contemporary choreographers, however, undermine the generally unquestioned belief that dance can be aligned with movement by introducing stillness, or the refusal to move, as a legitimate choreographic gesture. By means of the “still-act,” Lepecki argues, the dancer “initiates a performative critique of his or her participation in the general economy of mobility that informs, supports, and reproduces the ideological formations of late capitalist modernity” (16).

Next to disrupting the typically modernist penchant for continuous movement, the act of standing still also challenges habitual views on dance’s ontology. The persistent idea that dance is ephemeral because bodily movement can never be repeated exactly nor properly stored as a tangible archival relic is, according to Lepecki, brought to its zero-point from the moment the body stops moving. “It is the very notion of [the] present,” he writes, “as [a] series of forever lost ‘nows’ that can no longer be sustained” (130). But insofar as the immobile body suspends the continuity of both movement and perception, it also allows for other temporalities to erupt, disclosing the multiple times that always already undergird dance, even if it appears to be bound to the present.²⁰ From this perspective, when contemporary dance opposes modernity’s imperative to continue moving towards an unknown and arguably hopeful future, it exposes how dance’s contemporaneity stems from – as Peter Osborne would phrase it – “a coming

together of *different but equally 'present'* temporalities” (Anywhere or Not at All 17).

Despite Lepecki's valuable attempt to complicate current understandings of dance's temporality, his emphasis on the still-act seems to provide merely one possible perspective on how the present of performance might be infused with other times. Moreover, and more troubling, the same starting point can be easily recuperated within a discourse that sees the expressive gesture of stillness as a sign of dance's unique and unilateral relationship with time. In his 2009 essay “Scène and Contemporaneity” dance scholar Frédéric Pouillaude provides a poignant example of this recuperation that assigns an entirely different function to the so-called still-act.

For Pouillaude, the introduction of stillness is part of a larger tendency he calls “the reflective work of performance” (131), which marks the heightened interest amongst choreographers to question the constitutive principles of the medium dance. Pouillaude regards this “reflective work” as a “mutation” of choreographic practice, one that “would be neither modern nor postmodern,” but rather “*contemporary*, in an extra- or parahistorical sense” (134). This “extra- or parahistorical” contemporaneity of choreography is, according to Pouillaude, not grounded in the dancing body as such, but rather – as indicated by the title of his essay – an effect of the body's appearance on the theatrical scene. Based on the assumption that the scene enables the “coexistence” of living bodies, or the “explicit exchange between performers and onlookers (*regardants*)” (127), Pouillaude proposes an understanding of contemporaneity that is not related to “an historical figure, an epoch,” but instead points to a more abstract “structure of temporality,” which in the case of dance consists of “a neutral simultaneity” (*ibid.*). It is, in other words, the mere being together in time that constitutes the contemporaneity characteristic of choreography.²¹

Pouillaude's grasping on stillness as a sign of dance's “extra- or parahistorical” contemporaneity amounts to nothing less than a reversal of Lepecki's argument. Whereas stillness, for Lepecki, opens up towards the multiple temporalities of choreography, Pouillaude considers the very same gesture as an inward strategy that is primarily concerned with dance's own mediality and which seems to place choreography outside or above history.²² Pouillaude's understanding of contemporaneity thus bears no relationship at all with the formative and arguably continued influence of modernity on contemporary choreography. As such, he appears to corroborate Fredric Jameson's fierce plea for replacing the incessant

obsession with modernity for what he, in his 2002 book *A Singular Modernity*, terms “the ontology of the present.”

Such an ontology of the present, Jameson explains, “would not only wish to register the forces of past and future” and the manner in which they are thought to influence the present, but it “would also be intent on diagnosing, as I am, *the enfeeblement and virtual eclipse* of these forces within our current present” (*A Singular Modernity* 214; italics added).²³ Key to Jameson’s diagnose that only the present provides the purview of our time is his premise that modernity can stand as a synonym for capitalism. To the extent that capitalism fosters the homogenization of time and space through its relentless imperative for a maximized and globalized circulation of money, modernity can be seen to dissolve into postmodernity and even into what is currently called contemporaneity. From this perspective, time can indeed only be self-enfolding, if not flattening, rather than being able to enclose other times.

One possible way out of the temporal deadlock that Jameson seems to be construing is to read his book as an implicit response to Shmuel Noad Eisenstadt’s often-quoted essay “Multiple Modernities” (2000). In contrast to Jameson, who tends to level out synchronic differences under the diachronic banner of capitalism, Eisenstadt argues that “the actual developments in modernizing societies have refuted the homogenizing and hegemonic assumptions of this Western program of modernity” (1). Broadening the scope beyond the West, Eisenstadt observes that, in spite of the perhaps common aim to seek for prosperity through modernization, the overarching project of modernity has developed at various paces in different parts of the world, including “attempts at ‘de-Westernization,’ depriving the West of its monopoly on modernity” (24).²⁴ While Eisenstadt’s emphasis on the multiplicity of modernity might seem quite obvious, it has important implications for the manner in which modernity is historicized as well as for the function temporality might play within our allegedly “present” era of contemporaneity. What Eisenstadt aims to undermine is the idea that “the modern project, at least in terms of the classical formulation that held sway for the last two centuries, is exhausted” (3). While this apparent exhaustion has prompted Francis Fukuyama to proclaim the “end of history,” Eisenstadt opposes that “the trends of globalization show nothing so clearly as the *continual reinterpretation* of the cultural program of modernity” (24; italics added).²⁵

It is interesting to note that the title of André Lepecki's book, *Exhausting Dance*, gives expression to the very same kind of exhaustion that Eisenstadt detects in the ongoing discussions on modernity and history. However, by countering the alleged exhaustion of modernity with a dynamics of "continual reinterpretation," Eisenstadt offers an opportunity to rethink the temporality of contemporaneity. This seems especially important in light of current debates on contemporaneity, which tend to foreground its distinctive newness, at the expense of its relationship with other previous times that is nevertheless regarded as its constitutive feature. As Keith Moxey observes in his critique on Terry Smith's claim that contemporaneity defies periodization, the underlying assumption is that "history has come to an end," leading to a "perspective [that] eliminates not only differences among moments in time but also the possibility that there might be other ways of telling time" (44). In other words, the irony of the increased attention for what might constitute contemporaneity is that it slips into a peculiar *de*-temporalized view that, by renouncing the possibility of periodization, dispenses with temporality altogether. "A featureless contemporaneity," Moxey writes, "registers differences in neither time nor culture" (ibid.).

Retrieving Time

"We cannot not periodize," Fredric Jameson posits in *A Singular Modernity* (29), obviously echoing his earlier dictum in *The Political Unconscious* (1981) that one must "always historicize" (ix). What remains unclear, however, is how we are to historicize the so-called era of contemporaneity, given that periodization is precisely the tendency that contemporaneity is said to defy. We are, in other words, left with a double bind that ties contemporaneity to a contemporary condition that, through the very gesture of molding together different times, becomes *timeless*.

It is here, perhaps, where the conspicuous return to modernity in dance by means of re-enactment becomes most meaningful, revealing its potential to recalibrate the experience of time in times of contemporaneity. For if modernity marks a decisive change in the experience of time, the re-doubling of this experience in choreographic re-enactment aims to hark back to as well as to push forward the temporality that conditions dance, both modern and contemporary. The deliberate intention to put the history of dance back onto the stage, by re-living, re-inventing, and re-embodiment works from the past, proposes a different attitude to the possible persistence of the past within the present, not only because it illuminates how the present of dance is always already infused by historical traces,

but also – and more importantly – because it demonstrates how dance is able to *historicize the current cultural condition we are tempted to call “contemporaneity.”* Rather than reinforcing the idea that history has ended, choreographic re-enactment inaugurates a renewed beginning – or, rather, a continued recommencement – of history. From this point of view, the apparent appeal of modern dance for contemporary choreographers might reside in the fact that it provides one possible entrance to elucidate, in a decidedly preposterous manner, the kind of temporality that connects our so-called contemporaneity with historical modernity.

Most concretely, re-enactments of modern dance signal, above all, that the previously predominant emphasis on expanding movement idioms by means of still-acts – or, more generally, through the pervasive use of release techniques, improvisation, or other methods geared towards physical relaxation – is on the rebound, giving way to other registers of bodily expression, such as physical tension, theatricality, or flowing movement. This begs the question as to what this (re-)turn towards a supposedly out-dated choreographic aesthetics of moving and appearing on stage means from a broader cultural perspective. According to Ramsay Burt, the dancing bodies of modern choreographers, such as Martha Graham or Mary Wigman, can be called “alien bodies,” since they reinserted – amongst other things – a degree of “primitivism in the arts” as a response to the fact that “modernity undermined ideologies of national identity” and therefore “created needs for new definitions of origins” (14). These alien bodies thus reflected the alienation that people themselves might feel in modernizing societies, producing a certain recognition through the display of strangeness. It might certainly be that a similar search for roots is what draws contemporary choreographers to the tradition of modern dance and that re-staging this legacy corresponds to the alienation people now might feel in a globalized world. On further thought, however, there seems to be a more complex temporal dynamics at work in choreographic re-enactment: while a return to the roots of dance still suggests a rather linear going-back to the past of dance as it once has been, the re-enactment of historical dance works is rather concerned with the incongruous congruence of different times. Put otherwise, rather than wanting to restore origins (or, at least, the feeling thereof), re-enactment is about time as such.²⁶

Modernity is known as the era in which the experience of time becomes notoriously ambiguous: as the past loses its formative function, the present becomes the measure of all things, even while it is geared towards the future. With re-enactment, the weight of the past is obviously revalued, but only to

exacerbate the ambiguity of temporality that was already present in modernity and which is now turned into a condition of so-called contemporaneity. In this respect, if we follow André Lepecki's argument that modernity inaugurated the equation of dance with flowing movement and if one of the defining characteristics of contemporary dance is that it has defied this alignment through the introduction of still-acts or other ordinary gestures, then we are impelled to consider the possibility that the emergence of choreographic re-enactment marks a transition from contemporary dance to what can be called *contemporaneous dance*, even if this might imply a somewhat improper use of the word "contemporaneous" that broadens its meaning beyond common parlance.

"Belonging to the same time or period," is the first definition the *Oxford English Dictionary* gives for the entry "contemporaneous," but the most significant addition is that the word also denotes "existing or occurring at the same time."²⁷ This second meaning suggests that, next to the conventional usage of "contemporaneous" as a signifier of a singular time, it might also include the occurrence of different times "at the same time." While this is in line with Peter Osborne's theorization of contemporaneity, we could push his ideas further by re-inserting modernity as the interval that re-enactment tries to restore and to rethink. Looking back from the perspective of contemporaneity at the work of pioneering modern dancers, such as Loie Fuller, Mary Wigman, or Vaslav Nijinsky, the avant-gardistic aspirations that propelled their practice become a function of the past, rather than an anticipation of the future. This means that we are at a point in time where we are able to reconsider the drive towards innovation that we have inherited from modernity and which continues to haunt us up until today. The fact that dance re-enactments such as Fabián Barba's *A Mary Wigman Dance Evening* or Faustin Linyekula's *Création du monde* present not only moving bodies – since, obviously, the moving body has never been entirely absent from choreographic practice – but also use the body to put history into motion, suggest that the contemporaneity of dance might consist precisely in being contemporaneous, as a coming together of times, rather than in its upholding of the label "contemporary" as the primary token of being up-to-date and in pace with the present.

My suggestion, then, to rethink contemporary dance as a practice of contemporaneous dance ultimately implies that contemporaneity can only be defined as a new period to the extent that it allows to look back on both modernity and postmodernity from the vantage point of a contemporaneous

perspective that shows how the past continues to move on, in the multiple sense of moving with us, through us, and beyond us.

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¹ On the blog page "Berichte aus dem Museum" (Messages from the Museum) of the Society for the Promotion of the Egyptian Museum Berlin, Dietrich Wildung recounts how he encountered Nannucci's work and how the phrase exemplified for him the Museum's intention to restore the connection between ancient art and contemporary times by developing new ways of exhibiting historical relics, artefacts, and artworks (Wildung 2004). To be entirely accurate, I should point out that the bust of Nefertiti was on display in the Altes Museum only between 2005 and 2009, when the Neues Museum (where the Egyptian Collection is normally housed) was being renovated.

