After the Future: Choreography as the Practice of Editing

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***After the Future*: Choreography as a practice of editing**

Antje Hildebrandt

This article explores the role of the choreographer as editor of words and movements through the interrogation of a piece of practice entitled *After the Future: A Homage to Bifo*, which was performed in June 2012 and April 2013, and now exists as a video work (https://vimeo.com/74394747). As the project is preoccupied with the relationship between humans and technology it asks where meaning resides – in the body, in between bodies, in the voice, in gestures, in words, in spoken or written language, in movement language, in languages of the body. In the following writing, I will expand on ideas on the shifting role of the choreographer from author to editor, the dancer as copyist, performance as a 'catching up' in time and place and the implications of a continued understanding of choreography as a theoretical as and a practical field of study.

In a recent publication Jenn Joy reminds us of the urgency to see 'dance and choreography not only as artistic strategies and disciplines but also as intrinsically theoretical and critical practices' (2014: 15). The choreographic practice discussed in this article aligns itself with this expanded understanding of choreography and attempts to critique the idea that dance is a form of expression that lends itself to producing experiences of aesthetic (visual) pleasure and satisfaction in the viewer. Claudia Kappenberg and Douglas Rosenberg promote this notion in relation to screendance as they write in *The International Journal of Screendance* 1, 'we aim to reframe screendance as a

form of research that examines the interrelationships of composition, choreographic language, and meanings of body, movement, space and time' (Rosenberg and Kappenberg 2010: 1). Similarly, I have argued elsewhere (Hildebrandt 2016) that choreography at the beginning of the twenty-first century should not only be understood as contained in the discipline of dance, but as an expanded practice relevant not just to the field of arts or education but also to society at large. Choreography as a theoretical and a practical field of study opens up possibilities for a new approach to training dancers through understanding itself both as a theoretical tool and a 'doing' practice. The intertwining of theory and practice comments on important and timely philosophical issues that expand beyond dance, such as subjectivity, representation, embodiment, authorship, spectatorship, participation, collaboration and knowledge production. In this way dance, which places an emphasis on individual experience and movement, becomes even more relevant to many current political processes, such as globalization and changing labour/work structures. Today, dance is expanding beyond its perception as an object that can be described in terms of style (of a certain choreographer-author) or subject matter (theme). As it becomes increasingly more recognized for its potential as a form of production (rather than representation), it can comment on its own politics and is able to reposition itself in a wider social and political context. As Joy argues, 'choreography as critical concept and practice attunes us to a more productively uncertain, precarious, and ecstatic understanding of aesthetics and art making' (2014: back cover).

In this article, then, I will discuss my work entitled *After the Future: A Homage to Bifo* (Hildebrandt 2012), a twenty-minute video piece that I created in dialogue with the conceptual concerns of the article, referred to above, which attempts to illustrate these issues in practice.[1] *After the Future: A Homage to Bifo* has a 'double identity'. As a work, it manifests itself both as a live performance and as a piece of video art. Two different live performance versions were presented at Hotel Elephant (a gallery in South London) as part of *The Industry Invites* […] on 19 July 2012 and at the *Performing Documents Conference* at Arnolfini (Bristol) on 14 April 2013. Here, I will mainly refer to the video version, which is not to be read as documentation of the live event, but as a work in and of itself.[2] It is worth noting that this article is written with a nod to Walter Benjamin's often-quoted essay, 'The work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction' from 1936, in which he argued that (at the time) new technologies of reproduction, like photography and film, would change perceptions of art and allow for new understandings that questioned the uniqueness and originality of a work of art. My own questioning at the beginning of making *After the Future: A Homage to Bifo* was as follows: how can I complicate the relationship between theory and practice, undermining both? How can I turn a lecture into a dance? How can I turn theory into practice? How can I take something that already exists and turn it into something else? How can I respond to Bifo's proposition about the end of the future through choreography?