² Clock time was officially introduced in 1884 at the Prime Meridian Conference in Washington, where delegates from twenty-five countries decided to equate the length of one day with twenty-four hours and to divide the globe into twenty-four time zones (Kern 12). According to Robert Hassan, the introduction of clock time constituted what he terms "the first empire of speed," as it led to an unprecedented acceleration of society (41-66).

³ Smith describes “postmodernity as a fate of the West (or, at least, of many parts and elements of it, but not the world,” claiming that it fails to “explain enough of what is happening in what remains of the West as the world migrates to it, everyone changing as they come and go.” This convinces him that “it might be time to grasp a more supple set of ways of being in time now and to shift to another set of terms,” which he finds in the notion of “contemporaneity” (“Contemporary Art” 702).

⁴ The clearest expression of this resurgent interest in the meaning of the label “contemporary art” is probably the “Questionnaire on ‘The Contemporary’” that was published in 2009 in the journal *October* and which asked critics and curators about their view on the implications of calling art “contemporary” (Foster). Since then, several edited volumes and other articles – some of which I will refer to throughout this text – have continued to pursue similar questions. The interest in the “contemporary” is, however, still growing, as indicated by the conference “The Contemporary Contemporary: Representations and Experiences of Contemporaneity” organized by the Aarhus University (Denmark) in June 2017.

⁵ Reflections on the temporality of performance have been re-galvanized by Rebecca Schneider’s *Performing Remains* (2011) and further explored in various other volumes (see, for instance, Jones and Heathfield; Grant et al.). Most recently, the terms seem to be shifting towards the idea of “contemporaneity,” as evidenced by the symposium organized by Ghent University (from which also my present contribution results) and the fact that also the last edition of the triennial German Tanzkongress (Dance Congress) took contemporaneity as its general theme (see <http://www.tanzkongress.de/en/home.html>).

⁶ For recent discussions on historical distance, see Phillips; den Hollander et al.; Kellner.

⁷ In *Literature, Modernism, and Dance* (2013), Susan Jones explains that modern dance’s innovations entailed more than the somewhat clichéd image of dancing on bare feet, since there are various formalist counterparts that were rather invested in abstracting movement, while also ballet itself was subjected to thorough revision by choreographers, such as Mikhail Fokine, who tried to purify it from the predominance of narrative (5-6; 88-89). Similar correctives to stereotyped ideas of modern dance can be found in the special issue of *Modernist Cultures* on “Modernism and Dance” (Preston).

⁸ The authoritative study on how modernity brought about an incisive reconfiguration of the experience of time is Reinhart Koselleck's *Vergangene Zukunft: Zur Semantik geschichtlicher Zeiten* (1979), which was translated in English only in 2004 as *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time*. After Koselleck, various authors have joined his project to probe the complexities of modernity's temporality (see, for instance, Doane; Fritzsche).

⁹ Smith has reiterated this claim at various other occasions. In *What is Contemporary Art?* (2012), he writes: "when it comes to considering the present and the future, periodization may no longer be possible" (256-257). And, more recently, in "Defining Contemporaneity" (2015), he asserts: "in contemporary conditions periodization is impossible" (160).

¹⁰ For a similar critique, see McLean (esp. 21-23) and Andrew McNamara's review essay.

¹¹ The notion of "modernity's waiting room" is one that Smith borrows from the Indian artist group RAQs Media Collective and which he defines as "an immobilized space, one that immobilizes all who enter it, a place of waiting for the next great art unifier, the next really big art story" (312).

¹² In "Currents of World-Making in Contemporary Art" (2011), Smith similarly defines "remodernism" as "the constant efforts of the institutions of Modern Art (now usually designated Contemporary Art) to reign in the impacts of contemporaneity on art, to revive earlier initiatives, to cleave new art to the old modernist impulses and imperatives, to renovate them" (180). Yet he also adds an important side note, clarifying that "remodernism, as I understand it, is not simply about tired repetition, or reluctant nostalgia, or even melancholy negation," since this would mean it is "in decline" (*ibid.*). Instead, the "remodernism" he thinks of is "alive" and can be discerned, albeit in a different way, in the art practice of Richard Serra, Jeff Wall, and Gerhard Richter (*ibid.*).

¹³ According to Fredric Jameson, whose writings on postmodernism have been extremely influential (see, e.g. Jameson 1984), pastiche is the quintessential postmodernist genre. In contrast to parody, which still presupposes a critical distance between the source material and the parody itself, pastiche amounts to a mere recycling of existing cultural forms that, by extension, also marks the decline of a genuine sense of history.

¹⁴ In *Anywhere or Not at All*, Osborne asserts that "art is a privileged cultural carrier of contemporaneity, as it was of previous forms of modernity" (27).

¹⁵ Amelia Jones makes a similar argument when she contrasts Marina Abramović's outward claims to physical, unmediated presence with Jeremy Deller's distributed use of documentation in video installations to re-present his famous 2001 re-enactment *The Battle of Orgreave* (24).

¹⁶ Osborne borrows the notion of "coeval time" from anthropologist Johannes Fabian, who first introduced it in *Time and the Other* ([1983] 2014). Defining "coevalness" as a condition of "shared Time," with a capital T (34), Fabian denounced the dominant tendency in anthropology to maintain a "(temporal) distance" between researchers and the object of research, a distance he deemed both untenable and unproductive (31). Fabian's idea of coevalness has been widely picked up in postcolonial studies, a field that also has an important influence on current debates on contemporaneity (see, for example, Bevernage). What I am unfortunately not able to address here is the relationship between (post-)colonialism, contemporaneity, and choreographic re-enactment, even though choreographers such as Fabián Barba and Faustin Linyekula use re-enactment as an artistic strategy to criticize the division between center and periphery in historical as well as contemporary dance, exposing how this differentiation is a legacy we still carry with us from the modern period of colonization. For a further exploration of these questions, see Fabián Barba's contribution to this issue.

¹⁷ In "Global Modernity and the Contemporary," Osborne presents a similar claim. Here, he writes that, "if modernity projects a present of permanent transition, the contemporary *fixes* or *enfolds* such transitoriness within the *actuality* of spatially distributed conjunctures." In other words, "in contrast to modernity's temporal differentiation within a unified space," contemporaneity is defined by the seemingly incommensurable pair of "temporal unity/spatial disjunction" (81; italics added). It is precisely this conundrum that artistic re-enactment contests by showing how "spatial disjunction" is not necessarily covered up by a "temporal unity," but rather gives rise to different experiences of temporality that might be the only genuine sense of contemporaneity.

¹⁸ Stillness as a dance gesture has been explored by various choreographers, such as Jérôme Bel, La Ribot, Estzer Salomon, Xavier Le Roy, Maria Hassabi, and many others.

¹⁹ In *Poetics of Dance* ([1995] 2015), dance scholar Gabriele Brandstetter reiterates the common equation of modernity's most essential features with choreographic movement. Referring to Baudelaire's famous characterization of modernity as "the ephemeral, the fugitive, the contingent" ('La modernité, c'est le transitoire, le fugitif, le contingent'), Brandstetter states that his claim "simultaneously describes the art of dance," insofar as "the transitory, the ephemeral is a fundamental, idiosyncratic feature of dance as an especially revealing example of the performing arts" (21).

²⁰ Lepecki develops a similar, though slightly different view on the conjunction of different temporalities in dance in his 2010 essay "The Body as Archive." Drawing on Deleuze's ideas on virtuality and Foucault's notion of dispersion, he considers choreographic reenactment as a passing on and a re-actualization of virtual potentialities that were not realized yet in a work's past stagings.

²¹ In emphasizing that "coexistence" is both the temporal and phenomenal condition of the theatrical scene, Pouillaude is echoing theatre scholar Erika Fischer-Lichte, who claimed that the constitutive feature distinguishing the performing arts from other art forms is "the bodily co-presence of actors and spectators" (2008, 32). Both Fischer-Lichte and Pouillaude seem to be reaching back to Lessing's *Laocoon* (1766), the treatise in which he introduced his infamous distinction between time-based arts and space-based arts. As such, they deny time not only the ability to cross between different media, but also the potential to go back and forth between the past, the present, and the future.

²² It should be noted that, more recently, Pouillaude has slightly revised his thinking on contemporaneity, primarily due to a tendency he terms "documentary dance," which relates more explicitly to an extra-theatrical reality and therefore complicates his previous tying of dance's temporality to the present of the scene (see Pouillaude "Dance as Documentary").

²³ Even though Jameson's *A Singular Modernity* seems to be far removed from Peter Osborne's definition of contemporaneity as the disjunctive coming-together of times, there are a few remarkable commonalities. When Osborne claims that the momentary standstill of the (post-)photographic picture signifies the eradication of temporality, he appears to reinforce the Jamesonian standpoint that capitalism tends to flatten time. Also Osborne's assertion that "the disjunctiveness of presentness" constitutes an "existential unity" (*Anywhere or Not at All*, 25) brings him closer to Jameson than one might expect at first sight.

²⁴ Eisenstadt's standpoint is close to Dipesh Chakrabarty's *Provincializing Europe* ([2000] 2008), in which he seeks to attenuate the presumed supremacy of Western modernity, not by simply erasing the differences between the West and the non-West, but rather by proposing to "create conjoined and disjunctive genealogies" that acknowledge the importance of Europe's intellectual legacy for critical thinking and simultaneously "contemplate the necessarily fragmentary histories of human belonging that never constitute a one or a whole" (255).

²⁵ Eisenstadt's notion of "continual reinterpretation" could be extended to dance by means of Helen Thomas's view in *Dance, Modernity and Culture* (1995) that modern dance emerged through a dynamics of what she terms "cultural reproduction" (55-83).

²⁶ Even though I am arguing that re-enactment is about time as such, it is obviously impossible to separate this from the dimension of space, not the least because the idea of contemporaneity draws together different experiences of temporality at various places in a globalized world. In this sense, one way to broaden the discussion I am only broaching in this text would be to consider the ways in which choreographic re-enactment invites to map what can be called a "geography of time."

²⁷ *OED Online*. Oxford University Press, September 2016. Accessed 28/11/2016 at www.oed.com

The Distance with the Present

On Agamben's Notion of the Contemporary

Daniel Blanga-Gubbay

1. Some months ago the organizer of today's symposium sent me an email, asking if I could give – for this occasion – a short introduction on Giorgio Agamben's notion of the contemporary, present in the well-known short book *Che cos'è il contemporaneo?*, transcribed from the inaugural course that Agamben gave at his 2007-seminar at the European Graduate School, and later translated as *What is the Contemporary?*¹ The courses started with the following words: “The question that I would like to inscribe on the threshold of this seminar is: ‘Of whom and of what are we contemporaries?’ And, first and foremost: ‘What does it mean to be contemporary?’”

While replying to the first email, I was already projecting myself into the future, into the moment I am now in. *Am I, while writing this email, contemporary to the 5th of March?* Indeed back then, in the act of writing, I was not only projecting myself into the future, foreseeing myself today; the very typing of that e-mail was also a consequence of the moment of today, a peculiar sort of consequence that happens *before* the cause. Writing that email made me perceive, for an instant, the contemporariness of the two events. And the question comes back to me reversed today: in which way am I contemporary to that email?

The same question might arise for a reader, while reading this text, which is the transcription of the one pronounced at the conference on the 5th of March. Indeed, rather than taking on the form of a written essay, this text deliberately retains the formal qualities of that lecture, echoing Agamben's question about the contemporaneity in the coexistence of different temporalities in these words, traveling between the conference, the writing of this text, and the moment of its reading.

Indeed, at the beginning of his text Agamben writes:

In the course of this seminar, we shall have occasion to read texts whose authors are many centuries removed from us, as well as others that are more recent, or even very recent. At all events, it is essential that we manage to be in some way contemporaries to these texts. (39)

In these opening remarks contemporariness is not marked as a common belonging to a precise period of time, but as a coexistence of different times

within a single time; the presence of something that – while belonging to a different time – is still present or is not yet there. Agamben here refers to the idea of Walter Benjamin's *dialektisches Bild*, the dialectic image able to carry different moments of history, to link different times, almost reducing the space between them and making them contemporary. “It’s not that what is past casts its light on what is present, or what is present its light on the past; rather, image is that wherein what has been comes together in a flash with the now to form a constellation,” writes Benjamin in *The Arcades Project* (262). The shape of the constellation shines as the possibility of breaking the linear conception of time, and acts as a fundamental critique of the modern conception of historicity, that Agamben – just like Benjamin and other writers equally fundamental for him like Nietzsche or Warburg – has taken as a starting point.

The clearest example that Agamben gives in the text is the one of fashion, as that which – quoting Agamben – “recalls, re-evokes, revitalizes” (50) the past. While rethinking fashion with Agamben, fashion is no longer – as often conceived – at the point of the *now*, advancing as a single point at the edge of novelty within a linear time. While wearing clothes, I carry with me different times, both the references to the past and moments where these clothes were created or bought. I dress myself of times, which I transport into, in and beyond the present moment. I am the contemporaneity of different times, and the space between myself and the present time is full of other times.

2. Still, more than investigating the way in which we are contemporary with other times, the core question for Agamben is: are we contemporary with the present time? And if so, in what way? This is the question that I propose to explore here, especially given the two topics brought up by Frederik about contemporariness and performing arts: the relation between art and its time, and the paradigm of the *hic et nunc*.

To explore this question in his text Agamben starts from a position proposed by Friedrich Nietzsche in the *Unzeitgemässe Betrachtungen*, the *Untimely Meditations*, where contemporariness to the present is described as a state of disconnection and “out-of-jointness.”

Agamben writes:

Those who truly belong to their time, are those who neither perfectly coincide with it nor adjust themselves to its demands. [...] Precisely because of this condition, precisely through this disconnection and this anachronism, they are more capable than others of perceiving and

grasping their own time. (40)

We need to further specify this disconnection with the present time. Agamben explains immediately that this “dys-chrony” is not the one of a person who nostalgically lives in another time, by living in the past. To clarify this, he refers to a 1923-poem of the Russian poet Osip Emilyevich Mandelstam, titled “The Century,” which, according to Agamben, reflects on the relation between the poet and his time. It presents “the Century” as a running beast ridden by the poet. The image is particularly powerful: the beast is not simply running forward, but is also transporting us. We are transported by time, and we go further with the present.

Within the poem, Mandelstam addresses this beast, i.e. his century, and asks it: “who will manage to look inside your eyes?” (qtd. in Agamben “What Is the Contemporary?” 42), evoking the fundamental paradox of our (in)ability to perceive the present. Indeed, we cannot get off, since one cannot get off the time running forward, and the only possibility of perceiving the present – to look at the present – is to lean forward beyond the beast, to look it in the eyes. By doing this, we would still be in the saddle and advancing with the beast, but from there we protrude forward beyond the beast, from where we can firmly lock our gaze onto its eyes. The beauty of this image lies herein, that while still being on the beast galloping forward, we create a gap between the beast and ourselves.

In the gap of this movement Agamben conceives the first definition of the contemporary in the text: contemporariness is “a singular relationship with one's own time, which adheres to it and, at the same time, keeps a distance from it. More precisely, it is *that relationship with time that adheres to it through a disjunction and an anachronism*” (41). Leaning beyond the beast, the contemporary is the one who detaches himself from his time, in order to stare the time directly in the eyes.

3. Nevertheless a new question immediately emerges: what does he, who can stare at his time, actually see? What do we have to see in the eyes of the beast?

A few sentences later Agamben details his definition of the contemporariness further, when specifying that “the contemporary is he who firmly holds his gaze on his own time so as to perceive not its light, but rather its darkness” (44). The contemporary is thus the person who sees the obscurity in the eyes of the beast, in order to access the obscurity of the present. Agamben immediately clarifies that this darkness is not a privative experience but an active one; it is not a de-activation of sight – as might happen by closing the eyes – but rather a new ability

that emerges in seeing details in the absence of light. Still, how can we define this darkness of the present?

A first interpretation of this darkness might be to approach it as the darkness which exists in the present without being the image of the present, i.e. its dominant narrative. We can trace here in Agamben's text the influence of Pier Paolo Pasolini and the idea of "minor cultures." A minor culture is that which exists but is disappearing under the homogenizing image of modernity. In a well-known article of 1975 – the year of his death – Pasolini used the image of the fireflies: in the same way the tenuous and elusive lights of the fireflies disappear in the dazzling lights of modernity, a dancing swarm of minor cultures is annihilated by the strong light defining the image of the present.

In this sense, leaning forward and distancing himself from the beast of the present, the contemporary is he who grasps and recognizes in this distance the construction of the very image of the present, and by doing this is able to go beyond this light, to see what is left aside by its construction. That is why Agamben is writing that being contemporary is having "the ability [that] amounts to a neutralization of the lights that come from the epoch in order to discover its obscurity, its special darkness" (45). Being contemporary means to hold the gaze in the darkness to see the light of the century, instead of being blinded by it; and to see at the same time in the darkness what is left beyond the light. We do not simply enter into the obscurity of the present, but we make the obscurity enter the present.

4. Still, does this beam of darkness not contain more than simply what is left over by the homogenizing light of the present? Beyond what is invisible and yet present, does this darkness that surrounds the image of the present not contain other temporalities? Or, to put it in other words, beyond what it was and is, is this darkness not full of what it might be?

At this point in his text, Agamben describes a beautiful image that I would like to share to investigate the temporality of the darkness of the present further.

Apart from referring to the image of the disappearing fireflies we encountered in the work of Pasolini, Agamben indicates other luminous points suspended in the dark when he portrays the image of the stars shining in the middle of the darkness of a nightly sky:

In the firmament that we observe at night, the stars shine brightly, surrounded by a thick darkness. Since the number of galaxies and luminous bodies in the universe is almost infinite, the darkness that we

see in the sky is something that, according to scientists, demands an explanation. (46)

Starting from the scientific problem at the core of this image, Agamben invites us to understand this darkness differently:

In an expanding universe, the most remote galaxies move away from us at a speed so great that their light is never able to reach us. What we perceive as the darkness of the heavens is this light that, though traveling toward us, cannot reach us, since the galaxies from which the light originates move away from us at a velocity greater than the speed of light. (46)

If the stars – or the patterns of their constellation – correspond to our present, the darkness that surrounds them is not empty, but rather full of constellations that might no longer or not yet be there. While looking at the darkness of the sky, we can imagine still invisible stars that might shine or never shine in front of our eyes. The darkness of the present is not empty, but rather it carries within it the possibility of a different constellation, of a universe different from the one we know, or the presence of other planets still preserved by the darkness of time. If the present manifests itself in the light, the darkness that surrounds it is first of all an exercise of imagination, and a space of contingency. The darkness is not the opposite of the light, but a laboratory where one can imagine a different conformation of the light. The darkness is not occupied by the nothing, but by the possible. Looking at the darkness of our time means to find the black spot of the present, where we can imagine a different conformation of the present; to be able to distance ourselves from the beast of time, to imagine – while firmly looking inside and almost archeologically digging in the dark of its eyes – a different form of the beast.

For this reason Agamben writes that

one can say that the entry point to the present necessarily takes the form of an archeology; an archeology that does not, however, regress to a historical past, but returns to that part within the present that we are absolutely incapable of living. [...] The present is nothing other than this un-lived element in everything that is lived. [...] And to be contemporary means in this sense to return to a present where we have never been. (51-52)

At the end of the text, we discover that we are again challenged by a *dialektisches Bild*, the image connecting and presenting different temporalities. However, it is

not a present point that connects with a different point in the past, but rather a present point that connects with a point in the realm of the possible. The darkness of the present is the breach in the present that allows new things to enter, similar to the “crack in everything” sung by Leonard Cohen: “that's how the light gets in.”² It is a black stain on a historical atlas, from where events that have never occurred will enter the present.

5. The description of the experience of the darkness makes us suddenly slide towards the black boxes and dark halls that welcome performances, and it is starting from this image of the darkness that I would like to go toward the end, with some questions about the relation between the performing arts and the contemporariness that might emerge from this reading of Agamben. The invitation to the *Contemporaneities*-symposium suggested two aspects of the term contemporary: it asked, on the one hand, how the performing arts relate to the world they are contemporary with, and, on the other hand, what kind of contemporariness the performing arts can evoke with its paradigm of the here and now. Now, the reading of Agamben echoes in these different questions.

First of all, Agamben's use of the contemporary suggests to reinvestigate the relation between art and its time, and by doing so to question the value of both actuality and novelty often associated with it. On the one side, Agamben seems to withdraw from reproducing actuality in the way topical documentary forms might be grasping the present day. Instead of pursuing actuality in this sense, his use of the contemporary invites us to explore through fiction the possible disjunctions and anachronisms, which are able to make appear the complexity of the present beyond its image. This exploration of the gap between us and the beast of time has been at the core of the work made in recent years by a new generation of dancers and choreographers: from the body as a field of irreconcilable histories that rejects simplification in the work of Cecilia Lisa Eliceche, to the complexity opened by the merging of Jamaican dancehall and traditional songs from Georgia in *DFS* by Chaignaud and Bengolea. We can also find it in Fabián Barba's reflection on anachronism and the dominant canon in contemporary dance, and the possibility for contemporary Ecuadorian dance to be perceived as contemporary – and no longer traditional – in the European context. While looking at this work through Agamben, the contemporary emerges an act of acknowledgement of what exists in the luminous darkness of the present, similar to that which Peggy Phelan named “the unmarked” in the paradigm of the present.

At the same time, if the perception of the term “contemporary” in the arts is often

linked to the value of novelty (inheriting the avant-garde model, well embodied by Kandinsky's image of the apex of the pyramid making new discoveries and ushering in tomorrow's reality), the reading of Agamben invites us to rethink the pioneering position of art. More than a point at the edge of novelty, do not the arts – like it was for fashion – have the possibility of showing a temporality beyond linearity, of storing multiple temporalities that are recalled, re-evoked, revitalized? According to this reading, Agamben's use of contemporary might resonate in the exploration of the notion of the archive that manifestly crossed the field of the performing arts in recent years, from the living books of Mette Edvardsen (*Time has fallen asleep in the afternoon sunshine*) to the practices of Boris Charmatz (*Untitled, 2000*) and Mette Ingvartsen (*69 positions*). The performer does not stand at the edge of novelty. Instead, these performance present complex and multiple temporalities within the body, whose gestures travel beyond linearity, becoming time and again a dialectic image in front of the audience.

6. There is, however, a last point raised by the reading of Agamben that needs to be addressed: beyond the specific content of a performance, is not the same experience of performing art interrogating the contemporaneity?

The words *hic et nunc* are often taken as paradigm of the performing arts. They suggest an idea of contemporaneity in the sense of a coexistence of performers and spectators, and of an immediacy of that which appears before our eyes. Following the reading of Agamben, and the location of the contemporary in the obscurity surrounding the stars, contemporaneity seems reversed into an experience of the invisible: the experience of contemporaneity is not that of the present stars, but rather that of the darkness where a star might exist.

Hence, if we venture back into the obscurity of theatre, Agamben seems to suggest that performance is not so much about what is *here* and *now* on stage, but rather about the exercise of contingency that surrounds it, and that is activated through it. Governed by fiction or by a lack of necessity, that which is on stage continuously raises the possibility of its contingency, and by doing this it makes us discover the contingency of our own world. Agamben hence seems to define the *here* and *now* no longer as an immediacy of what is but rather as a medium to discover what might be. It is the tip of an iceberg, standing as a visible witness of other invisible and yet possible *heres* and *nows* beneath the surface of the present, and transporting us therein.