In *After the Future: A Homage to Bifo*, a performer (Stella Dimitrakopoulou) copies, without prior rehearsal, words and movements from a video that

shows Franco Berardi aka 'Bifo'. The Italian Marxist, founder of the famous *Radio Alice* in Bologna and an important figure of the Italian Autonomia Movement, is a writer, media theorist and media activist. Even though Berardi does not have any professional training in dance, his practice as a writer is deeply concerned with the body. In a recent article he writes:

> This generation, which experiences a problematic relationship between language and the body, between words and affection, separates language from the body of the mother, and from the body in general – for language in human history has always been connected to a fear of trusting the body. In this situation, we need to reactivate our ability to connect language and desire, or the situation will become extremely bad. If the relationship between the signifier and the signified can no longer be guaranteed by the presence of the body, we lose our relationship to the world. (2011b)

My video interrogates the presence of the body by placing the 'original' video of Berardi explaining key concepts from his book *After the Future* (2011a)[3] next to Dimitrakopoulou's copied version. It explores the relationship between humans and technology and ultimately asks where meaning resides – in the body, in between bodies, in the voice, in gestures, in words, in spoken or written language, in movement language, in languages of the body. With this piece, I argue that meaning does not reside only in language but in complex relationships to the body/to bodies and ultimately in the space between bodies

(performer/spectator or writer/reader). These multiple displacements are essential to the reading of the work.

The premise of the performance for video is at first sight simple: Dimitrakopoulou copies both words and movement from Berardi's talk. Yet, already before this transmission from one body to another, one other displacement has taken place. Since *After the Future* is a full-length book, Berardi has made a selection in the form of a script, even if he hardly refers to this in his talk. Therefore, there is an initial displacement from written to spoken language, preceding Dimitrakopoulou's performance. These types of displacements continue through what I propose to call a practice of copying, which is here not used as a dismissive term with negative connotations, but as a challenging, skilful and attentive act of performance.

The dancer as copyist

It is common knowledge and practice that dancers traditionally learn their craft by copying (movement) from others. In a technique class the teacher would often show exercises and sequences, which the dance students copy. This is a traditional way of transmitting dance knowledge (about a certain technique, a piece of repertoire or a choreography) from one body to another. Dance students often spend many years copying other people's movements before they start creating their own work. They engage in a process of repeating and returning again and again in order to inscribe and memorize certain techniques and to preserve another's gesture. It could be said then that

dancers construct their own identity, and becomes oneselves, through copying others.

In *After the Future*, I playfully comment on the 'show and copy' tradition by presenting the dancer as 'virtuoso' copyist, foregrounding notions of synchronicity and difference that are fundamental principles in choreographic practice. I tried to emphasize this by giving Dimitrakopoulou the task to copy Berardi as accurately as possible. I wanted her to engage in the act of copying, to be fully absorbed in it in order to create distance and to work against notions of 'performance'. Despite her obvious awareness that she is performing, she does not try to 'act like' or even portray Berardi. The focus for her is on 'doing' rather than 'being'.

The difference between 'doing' and 'being' was further emphasized when the work was presented as a live performance. The moments of 'pause' between the sections became important markers in highlighting Dimitrakopoulou's task-like activity, as she returned to a 'neutral' position, to her own physicality, for a split second. Dimitrakopoulou's direct relationship with the camera in the video is different to when the work is performed live, as the relationship, which is normally immediate, is disrupted by technology. During the live performance, the almost dialectical character and tone of Berardi's talk was emphasized as it became even more difficult for Dimitrakopoulou to 'connect' with the people in front of her due to the distance that the laptop screen created between her and the audience. The technological 'obstacle' ironically points towards the impossibility of performance to communicate 'directly' in a

straightforward way. Nonetheless, the video clearly shows the bodily differences between Dimitrakopoulou and Berardi as the task of copying exposes the physicality, the character, the expressiveness, the gestures, the habits and the accents of both 'performers'. One of the reasons for choosing Berardi as a subject for copy was his engaging physicality and his distinct presence as a performer that Dimitrakopoulou can only fail to match and that, in turn, brings out her own physicality even more. I suggest that the act of copying for a post-conceptual dancer functions as a kind of relief, in which she is no longer required to fully express herself through an emphasis on her individual identity. At the same time the task might make Berardi aware of the peculiarities of his 'movement vocabulary', should he ever come across the video.