That is why Agamben was writing that “the appointment that is in question in contemporariness does not simply take place in chronological time: it is

something that, working within chronological time, urges, presses and transforms it” (47).

While seating in the black spaces of theater halls, we face the un-lived elements in everything that is lived, we feel the vibration of the contingency, while the events that have not yet happened are fleeing from us at a faster pace than that with which they approach us.

Maybe we can also see the reverse of this perspective: art is not simply that which flourishes in the dark distance between the present and the possible; it is that which allows this distance to be preserved, as a layer that prevents the present to adhere too much to itself, and to close the crack through which other possibilities enter the present. This is why – to conclude – while speaking about the beast, Agamben was saying with Mandelstam that a poet *is* the contemporary: he does not simply live in the fracture but he is this fracture, cracking the image of the present and eventually impeding the present to be unchangeably what it is.

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1 All quotes in this text are from the English translation of the essay that appeared in Agamben's book “*What Is an Apparatus?*” *And Other Essays* published in 2008.

2 Cohen, Leonard. “Anthem.” *The Future*, Columbia Records, 1992.

Portfolio

A Future History of the Present

Thomas Bellinck & Sébastien Hendrickx

Editorial note: the text below is a reworked and edited rendition of the artist talk in interview format between theatre maker Thomas Bellinck and his dramaturge Sébastien Hendrickx during the Contemporaneities symposium.

Thomas Bellinck (TB): To allow for a higher degree of improvisation, we've decided to stage this artist talk as an interview.

Sébastien Hendrickx (SH): An interview based on a set of pictures. As a starting point, I suggest a close reading of this picture of one of the first spaces one encounters when visiting *Domo de Eŭropa Historio en Ekzilo (Domo)*, your futuristic-historical museum about life in the former European Union, presented for the first time in 2013. In what way does it blend fiction and reality, as well as different times and spaces?

TB: This “blend,” as you call it, is something that is present in *Domo* on many different layers. Fiction is first of all present in the way the work is framed. In order to present *Domo*, we thought up an imaginary group of people — the “Friends of a Reunited Europe” — who supposedly built it. Nowhere within the museum is it explicitly mentioned that I, together with others, have built it. Then, we also have a level of fiction which is more formal, in the sense that a lot of the images and objects we present in the museum do not exist and are our own fabrication. At the entrance, there are more or less four spaces that function as a kind of “prologue” to the exhibition. The design of the fourth space is loosely based on the porch of the Ho Chi Minh mausoleum in Hanoi. On the left-hand side, you have what I call “The Beginning of the Beginning,” which is actually a photograph of the signing of the Treaty of Rome in 1957, which is one of the first key moments in the establishment of the European Union. On the right-hand side, you see “The Beginning of the End,” a picture representing the accession of Montenegro, Scotland, Serbia and the Republic of Upper Macedonia to the European Union in 2020, which is actually a very cruddy, photoshopped image. So, when entering the museum, you stumble upon this sumptuously decorated, deep blue wall, with a historical document on the left-hand side, a counterfactual picture on the right-hand side and in between this gilded, ceremonial gate, which



Photograph (c) Danny Willems

looks like the entrance to a mausoleum. And we present this wall as a kind of outtake, an *objet trouvé*, or found object, the front of which, much like the swing doors and the pictures, we cover in plastic. This is something that comes back again and again throughout *Domo*: we try to confuse the visitor, in the sense that the museum looks as if it is still under construction, about to be renovated, or actually falling apart. I think this confusion, embodied in this spatial prologue to the work, is a good metaphor for the European Union as well: it is not always very clear at which of the three stages it actually is.

Although at certain moments we do “predict” the future and project what is going to happen to the EU — I have to admit that I sometimes got it wrong but I will definitely come back to that later on — there is actually not much fiction on the level of the factual information we provide on the EU. The funny thing is, because we try to confuse spectators a lot on so many other levels, people start doubting the real stuff that is in the museum. This is also something we try to work on. It reflects on our historical amnesia: lots of people who visit *Domo* do not really know their own history that well, which makes it kind of easy to confuse them about it. So, quite often, people think that the things that are really true are completely fictional and the other way around.

SH: As a visitor to *Domo*, you get transported to another time, but it is never really clear where we are in time. You say that it is what will remain of the House of European History, funded by the European Parliament, in fifty years time, but you never mention exactly where you are as a visitor. But then, the official language in the museum is Esperanto, which is something old-fashioned, you could say. It is as dead as the egalitarian and universal idea that it once expressed. And also, consider what *Domo* looks like: I don't know what a museum will look like in 2050 or 2060, but I don't think it will look like this. *Domo* looks rather old-fashioned. So the question is: why did you not go all the way? Why did you not try to show some holograms or some virtual interactive displays? Why did you choose these specific aesthetics?

TB: It really depends on how you interpret what that means, “to go all the way.” It is certainly true that we never clearly indicate at what point in time you're visiting *Domo*. But we do give some subtle references: in an introductory text we casually refer to the “Second Interbellum” as the era of the visitors' grandparents. So, in a way, we simultaneously situate the visitors as grandparents in the historicized present and as their own grandchildren in the presentified future. When you're



Photograph (c) Danny Willems

talking aesthetics, there are several reasons why *Domo* really looks like this. First of all, to me, it's really a museum about the present. It's not a museum about the future. I didn't want to try to imagine what the future would look like, since the future is really a pair of glasses through which we try to scrutinize the present — which makes a big difference, I think. Secondly, the reason why *Domo* looks the way it does — you call it “old-fashioned,” I'd rather call it “poor,” perhaps — is also because we try to establish this kind of post-apocalyptic atmosphere. To me, it has the aesthetics of, say, a Baked Bean or Lawnmower Museum, of this kind of museum that is usually built by one person on a very tight budget — someone who, in this case, has tried to scramble together the pitiful remains of the House of European History. *Domo* was very much inspired by one of my favorite one-man museums, namely the Museum of the 1989 Revolution in Timișoara, Romania. It is an absolutely fantastic museum; I recommend everybody to go visit it. It was set up by this one guy, a veterinarian, who, at some point, abandoned his job and ran off to Timișoara to go fight in the revolution. Ever since, he's been collecting stuff on the revolution. Just like our “Friends of a Reunited Europe,” the collector didn't really have a comfortable budget, and has really quite literally had to glue — sometimes conflicting — things together and display them in this dilapidated building. A visit to his museum actually starts with one room where you have to watch a self-made film, explaining why God picked Timișoara as the place to start the revolution, which I think is very interesting, because it immediately, very clearly presents you this hyper-subjective point of view. In any case, I guess it's no coincidence that to plenty of visitors *Domo* is reminiscent of Eastern Europe. Even though that's probably also the case because to many the former Eastern Bloc is the only example of a European cultural sphere that collapsed during its lifetime.

The most important is that with this style and with the use of Esperanto, I try to create a historical distance to the present. In order to do this, I thought it would be much easier to transport people into some kind of unknown future time by appealing to a certain aesthetics that they are somehow familiar with, rather than start dabbling in holograms and the like. Such a sci-fi approach would have directed the gaze too much to the future, creating a different focus with less temporal layers. In addition, the Esperanto gives you the feeling of being somewhere in Europe: you recognize the language, it really looks European, but at the same time it is foreign. While “Esperantists” (i.e., people who speak Esperanto) would say it is universal, it is actually quite Eurocentric. So, even

though every European can understand a few words, she or he never grasps the complete picture — which is also a good metaphor for the European Union.

SH: With this next picture, I want to ask you about the theatricality of *Domo*. There is this bourgeois notion of theatricality that links theatricality with the construction of an illusion, which, you could say, has culminated in cinema, and nowadays in video games. We also find it in the trend of experiential, immersive museums. Well, in the case of *Domo* we can also see something that tries to create an illusion, by making present-day objects look older. A big difference, of course, between these immersive museums and your museum is that yours is not a museum providing illusions but the museum is the illusion itself. So, I was wondering how you would describe the specifics of theatricality used in *Domo*.

TB: Instead of "theatricality," I prefer "performativity," because to me, *Domo* is much more performative than a theatrically scenographed exhibition. We appeal to the physicality of the visitors, who from regular spectators grow into performers activating the installation with their presence. My hope is that they become what I like to call "minds on legs," rather than just passive consumers. We only allow one person every five minutes to enter the museum, so usually you're entirely left to your own devices. We do this because we want to give the audience the feeling that they're completely on their own in this dusty museum about something called "the European Union." The experience becomes a very physical one: you walk through a lot of empty, desolate, dusty and decaying rooms, and it is often very boring. Theatricality often involves a certain degree of spectacularity and *Domo* is very non-spectacular and in that sense, I would say it is rather non-theatrical. We do not use any moving images or sound recordings. As a visitor you don't get a lot of impulses. Instead, there is a lot of text to read. Because of this absence of different stimuli, the visitor has to develop a different focus. People read and reread everything; they even try to read all the bloody labels in Esperanto. This non-spectacular dimension also induces a different experience of time, a different kind of visiting duration. Sometimes I have couples visiting *Domo*. Obviously, we separate them, because we need the five minutes in between every visitor. And I have this bar at the end of the exhibition, where I serve post-apocalyptic comfort drinks. It sometimes happens that, for example, a guy comes in, orders a vodka, and starts drinking. After like three shots of vodka, he gets very worried, because his wife is still not showing up, and he goes to look for her in the empty hallways. Half an hour later, she comes out. This guy is totally worried and he freaks out and goes like: "Where the hell have you been?"



Photograph (c) Danny Willems

And the woman basically replies: “Thank god, this was the first time in my life I could really take my own time to visit a frigging exhibition” (laughter). I mean, we really leave it up to the visitors to take duration into their own hands.

As you say, *Domo* is not only a performative but also an immersive installation. But its sense of immersion is very different from, say, this Great War Museum I used to visit, where they had a reconstructed trench you could walk through. There were always lots of school kids running through it. In the trench you could hear gunshots and sound recordings of people going “Aaaaaaaaargh. Oh, my god!” At the end of the trench I once heard a kid shout: “Let's do it again!” I cannot really imagine that this is the feeling you wish your visitors to retain after they've visited the museum. The argument that is often used in this kind of experiential museums, is that visitors have to “feel,” “smell” and “touch” history. According to this idea, such experiences will give the audience a completely different, more “authentic” impression of history. But I think, if that's what you're aiming at, you should maybe also consider lowering the room temperature to a few degrees above freezing point, hiding chunks of fetid, rotten meat and having trained rats nibble at the kids' toes. I think this WWI-trench looked more like a movie about the Great War than the Great War itself. The way we tried to build *Domo* has a different attitude towards the notion of immersion. For one, we also try to involve “unattractive” elements, such as solitude, confusion, obscurity, fear, smell, etcetera. As far as the latter is concerned, apart from the damp smell that emanates from most of the venues we select anyway, we play around with the smell of decaying objects and pack-loads of hidden mothballs.

SH: So you do. Let's move on to the next image.

TB: OK, this is actually an image I usually never show, but I decided to do so today.

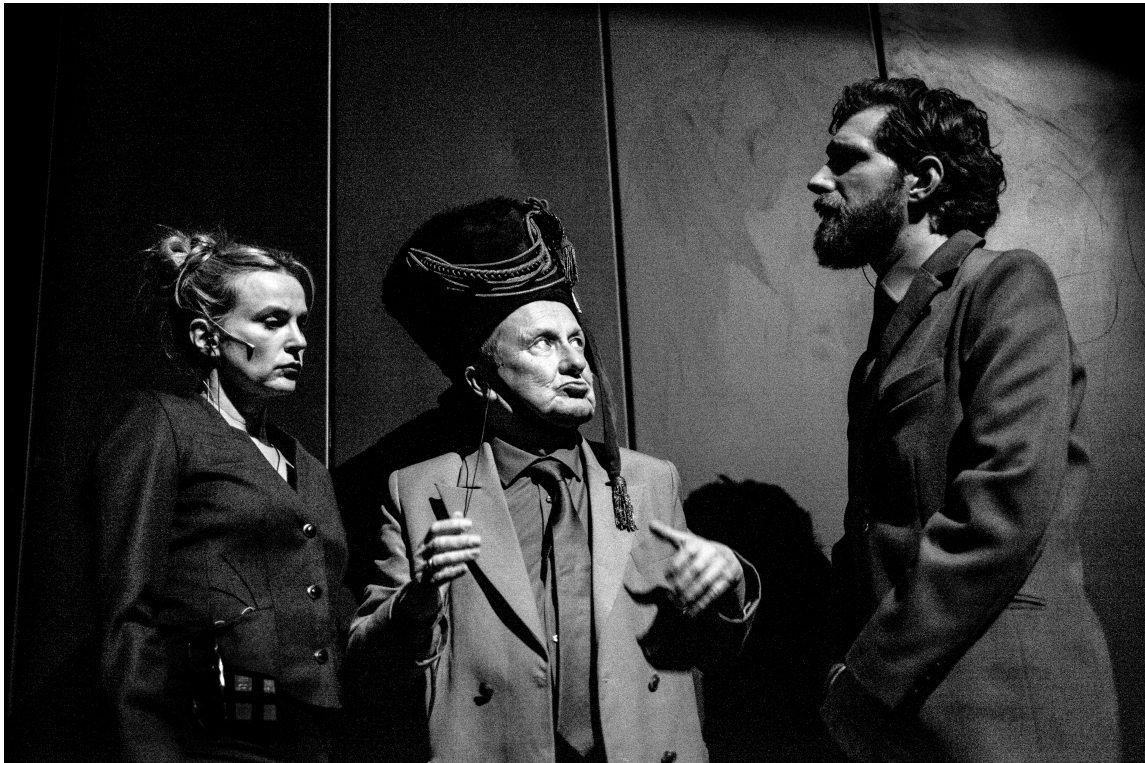
SH: This is the closing scene of your theatre piece *Memento Park*, which premiered in February 2015. In *Memento Park* you used the same strategy as in the museum project, historicizing the present. It was a piece about the commemoration of World War I, which, in Belgium, is something of a hot potato between the linguistic communities. In *Memento Park* you staged all kinds of people who were in some way connected to the commemoration of World War I and its commodification by the commemoration-industry, merchants, re-enactors or local politicians. Their voices were juxtaposed with the voices of people connected to contemporary warfare, like military advisors, ISIS insurgents



Photograph (c) Stef Stessel

or Syrian refugees. The performance evoked the question: how will we commemorate our contemporary wars? It is clear that in the piece you took a critical stance on the commemoration industry, but it could also be regarded as something that takes part in the commemoration, in an alternative, more critical way. Could it be regarded as an alternative way of commemoration?

TB: Sure, I think we could regard this as an alternative way of commemorating, even though I never intended it to be. I'd rather think of the performance as a "commemoration of the commemoration." Somebody recently used the word "pre-enactment" when we were talking about *Memento Park*, and I kind of liked that one, because parts of the performance indeed attempt to stage the future commemoration of our warlike present. But, not for a single moment in the performance do we attempt to commemorate World War I. Even the piece as a whole does not try to relate directly to World War I. The whole project was about scrutinizing the commemoration industry and specific groups that use history in order to make a claim on the future. Because I think that some of the mechanisms that are clearly visible in this commemoration share certain characteristics with the mechanisms that ultimately lead to conflict. I am not speculating about World War III or anything like that, but, unintentionally, local and geopolitical tension have started to surface in the way Flanders commemorates The Great War, and in the claims it makes on history in the process. Flanders was criticized a lot on an international level for the way it was trying to market the commemoration of a global conflict as a regional tourist event, without consulting specialist historians or joining forces with the Federal or Walloon authorities. I believe, if you really want to know what war is like, you should just ask the people involved. And they are actually right here today. There is one specific scene in *Memento Park* where I tried to deal with this issue: during the creation process of *Memento Park* I attended an Armistice Day ceremony together with my long-term artistic collaborator Jeroen Van der Ven, who was performing in the play. I was really surprised at how white and local this commemoration was. The age of the people commemorating, and what and who precisely they were commemorating tells a lot about the status of commemoration today. But during the event, there was this "funny" thing that took my attention. The commemoration took place in front of the grave of the Unknown Soldier, in the city centre of Brussels. On the other side of the road, there was a demonstration going on of Afghans who had not been recognized as war refugees and for months had been demanding the right to asylum. The police had kind of blocked the road between the commemoration,



Photograph (c) Stef Stessel

which was supposed to be serene and peaceful, and the shouting Afghans who were denied their right to reside in this country. I thought that was truly one of the most striking images of how this commemoration functions and does not function, of how inclusive and exclusive it is at the same time. So we tried to show that paradox in *Memento Park*.

SH: The well-known practice of “re-enactment” not only inspired you to create *Memento Park*, you also implemented it as a concrete tool for your actors. Their text was based on video footage and interviews you did with re-enactors, historians and politicians. Following the principles of “verbatim theatre,” the lines the actors said were literal fragments of those interviews and the actual recordings were fed to them through earphones. They were imitating these voices as exactly as possible. The play was thus a montage of very small re-enactments of these interview moments — including the “ers” and “ahs” and the moments when the interviewees stumble over their words. Why do you want to make this clear distinction between the “fictional” and the “documentary” value of the text material? Why was it so important to accentuate the documentary provenance of things like the actors’ words?

TB: I would not really say it was important to me to distinguish the fiction from the reality, because, I think, we really mix those on multiple layers. But anyway, for the actors, this approach was not that obvious. Jeroen can tell you all about how prescriptive this is for an actor. It is really taking away all timing, freedom and rhythm. But the reason why I really wanted to work with earphones and this idea of re-enactment, is because it allows for an on-stage “discourse analysis” of sorts. The method in a sense allows me to decontextualize specific speeches and discussions that are taking place in very different public contexts, on television and elsewhere. When you decontextualize these speeches and discussions, re-edit them, and show them in a theatrical setting — including lighting and costumes, you re-listen to them. You hear what is said differently. I do not only want people to hear what is said, but also how it is said. I think this “how-things-are-said” is crucial. The way people stumble, hesitate, repeat things, slow down or take a break, often reveals much more about the subjects and the subtext than what is literally uttered — especially with this kind of “explosive” material. This was of crucial importance to me: decontextualization on the one hand, and depersonalization on the other hand. For example, we took quotes from a famous right-wing, nationalist and separatist Flemish politician, but we did not try in any way to make the actor look like him. We did not try to refer to his name, or to

make clear that it was this specific, real-life guy who was talking. As we were aiming at commemorating the commemoration, we decided to perform our quotes as part of a script to some kind of ritual. Especially the first part of the performance is almost like a liturgical ceremony, which, in a way, is also all about re-enactment, because you hand down what has been said a hundred times before and you repeat the same old texts. I like the friction between the classical idea of liturgy and people who are stumbling and not exactly getting their words right, between the very informality and the formality of rituals.

SH: You are currently working on a project together with filmmaker Moon Blaise, called *The Miracle of Almería*. You are making a movie about the town of Almería in the south of Spain and are again exploring how past, present and future are intertwined.

TB: Well, actually, we recently decided to turn it into three movies. The trailer we are showing now is actually for part one, which features a visit by a General Franco impersonator to a home for the elderly, many of whom grew up during the Spanish Civil War. Let me first shortly frame what we're trying to work on in *the Miracle of Almería*.

Almería is a region in southern Spain, which is a junction of industrial agriculture, ecocide and mass migration. These global forces interact locally in a very strange way and director Moon Blaise and I wanted to address their complex concurrence, but we soon found out that it was very hard to say anything that has not already been said about these issues. There are many classic movies about industrial farming and exploitative labor conditions. In the sixties, for example, for *Harvest of Shame*, documentary filmmakers interviewed migrant workers about the harsh labour conditions in the south of the US. There are a lot of parallels to be drawn between the living and working conditions of workers on the Florida plantations and the situation of migrant laborers in Almería. For us as Europeans, it is very hard to say anything about it — not just to say something new but also to say something that would not reflect on our own position as filmmakers with a certain background. The fruit and vegetables grown in the region of Almería are the ones we buy in supermarkets here in Belgium. In order to deal with this element, we tried to look for a different way of creating a documentary. This is also the moment we realized there is a huge problem with documentary film making. “Documentary film,” as it has been developed in the last decade, has taken a lot of elements from the “fiction film” in the sense that



Photographs (c) Jonathan Wannyn

documentary films try to tell a story with characters and a plot line. These characters are often objectified, unaware in what kind of movie they are playing. They are just filmed while they share their story and they are pushed into a very passive role. In my opinion, this is a very violent procedure. When we started to work on *The Miracle of Almería*, we tried to look for a different way to work with the local inhabitants that wouldn't convey how we see the region, but how they see it. This approach led to us finding frictions between how we see it, how they see it, and how we can juxtapose several conflicting views in one movie. For the first part of *The Miracle of Almería*, which really deals with the history of the region and the Franco regime, we decided to work with people from homes for the elderly, because they are pioneers of the region who turned this patch of wasteland into the goldmine that it still is today. These people have a very optimistic reading of their own local history, referring to it as "the miracle of Almería." Their unique selling point, the combination of plasticulture, cooperativism and labor exploitation, is now being exported to other regions in the world, amongst others to Mexico and to China.

SH: In the movie, you use re-enactment, but while you usually employ this technique within the walls of the theatre, here you use it in the public space. What did this produce?

TB: We came up with the idea to use re-enactment not as a final result (because we didn't want to (re)present the history of the region as such), but to use re-enactment as a means to interact with the people who wish to collaborate. By using re-enactment as a method, we turn these local people from passive characters into active collaborators or participants. This proved particularly successful when we tried to re-enact Franco's visit to Almería. In reality, Franco came to the region several times, but in the memory of the elderly, these visits had blended into one glorious entry into Almería. So, rather than working on the official history, we decided to work on their memories of those events. We worked together with them and tried to find out what a scene might have looked like in their different recollections. The re-enactment is not THE re-enactment of Franco's visit but it worked as a catalyst for something new. In the trailer you see Franco, who is played by a guy who works as a nurse in one of these homes for the elderly, arriving. But the scene really kicks off the moment the elderly participants all start discussing his costume, his voice, and they start directing him, as well as each other.

SH: This seems similar to the way in which Joshua Oppenheimer worked with his collaborators in his film *The Act of Killing*, when he asked perpetrators of the killings during the dictatorship in Indonesia to re-enact and re-imagine their own past actions?

TB: Yes and no. Of course the creation process of *The Miracle of Almería* bears resemblance to *The Act of Killing* or the movies of the English filmmaker Peter Watkins. But there are crucial differences. *The Act of Killing* is an amazing movie, but in my view, it is extremely manipulative. Director Joshua Oppenheimer takes an outside perspective and he has this very cathartic kind of way of trying to reveal the criminals and shove their misdeeds in their own faces. It leads up to this moment where one of the former murderers in a very animalistic way almost throws up when watching himself re-perform his own brutalities. During the process of *The Miracle of Almería* we realized that we are as much entangled in the problematic situation of Almería as any local inhabitant. There is almost no way I could cook supper without buying their produce. So I cannot take the outside position, as Oppenheimer does. I cannot take a distance and make a film about how I think they are wrong or right. Many of the elderly “pioneers” we work with have experienced the atrocities of civil war and have lived under the Franco regime. Their one generation shift from rags to riches really defines their relationship with the migrant workers, creating a very specific kind of balance. It is a very complex situation. That is also why I thought it was very important to show how this region came about, together with them. In the second episode, we work more closely with some of the laborers, reconstructing race riots that took place in 2000. In the third one, we try to bring all the different stakeholders together — legal as well as illegalized. But that's a different story.

SH: Let's turn to the last question and back to your museum project *Domo de Eŭropa Historio en Ekzilo*. It premiered in 2013 and recounted the story of the European Union from the perspective of a faraway future. In that history you situated the end of the European Union in the year 2018 – in 2013 the near future and today the very near future. Everything that happened after June 2013, when the work was first presented, was by definition speculative fiction. Of course, we are now in 2016, so a lot of things happened which you did not predict. Also, some objects that were in *Domo* have acquired a completely different meaning nowadays, when you see Angela Merkel as a lemon juicer here.