The act of copying further posits performance as the practice of 'catching-up' and complicates notions of time. Since *After the Future: A Homage to Bifo* is performed without prior rehearsal, it could be called an act of instant performance. There is no hidden practice; the labour/skill of the work is what one sees in the moment of its realization (not counting, of course, the years of training that Dimitrakopoulou undertook as a dancer). Yet there is a slight delay, a 'behindness', as Dimitrakopoulou tries to 'catch up' with Berardi's speed and rhythm. This complex and paradoxical relationship between past and present is made explicit in the piece as Dimitrakopoulou explains the demands that the act of copying places on her as a performer: 'I'm trying to stay in the present whilst catching up a moment that is already in the past

[Berardi's gesture] which is actually before the present moment' (14 April 2013, personal conversation).

The choreographer as editor

If the dancer partakes in the act of copying, with its multiple translations that complicate notions of time and authenticity, I propose the act of editing as the practice of the choreographer. André Lepecki has described choreography as a 'system of command' (Allsopp and Lepecki 2008: 3) that controls and disciplines bodies in the same way as we could say language is a system of command that controls and disciplines (written and spoken) voices. Whereas my practice at times acknowledges and exposes these commanding systems, it also seeks to escape and challenge them. It approaches choreography as an expanded practice by trying to find alternative strategies for making dance work, such as methods of copying and editing.

For instance, in *After the Future: A Homage to Bifo* I reintroduce the choreographer as editor (as opposed to author), both in a sense of literally framing the act of editing (whether it is film or text) as choreography and conceptualizing the task of the editor as someone who is involved in activities such as adapting, developing, handling, focusing, selecting, combining, structuring, ordering and organizing, which are all aspects of choreography. It is the responsibility of the editor to prepare the final outcome for publication by considering and negotiating between the author, the reader and the work. In other words, the editor creates frames/frameworks for movement to take place (similar to Lepecki's notion of choreography as a commanding system)

and provides the condition(s) for something to happen, without necessarily having a clear preconceived idea of how the overall work is going to look. In his book *Postproduction*, Nicolas Bourriaud writes, with reference to art production since the early 1990s, that 'an ever increasing number of artworks have been created on the basis of preexisting works; more and more artists interpret, reproduce, re-exhibit, or use works made by others or available cultural products' (2005: 7). He asserts that 'artists who insert their own work into that of others contribute to the eradication of the traditional distinction between production and consumption, creation and copy, readymade and original work' (2005: 7).

I would add to Bourriaud's observation that the methodology of copying further confuses the boundaries between subject and object, between viewer and performer, between author and copyist and between choreographer and editor, questioning where the object resides. To position the choreographer not as author but as editor and to create a video work out of pre-existing material is a strategy that questions the necessity of creation and production (of an original work of art), placing instead importance on the way this material is presented and interpreted. The role of the spectator when she/he is directly addressed through the lens of the camera places responsibility on her/him as an active observer and interpreter.

The video that shows Berardi talking about his book *After the Future* is divided into several sections: futurism, the end of the future, post-futurism, ungrowth, singularity, precarization, semiocapital and thera-poetry. Under these eight

subheadings he argues that, in the past, we have associated the idea of 'the future' with energy, with more speed, strength, consumption, things, work, violence. This constant growth (of economy, capitalism, wealth and accumulation), he argues, has led to an exploitation of our lives. He finds the solution to the problem in 'ungrowth', in 'withdrawal' and in 'slowness of pleasure' since time is not something we can accumulate but only accommodate. 'We do not need more things, we need more time [to live]'.[4] As a time-based medium, often involving pleasure (of slowness), performance lends itself particularly well to this notion of 'retreat' (or pause) as it arrests spectators and performers in the same space at the same time to concentrate on one particular issue, on one particular subject/object. Live performance makes time and space to observe another person (the performer) in detail; it creates a frame to think, to critically reflect on our lives and how they are or should be. Rest, pleasure and time are then the very purposes of performance.

Berardi sees the move from capital (which he defines as the production and transformation of material objects such as iron, metal, steel, cars and things, etc.) to 'semiocapital' (which he defines as the production of capital through immaterial means such as projects, financial figures, words, concepts, simulation, etc.) as leading to an increase and acceleration of information and signs that, in turn, lead to a decline in meaning. In a rather daunting move he connects this loss of meaning to an increase in suffering and mental health problems (such as depression, anxiety, panic and suicide), which, according to him, mark the beginning of the twenty-first century.