TB: You can still buy this thing online for about twenty Euros. It's fantastic!



Photograph (c) Jeva Griskjane

SH: You have restaged the project several times since 2013 and to resume it not only made it travel through time, but also from one space to the other. We first presented it in Brussels, right in the European quarter, after that in Rotterdam and Vienna. Now we are about to present it in Athens, which, of course, has a very problematic relation with the EU, and in Wiesbaden. Do you adapt *Domo*? And in which ways do you adapt it to the current situation?

TB: There are several levels of revision or adaptation. Firstly, there is the level of speculative information, which I adapt constantly, from the names of future European Commission Presidents and the next European Parliamentary Election results to the further course of the Caliphate Wars and the eruption of the first Pan-European Pogrom. Things shift so quickly these days; it's easy to predict some general tendencies, but the details are another matter altogether. Clearly, we get those wrong all the time. Funnily enough, I often get belated reactions from people who send me an email two years after their visit, saying: "It's all happening, it's all coming true." I find this very intriguing, because I wonder what it is that is coming true. The present? Secondly, there is the level of geography, the countries and cities where we present the museum, their history and relationship with the EU. Initially we designed *Domo* rather generically to be set "somewhere in Europe." But as we started traveling, we soon discovered that things that work in Brussels, do not necessarily elsewhere. So long, universality... I remember for the first version we were looking for some kind of "patron saint" for the museum, a historical founding father who possessed all the necessary mythological qualities but had sunk into oblivion. We picked Otto von Habsburg, the last crown prince of the Austro-Hungarian Empire turned trailblazing MEP. And we painted him a nice, saintly gilded icon. And in Brussels and Rotterdam that functioned really well; people often thought he was completely fictional. But then in Vienna heated debates erupted. After the First World War Otto and his family had been exiled from Austria. Our translator told us for the Vienna version we were legally bound to drop the "von" in "von Habsburg." Of course, I'd anticipated some excitement, but who'd have thought that as soon as his gilded icon went up the wall, hardcore monarchists would also start visiting the museum. At the bar they confided to me that the EU's current woes could only be overcome by the restoration of the empire.

SH: I remember you saying that your views on the EU have also changed a lot since 2013. Maybe that is also something important to bring up?

TB: Yes, absolutely. That's yet another level. The position of the EU in the mind of a lot of people has really shifted between 2013 and right now. I have the impression there's another kind of debate going on; people seem to be much more aware than before. And then, as you say, there's me. I really no longer agree with a lot of the interviews I gave about the project back in 2013. I'm always having a hard time when a theatre or a festival is presenting *Domo* and quoting my words from 2013. Of course, I really meant what I said back then, but I simply no longer think the same. For example, in 2013, I repeatedly said in interviews that I really wanted to trigger in the audience this kind of sensation of going to the funeral of an acquaintance that is actually not dead. The museum, I said, had to evoke a sense of nostalgia for something that is still there, as an attempt to talk about death in order to avoid it. Looking back on all the overlapping crises of the past few years and the way EU institutions and member states handled them or did not manage to or blatantly refused to handle them, I think this no longer holds true. I think, right now, I would rather describe *Domo* as my reply to Gramsci when he said, and I'm paraphrasing: "a crisis is the moment when the old is dying and the new cannot be born." Even though we can't seem to let go of it, the old is dying beyond all doubt. I think today, I would really say that my museum is an attempt to finally put some things to the grave, to have a proper burial, say goodbye and observe a decent period of grieving. That's what you need, in order to move on and go to the next level, so the new can be born at last.

New Realism and the Contemporary World

The Re-enactments and Tribunals of the International Institute of Political Murder

Milo Rau

Editorial note: This text is based on two sources. The first source was Milo Rau's contribution to the Contemporaneities-symposium where Rau, supported by his dramaturge Stephan Bläske, gave an overview of some of the methods and strategies in the work of the International Institute of Political Murder (IIPM). The second source was an interview with Frederik Le Roy which focused on issues that were left untouched during the presentation at the symposium.

A Theatre of the Real

With the International Institute for Political Murder (IIPM), the theatre and film production company I founded in 2007, I always make trilogies. So far, I have made three such trilogies. The first dealt with re-enactment and consisted of *The Last Days of the Ceausescus* (2009), on the Romanian revolution of 1989 and the trial against the Ceausescu couple, *Hate Radio* (2011), on the genocide of Rwanda, and *Breivik's Statement* (2012), which was a re-enactment of parts of one of the speeches by ultra-rightwing mass murderer Anders Breivik. The second trilogy used trials and tribunals, which took place in Zürich, Moscow and Congo. After that I focused on Europe with *The Europe Trilogy* (2014-2016), and currently I'm starting a new trilogy of theatre projects that deal with the medium theatre and with theatrical effects. To be able to make three works concerning the same questions, both in terms of subject matter and representational techniques, allows me to really explore and eventually master a form without sticking to the same rules for too long. Here I want to primarily focus on the works using re-enactment and the trials because those seem to speak the most to the theme.

I first want to introduce the way we work in general and present some of the tools and methodologies we use to create our projects. When we founded the IIPM in 2007, we created a schematic map that traces the evolution of different artistic movements and their mutual relationships. For this map, we drew our inspiration from the famous cover of an exhibition catalogue by Alfred H. Barr Jr., the first curator of the Museum of Modern Art, entitled *Cubism and Abstract*

Art (1936) which presented a diagram of the historical development of the different styles, influences and movements of modern art. We made a kind of re-enactment of Barr's diagram, using the same style and graphics, to sketch out the different influences in our work – from romantic irony to New Journalism, from “the art of mimesis” to experimental ethnology, to name but a few. To explain our methodology, a few of the terms that we introduce in that diagram are useful.

Let's start with “investigative anthropology.” If I have to describe my work, I would state that I am an anthropologist working with film, theatre, media, politics and so on. This means that each re-enactment, theatrical trial or play entails long periods of intensive research, often supported by a team of collaborators. For *The Congo Tribunal*, for example, we spent about two years on doing research in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and other places. Such long research periods are not exceptional. They are informed by the work of researchers we engage and by interviews with specialists and testimonials by local witnesses. Importantly, our research is not only documentary: part of it is also the casting of actors, the development of the *mise-en-scène*, the writing of a script – all these I consider as research. It's difficult to distinguish between the different stages of research as they are all intertwined and inform each other.

This is also why I think our work is different from documentary theatre in its traditional sense. In documentary theatre, the main focus of the theatrical representation is on the presentation of preexisting documentary material. In documentary theatre, it is implied that what is being said on stage, has been said before. There are documents, sources, witness accounts to prove it. For me, however, documentary theatre is a *contradictio in terminis*. There are documents and then there is theatre and to go from one to the other will always involve a transposition. The transposition of historical documents creates something different: not a documentary theatre but, what I would call, the theatre of the real or also new realist theatre. There is this sentence that we often repeat and that is loosely based on a quote of Jean-Luc Godard: realism in theatre doesn't mean that a reality is reproduced but that the reproduction itself becomes real in the moment of performance. That is a perspective that is probably more performative than documentary. What counts for me is the reality of the moment of representation. What is real and what is not real at that moment? And that representation could be a witness testifying, a trial, a truth and reconciliation commission, a fictional theatre play, a museum (like in the work of Thomas Bellinck), and so on.

It is important to note here that the idea of blending fact and fiction, connected to the debates around the emergence of postmodernism, has become less and less interesting and is no longer a current issue for me. In my earlier period, I have made works – my first films for example – that were clearly inspired by the irony and deconstruction of postmodern cinema of the 90s. Postmodernism has certainly been an important influence for me, but with the foundation of the IIPM I clearly moved away from that. Instead of reflecting reality in an ironic mirror, the re-enactments of the IIPM like Ceausescus-project had a seriousness that was entirely different from a postmodern attitude. Instead of deconstructing truth or undoing realism, we paid meticulous attention to detail and the materiality of the historical reality. This method fits my larger political and intellectual vision which is entirely anti-postmodernist.

Even if my projects involve interviews, travels and other kinds of documentary research, the main research is always on this transposition, which primarily involves the production of a text that will be staged. Apart from one exception – the production *Breivik's Statement* based on the speech of Anders Breivik – the creative process of my theatre always involves the production of a text. Producing and understanding the logic of this text is already part of the creation of the *mise en scène*. There is no document prior to the creative process, instead the creative process produces the document. This also means that the document presented on the stage only exists as a finished document shortly before the première.

The next notion from the diagram I would like to shed light on is “The art of Mimesis” with the specification “Evreinov Tarde et al.” The Russian theatre director Nikolai Evreinov is a major influence on our work. Evreinov famously created a re-enactment of the storming of the Winter Palace three years after the historical event took place. Actually, Evreinov’s mass spectacle *The Storming of the Winter Palace* can hardly be called a re-creation because the events he supposedly re-enacted never happened. This illustrious moment of the revolution was originally just a rather quiet *coup d'état* executed by ten or twenty soldiers during the night. It was not this futuristic, Proletkult-like festival with hundred thousands of people that Evreinov made out of it. Interestingly, seven years later, so ten years after the Oktober Revolution, Eisenstein re-enacted the re-enactment by Evreinov and named his film *October: Ten Days That Shook the World* (1928), a documentary. Several years ago, when I opened a journal to read

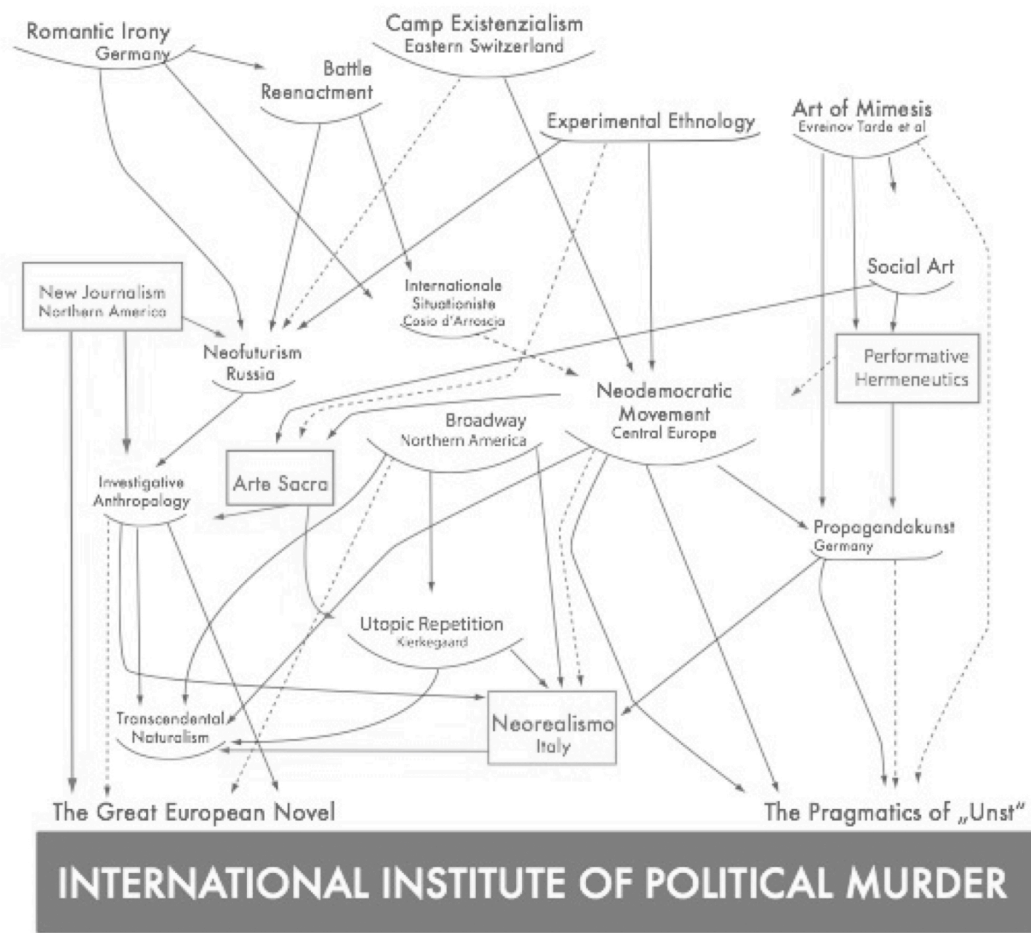
an article about the Gulag which referred to the Russian revolution, one of the images was a still from Eisenstein's film. The picture showing the re-enactment of Evreinov's re-enactment – which was totally made up – was presented there as a historical document. Of course, the reason for this mistake can be traced back to the fact that no pictures exist of what actually happened that night in October in Saint-Petersburg. For us, this is interesting. Not only has the picture entered cultural imagination as if it were a depiction of a real event, it also shows that the history of re-enactment actually starts with a lie.