Yet all is not lost as he concludes by drawing our awareness to the potential of the voice as a meeting point of body and meaning. It is here, at the very end of the video, that the reason for my decision to use Berardi's text specifically becomes most pertinent. In *After the Future*, I make explicit this meeting point of voice and meaning as I play with the authenticity of two different voices and bodies, arguing that meaning is created also through pauses, intonation, rhythm, tone, gesture and so forth. Furthermore, in order to counteract the 'precarization' of contemporary life, Berardi brings forth the concept of 'singularity' as the ability to withdraw from the 'homogenization of different lifestyles, different rhythms, different relationships with the world'. 'Singularity is joy becoming yourself'. Singularity is about finding one's own rhythm. In my video work, I aim to show the singularity of the two different performers by placing them next to each other. Through precise editing, and as they come in and out of sync with each other, it appears as though they are negotiating their different rhythms and relationships with each other. In Dimitrakopoulou's case I suggest that her singularity, her becoming herself, is emphasized through the act of copying another person's voice and body.

A homage: From copying to choreography

My last point relates to the tension between method (the act of copying) and content (Berardi's arguments) as those two elements can no longer be seen as distinct from each other. I argue with this piece that the question of 'how' a certain artwork is executed (its performance, style and technique) and 'what' is being said remain equally important for the reading of the work. I chose to

select Berardi's video for copying because I think he makes important points about the societal issues of our times. By choosing to present this piece as my work, my aim is to both disseminate his ideas but also, and this is crucial, to question them by simultaneously reproducing and transforming them through the act of copying. Ideally, the work should ask the viewer to start a dialogue about both the content and the methodology of the work. At the same time, it asks him/her to evaluate copying as both a useful and a problematic tool for making conceptual and post-conceptual performance work.

As the title of my piece implies, *After the Future* should be read as a homage rather than a mocking pastiche or satirical comment. It takes Berardi's propositions seriously despite the fact that neither the choreographer nor the dancer might necessarily agree with (all of) what is being said. I want to make the point that dealing with Berardi through my work allows for spectators to engage (critically) with ideas that he puts forth. This possible disjunction of content and method/form became particularly explicit when Dimitrakopoulou and I presented the piece live at a conference.[5] In the question and answer session afterwards, one audience member had clearly not realized (or refused to realize) that Dimitrakopoulou was copying from the screen/headphones as he kept on asking questions about the content of the talk itself. We were quick to point out that we were unable to answer his questions since these words were not our own but Berardi's. Upon reflection, it may have been interesting to carry through this confusion, attempting to give answers 'in the style' of Berardi, anticipating what he would have said in the situation. This situation

raises interesting questions of authorship and dissemination as I 'promote'

Berardi's work and as my work might, unintentionally, become connected to

that of Berardi's.[6]

I have argued in this article that *After the Future: A Homage to Bifo* is a work

that borrows from the work of 'another' (that is Franco 'Bifo' Berardi) to create

a new work. In doing so, the video complicates matters of practice and theory

as it can be read as a dance work that borrows from a work of critical theory in

order to shed new light on that theory and on the multiple ways in which

knowledge is transferred and translated, asking us how we 'read' and how we

make meaning from what we see in front of us. I have drawn on ideas on the

expansion of choreographic performance practice through the shifting role of

the choreographer from author to editor, the dancer as copyist, performance

as a 'catching up' in time and place and the implications of a continued

understanding of choreography as a theoretical and a practical field of study.

Overall I have likened the role of the choreographer to that of an editor of

words and movements, an editor who understands dance in the twenty-first

century as an expanded practice that does not necessarily engage the

conventional object of dance: dancing.

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Appendix: *After the Future: A Homage to Bifo* – Transcript

You know, all along the modern times the myth of the future has been connected to the myth of energy; think about Faust, for instance. This idea that the future is energy: more and more and more. More speed, more strength, more consumption, more things, more violence. Futurism is the point of passage, the final step to full modernity, and futurism is the exaltation of violence, of despising the woman, for instance. The woman is weakness, is senselessness, is feebleness. Everything the modern energy wants to forget about: forget the woman, despise the woman, exalt war, exalt violence, exalt acceleration. This is futurism.