This is for us “The art of Mimesis”: with the IIPM we always use institutional forms that exist outside of theatre and transport these to the stage. In this way, we have appropriated re-enactment, trials and juridical processes but also propaganda art (to which we will come back later). This brings us to one of the most important things for us in the diagram of influences on the IIPM: “Propagandakunst.” The main question of propaganda art, which of course has links to the revolutionary art of Evreinov and Eisenstein but is also connected with German fascism, is how to influence the opinion of a majority of people through art. How can art become real in a very pragmatic, political but also historical way?

Shortly after the creation of the institute we published the manifesto *What is Unst?* in a Swiss newspaper. “Unst” is of course “Kunst” (“Art” in German) without the “K.” The manifesto was presented as a dialogue between a scholar and a maestro of Unst who, as a specialist in Unst, would respond to all the questions the scholar has about Unst. The scholar asks the following: “What does the modern artist deliver to society?” The answer is: “The artist delivers a literal repetition of the present, through the past, for the future.” The scholar might ask: “What does that mean?” To explain this, it is useful to go deeper into the corpus of re-enactments we made.

Re-enactment and the Universal in the Concrete

Almost ten years ago, we made the project *The Last Days of the Ceausescus*, which consisted of a theatre play and a film. The project dealt with the trial and the execution of Nicolae and Elena Ceausescu on Christmas Day of 1989 in Romania. The execution by firing squad of the despot and his wife was supposed to be the inaugurating event of a new Romania. We organized a casting in Romania and found two famous Romanian actors, well-known for their work in theatre, television and cinema, to re-enact the entire one hour and fifteen



Mind map of the *International Institute of Political Murder*

minutes of the television broadcast of the trial of the Ceausescus. The only known images of the event are from that live broadcast, but show only a specific perspective on the event because the camera was fixed on the corner where the couple was sitting. We took this broadcast as our starting point, and by making a precise re-enactment of the broadcast – frame by frame, second by second – and placing it on the stage we were able to open up the camera's angle.

Our approach was more performative than theatrical. We made the re-enactment more like a choreography or a music play. The lack of "theatralization" meant that some parts were actually quite boring or chaotic because throughout the recorded trial about ten voices were talking – often even screaming – simultaneously. We did work on the acting, using techniques like method acting, but we rehearsed it as a music play, to create a complex ensemble that would be as exact a copy as possible. I'm fascinated by what happens when you re-create an event in scale one to one, so to speak. When we showed it on stage in the national theatre of Bucharest, it not only produced quite a shock, the only surviving son of the Ceausescu also pressed charges against the national theatre and our company because we used the name "Ceausescu." He lodged his juridical complaint on the fact that he was the copyright holder on the name of his father. We used that name illegally. In a very simple way, that case showed what was for us at stake in *The Last Days*, namely that after the downfall of the communist state the political power has been transformed into economical power. Moreover, because of that trial against us, the archives of the revolution were re-opened for the first time. The strange thing is that when you see the 180° angle of that trial, you see all the participants, also those who were originally outside the frame. Five of the people in this trial who were in the army at the time of the revolution, are now in the parliament, in the government or in some other international institution. It's really ghostlike, how you see them talk to their chef Nicolae Ceausescu during the trial, after which they will kill him and become social democrats.

This brings us back to the artist's statement about what the artist does, namely reproducing the present through the past for the future. If you type into Google "Ceausescu trial," then the first ten images that show up are all from our re-enactment, rather than from the actual event of 1989. Most of you will know the work *Seven Easy Pieces* by Marina Abramović which was shown in the Guggenheim Museum in New York, and consisted of seven re-enactments of the historically most important performance art works – one of which was hers. If you look for the original performances on the internet, you will always find

Wie löst die Unst das Zeitproblem?

FRAGE: Wie steht die Unst zur Jetztzeit, zur Geschichte und zu den Problemen der Zukunft?

ANTWORT: Die Unst ist die Analyse des GENAU SO der Jetztzeit, welche aber im Augenblick ihrer Betrachtung bereits eine vergangene, also eine Vorzeit ist.

FRAGE: Die Jetztzeit ist eine Vorzeit?

ANTWORT: Oder umgekehrt.

FRAGE: Und weiter?

ANTWORT: Gegeben das gestische Voranschreiten der Unst im jeweils gegebenen Moment in beide Richtungen der Vor- und der Nachzeit, ist jede Erkenntnis des Ünstlers über das GENAU SO der Jetztzeit zugleich eine Handlungsanweisung für eine ebenfalls völlig gleichzeitig sich ereignende Nachzeit.

FRAGE: Die Gegenwart des Ünstlers ist also eine Handlungsanweisung an die Zukunft?

ANTWORT: Richtig. Unter der Voraussetzung natürlich, dass diese Anweisung nicht in irgendeiner übertragenen Weise, sondern ausschliesslich GENAU SO, also FÜR DEN GEGEBENEN MOMENT, also WÖRTLICH gemeint ist. Aber ein Ünstler spricht immer wörtlich, sonst wäre er kein Ünstler.

FRAGE: Vergangenheit, Gegenwart und Zukunft werden durch die Arbeit des Ünstlers ein und dasselbe?

ANTWORT: Natürlich.

FRAGE: Produziert ein Ünstler also Nachzeit?

ANTWORT: Selbstverständlich. Jeder Ünstler ist eine völlig objektive Weisungsagentur der Nachzeit.

FRAGE: Der Ünstler kennt die Zukunft?

ANTWORT: Richtig. Aber nur für den jeweils gegebenen Moment. Nur innerhalb der jeweiligen Recherche. Nur wörtlich.

FRAGE: Was also liefert der Ünstler der Gesellschaft?

ANTWORT: Der Ünstler liefert: eine völlig wörtliche Wiederholung der Gegenwart durch die Vergangenheit für die Zukunft.

Fragment from *Was ist Unst?* Published on the frontpage of the February 20, 2009 issue of the newspaper *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*

Marina Abramović re-enacting them because this re-enacting was a true media event, with people taking countless photographs. While Abramović herself, in some cases, often had difficulty finding documentation of the original performances, there are now endless sources of her re-enactments online. The re-enactment of the original has become an image of the real event. The double is now more important, so to speak, than the original. This reminded us of what happened with Evreinov's re-enactment of the Storming of the Winter Palace of course, but also of what we did with *The Last Days*. In the present re-enactment of the images of the past, we produce how the future will remember that past. With *The Last Days* we created an image of a past that was being repressed.

That is also something you see in our piece *Hate Radio*. Here again there was a reference to propaganda style, but now we focused on the perpetrator's perspective on the Rwandan genocide in 1994. We invited actors to re-create a broadcast by one of the most famous radio stations in Rwanda back then, namely the racist fun-radio Radio Télévision Libre des Mille Collines (RTLMC), which played a key role in stirring up the extreme violence. With the re-enactment of the radio show, the stage became a place where all the hate and racism was present again. With this piece we moved beyond proper re-enactment because the show was a fictionalized version of the broadcasts we found in the archives. It's not an exact copy of a one hour radio show that actually took place. For example, we included a song by Nirvana in the playlist of the radio broadcast even though we knew that this song would not have been played originally. However, Nirvana was popular at the same time the Rwandan genocide occurred. After hearing the song in *Hate Radio*, many, even Rwandans, were convinced it was also played on RTLMC, while that was not the fact. That's how memory works.

That which is most visible and most frequently reproduced often loses its meaning and becomes the most invisible. The video of the last hours of Ceausescu is widely known and widely available, but strangely enough, nobody has taken the time to really look at it. It has its metaphorical and political significations that have been imposed on the image, but the challenge is to look beyond those. A similar idea is present in the projects for *The Europe Trilogy*: if you concentrate intensely and for a long time on the very concrete, on the lives of specific individuals, you will find the most unexpected and universal things. In a way, making those projects, is reaffirming the Hegelian idea that in the concrete you will find the universal, while the most universal is only materialized in the concrete. That idea is theatrical *par excellence* because the theater is *always* in the

moment, in the concrete, in the material existence. As an art form that is not dependent on reproduction and requires to be presented live, theatre is an art of the concrete. And it is in the concrete that the universal can be shown. This concrete reality can be a well-known image, like in *The Last Days*, but those images are not necessarily the starting point. In *Hate Radio*, for example, we shy away from the iconic images of the Rwandan genocide – no skulls, no machetes. With *The Europe Trilogy* we worked with the absolute concrete: I deliberately prohibited to say anything that had been made up. We only made a montage of the concrete, individual material of the autobiographical stories of the actors who had gone through particular historical or personal events. There was nothing preceding the montage we made. But such a montage creates a collective on the moment of the performance. This collective only exists on the moment of the performance, when the spectators understand that they too are somehow represented on the stage, even if the represented lives are very different from theirs or even if what they see on stage is not a fictitious “third figure.” Unlike Rimini Protokoll’s “experts of the everyday,” who aren’t theatre professionals, the people on stage are professional actors playing themselves. I’m interested in what emerges from that confrontation of the authentic and the artificial, of the concrete and the universal.

The last re-enactment we did was *Breivik’s Statement*. For this work we sort of re-enacted the speeches the Norwegian far-right terrorist and mass murderer Anders Breivik gave in court during his trial. For this re-enactment, we invited an actress to bring his speech on different stages in Europe, each time in an official building. In Ghent we presented it in the Aula, the ceremonial central hall of Ghent University. At the basis was an almost activist or rebellious gesture. I was impressed by the complexity of the speech, the rhetorics, the way in which Breivik mixes both left-wing and right-wing clichés. Apart from a few passages, the speech isn’t that extreme or different from what certain politicians claim today. I was interested in seeing what this discourse of a right-wing terrorist could produce when restaged, but restaged by an actress who very deliberately kept a certain distance while pronouncing the speech and made no effort at all to sound or look like Breivik. The focus was on the discourse and it was our intention to make the audience really listen to it, without immediately dismissing the text because it was written by a right-wing terrorist. From the outset, the piece was met with resistance and controversy. A week before the première, for example, the piece was canceled. The recurring scandals around this project became an integral part of it. Interestingly, the project took place before the



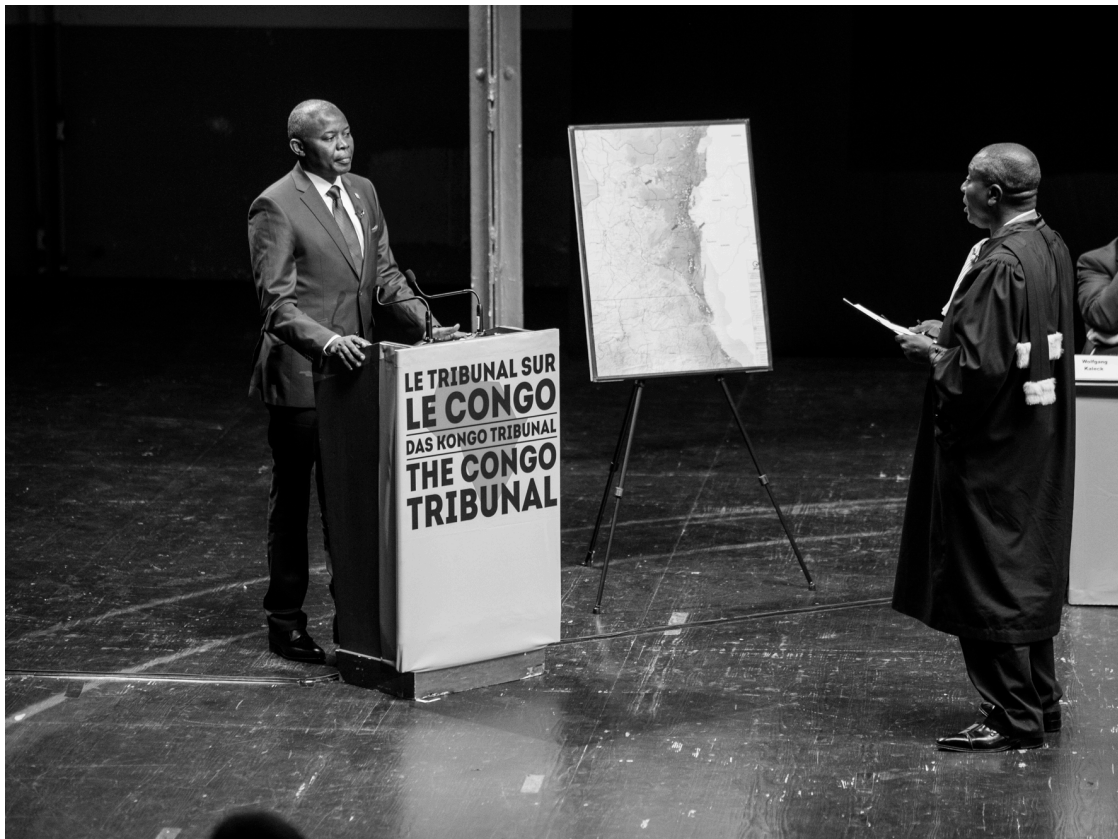
From left to right at the microphones: Georges Ruggiu (Sébastien Foucuault), Valérie Bemeriki (Bwanga Pilipili) and Kantano Habimana (Diogène Ntarindwa) (Photographer: Zeno Graton © IIPM)

terrorist attacks in Paris and Brussels. These events transformed the discourse. This reminds me of Thomas Bellinck's contribution, explaining how certain works hold prophecies that might or might not be fulfilled, how the future in the reproduction of the past might actually be realized, even if only in part.

Propaganda Art, Theatrical Trials and Globalization

I mentioned that propaganda art is a major influence. How can art be used to change public opinion? In 2010 we did a project called *City of Change* after we learned that demographical research had shown that between 25 and 30 percentage of Swiss people are immigrants – up until the fourth generation – and do not have the right to vote. An opinion pole had also shown that 80 percent of the Swiss thought that the immigrant vote was an absurd idea. So we decided to create a project that would try to introduce the right to vote for immigrants through art. The main influence on our idea of propaganda art is the theory by Gramsci who stated that power resides in the opinion of the majority of people rather than in the actual political institutions. Societal change can be achieved by influencing the opinion of the majority. Gramsci was, in a way, the first postmodern of the communists. In the Swiss town of St. Gallen, we created an interim government, wrote and presented speeches, mounted a media campaign with a campaign logo. It was a very rudimentary exercise in propaganda. After a month of doing this, we did another opinion pole which now showed that only 25 percent was against voting rights for immigrants. The film about the project tells this hopeful story. However, the film ends with a follow-up project we did in which we used similar techniques to organize a petition demanding a racist law – a harder version of the Nuremberg Laws. After one week we actually obtained enough support so that the law could be presented before parliament. Just to say that in Swiss democracy you can achieve almost anything.

After the re-enactment we somehow tied back to a more direct political form that was already present in *City of Change*, when the IIPM produced a series of trials which, in most cases, took place in theatrical settings. The first one, *The Zurich Trials* (2013), was against a Swiss right-wing newspaper. More recently we made *The Moscow Trials* (2013) at the Sakharov Center in Moscow. The name already shows that one of our major inspirations for these trials were the communist show trials – perfectly planned and controlled spectacles that were used by the regime to intimidate political opponents and influence the general population. With *The Moscow Trials* we re-litigated a series of trials against curators, art galleries and artists that took place between 2002 and 2012, not with



Chief prosecutor Sylvestre Bisimwa questions Presidential candidate and expert of the tribunal Vital Kamerhe during „The Berlin Hearings“. (Photo: Daniel Seiffert)

actors but with some of the real participants of the original trials. Apart from the curators and artists, some of the attorneys and even one of the judges participated, as well as several experts and even a famous ultranationalist right-wing populist. One of the artists participating was the only member of Pussy Riot who was not in the labor camps at that time. All of them got the opportunity to make their case again before a jury of real Muscovites who, at the end of the trial, could decide if art won or not. The idea was to show what would happen if the original anti-artistic trials would not have been show trials, set up by the Russian regime and with a predetermined outcome, but real trials. In the end, with a very close vote, art won.

The last trial we did was *The Congo Tribunal* (2015), which was made on location in Congo with an international cast and which consisted of both a film and a theatre part. In it, we wanted to investigate the causes of the civil war – sometimes called the Congo war or even, due to its enormous scale and the huge number of victims, the “third world war” – that has been raging in the Great Lake Region for more than 20 years now. We did three symbolical trials, two of them on the economic underpinnings of the conflict, which focussed on industry for natural resources and the deportation of people, a massacre which was more or less caused by the UN, together with the Congolese Army. The other tribunal was organized in a city in the middle of the region Bukavu where the civil war was raging. We invited judges from the International Court of Justice in Den Hague, Congolese judges but also rebel leaders, government representatives like the minister of interior and citizens who survived the massacres, some of which testified anonymously. We worked closely together with some political parties. After *City of Change*, this project was our first try to have a direct impact on politics and on public opinion.

A question that is asked often to me with regards to these projects is what my stand towards globalization is and how I, as a European, relate to those different realities given the history of colonialism for example. There are two ways to think globalization. The first way is really tragic. Take the Rwandan genocide for example: you do not have to be a paranoiac to realize that this genocide is also, even primarily, a European genocide. The same goes for the conflict in the Great Lake region in Congo which we dealt with in *The Congo Tribunal*. If the natural resources that power our computers and telephones were not found there, or if our phones and computers would be produced in Rwanda or Congo instead of Taiwan or South Korea, those conflicts would probably not have happened the

way they have. Showing the connections with our way of living makes the networks of culpability in globalization visible. That is the reason why we “Europeanized” the radio show in *Hate Radio*. Changing the ratio between African and European songs helped to emphasize that this crisis was a globalized crisis. It was the first globalized genocide committed on the tunes I, as a youngster, was listening to at the same time.

A second way to think globalization is culturally. I am astounded that in theater we continue to stage the plays of Chekhov or other canonic dramatists. Why don't we try to create contemporary writings that reflect on our globalized reality? Why do we do Shakespeare and not Ceausescu? Why Euripides and not the war in the Great Lake region? Why do we reproduce the tribunals in the plays of Büchner, instead of creating tribunals in theatre that reflect on the injustices of today? Why don't we create new plays that speak about the revolutions of our time across the world? This questions primarily concern theatre because the contemporary visual arts, cinema and popular culture are already totally globalized. My children know more about American and African music than they do about German music but they will, eventually, know the German theatre a lot better than American or African theatre. In theatre we are behind on globalization. Theatre remains traditionalist and Eurocentric. It is supported by a system that allows my plays to travel to Singapore, to the United States, to Africa, to everywhere, but that pseudo-globalism borders on neo-colonialism. We see this in France: the French look at what the Germans are doing in theatre and they do it themselves ten years later. Today they start to work like Frank Castorf twenty year ago. That's very sad and strange at the same time. In music it isn't possible to make the music that was made ten or twenty years ago. But in theatre it is. That's why there is a ridiculous colonialism in theatre, something I fight against. So, there is an economic side to globalization with often very tragic effects, but there is also another form of globalization, that is an interest that is truly ethnographic. If we use an ethnographic approach to German theatre, we will quickly recognize the enormous influence of Protestantism in the way theatre makers work with space, the way of acting, the overall minimalism and so on. It's interesting to consider that, not only in Germany but also in other global contexts. That is the kind of globalism that interests me.

I have always tried to create an art that you could be called “global realism” because *I am* in Congo, just like I am in Romania or Russia. I am there not only



Setting „The Kongo Tribunal“ at Sophiensaele Berlin
(Photo: Daniel Seiffert)

because I consume products which, in our globalized economy, in part have their origin in those localities, but also because our histories are interconnected. Switzerland, Germany or Europe *are* or *have been* in Congo and Rwanda. Local perspectives are important but my perspective is also local. When I was in Rwanda, I really tried to talk about myself and situate myself in a direct way. Moreover, we have worked in central Africa since six or seven years now and have built strong relations. We discuss and exchange thoughts and sometimes, after a few years, we know what we want to work on, what could be an interesting project.

Take Russia, for example. When I was very young, growing up before the fall of the wall in 1989, I was very attracted by the idea of communism. My parents were Trotskyist. Given that history, the idea of making a project in Russia was very exiting for me, so when I was invited to create a project on the Gulag I immediately proposed to do something about the second show trial of 1937. After one and a half years in Moscow, I saw that what happened in the thirties in the Stalinist show trials was being translated to the present with the trials against artists and curators, and eventually also against Pussy Riot with whom I had been in contact. The action of Pussy Riot that unleashed the scandal and led to their incarceration happened when we were working on a first version of *The Moscow Trials*. Only after two years with many side steps we eventually created *The Moscow Trials*. Every time it's a long process. And in these different local contexts, I enter with a certain framework, for example about justice and injustice, but within the set-up the trial allows for other frameworks in which the participants can place their own reality. During *The Congo Tribunal* for example, one of the participants very strongly used the tribunal as his own platform to promote his candidacy for the presidency. I often hear the critique of Eurocentrism, implying that my European perspective would dominate, but I would also get the critique that I allowed this person to use the trial as his platform for local political reasons. The same can be said of some of the ultranationalist interventions during *The Moscow Trials*. These different and often diverging points, however, should be allowed to meet in the trials.

Coda: Theatre and the Voyeuristic Impulse

Returning to the question of documentary which I addressed at the start of the talk, I do want to stress that it is often important for the spectators of my theatre plays to know that what is being presented on stage has really happened once before – even if it has been transposed. It helps to pass through the trauma.

Therein lies the performative power of the sentence "based on actual events" at the start of a film or novel: it provokes an emotional expectation which is very different from the expectation we have as a spectator when we go to see Shakespeare. While in rhetoric you have to implement a *captatio benevolentiae* in the start of a speech to capture the goodwill of the audience, the "based on actual events" induces the spectator's instinctive voyeuristic impulses. My theater induces from such a voyeuristic *captatio*, which, rather than rhetoric, is a question of "Pavlov": it is provoked by the theatrical situation as such. The theatrical effect, in my opinion, does not stem from an intellectual interest but should be understood in relation to the moment of the performance. It is no coincidence that in 2017 I will make a piece called *The History of Theatre* in which I will reflect on the machinery of theatre, on voyeurism, on the myth of authenticity and on the voicing of politically provocative opinions – all these elements that make us feel addressed but also aggressed by what happens on a stage.

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CONTENTS

- 2 Contemporaneities. On the Entangled Now of Performance
Frederik Le Roy
- 28 Time on our Hands
Rebecca Schneider
- 46 The Local Prejudice of Contemporary Dance
Fabián Barba
- 64 From Contemporary Dance to Contemporaneous Dance. Choreographic Re-enactment and the Experience of Contemporaneity After (Post-)Modernity
Timmy De Laet
- 90 The Distance with the Present. On Agamben's Notion of the Contemporary
Daniel Blanga-Gubbay

PORTFOLIO

- 101 A Future History of the Present
Thomas Bellinck & Sébastien Hendrickx
- 121 New Realism and the Contemporary World. The Re-enactments and Tribunals of the International Institute of Political Murder
Milo Rau