The end of the future

Now futurism has brought the world to this point of total despair. Futurism without future. This is the present reality we are facing and we have to invent something beyond this obsession of the future because the future is over. And saying that the future is over does not mean that tomorrow we will not get up – we will get up – but please, don't be obsessed about the idea that want more things, more violence, more speed. We want more time to live.

At a certain moment in the year '77, as far as I can remember, we had the perception that the future was over. We had the perception that the idea of the constant growth was leading us to destruction and to war, to total exploitation of our life, in the name of the future. So, in some places of the world, for instance in the United Kingdom, where Mrs. Thatcher was taking the power

and saying: 'there is no such thing as society' so, some people cried 'No Future!'. If future has to be a future without society, future where only economy, where capitalism, where wealth and accumulation is legitimate, and society is nothing, if it was this we say: 'No Future!' In some other places in the world – for instance in Italy, in Bologna, and in Rome – students, young proletarians, people said: 'we want our life now'.

You see, '77 was the strangest of the years because in a sense it was the year of color, of happiness, of creativity, of invention of new possibilities for life. But at the same time or maybe suddenly after it became the darkest of moments because we became aware that the possibility of richness, of joy, all of a sudden was destroyed by the restoration of capitalism, of profit, of future.

Post-futurism

So what now? You see what is happening now, at the beginning of the second decade of this century that comes after the end of the future. You can see this destruction, this devastation, of the possibilities that modernity has created. You see it in the dictatorship of the financial economy. Financial economy is destroying intelligence, is destroying public schools, is destroying creativity, is destroying the environment, is destroying water, is destroying weather. Everything has to be sacrificed to the growth – this abstract growth – of money, of value, of nothing. So, how can we withdrawal from this kind of craziness. I think that we have to act, and to live, in a post-futurist way which means we have to choose a slowness of pleasure – like the birds in the sky, like the flowers in the fields, they don't need to work, they don't need to

accumulate, they don't need to possess. They need to have pleasure, to live, to live in time. Time is not something that you can accumulate. Time is something you can accommodate in, and take pleasure of the decomposition of yourself. Taking pleasure in the becoming-other of yourself. Becoming-other means being yourself without protecting yourself. This is post-futurism, I guess.

Ungrowth

Ungrowth is a difficult word to use. I actually don't really like the word. It is an approximation to a better concept that we should invent. Growth means the constant expansion of capital, of property, of the world of things. But we do not need not more things, we need more time. We do not need more property, we need more joy. The collective intelligence, the social organization of collective brain has created the possibility of producing everything we need without more exploitation. So the problem now is not to restart growth; the problem now is to find a way to enjoy what we already have, and develop the possibility of self-care, of self-therapy, of self-education. Society has to come out from the obsession of growth.

The problem of this word – ungrowth – is that it seems to hint to something less. Not at all. What we need is not less life, less pleasure. We need more life! More pleasure! But more life, more pleasure does not imply more consumption, more merchandise, more work! We are dying because of the huge bubble of work. We have been working too much during the last 500 years. We have been working too too much during the last 30 years.

Stop working now. Start living, please.

Singularity

A French philosopher called Simondon uses the word individualization. Individualization is the ability to be yourself in separation from the world. Singularity is something different; singularity is the ability to become yourself, creating the world with your becoming-yourself.

The history of capitalism, the history of accumulation, of growth, is the history of the homogenization of different lifestyles, of different rhythms, of different relationships with the world. Everything must become similar, homogenous, exchangeable. Singularity is the ability to withdraw from this kind of homogenization. Singularity is joy in becoming yourself.

Precarization

In the second volume of the *Grundrisse*, Marx speaks of General Intellect. General intellect is a fundamental concept if you want to understand something of what is happening now, a century and a half after Marx. General intellect means the connection of infinite fragments of human intelligence in a continuous machine of production.

Cognitariat is a word, a concept, meaning at the same time the general intellect at work and the body – the denied body, the forgotten body – of the

general intellect. Because, as you know, the general intellect has a body. An erotic body, a social body. But when we are working in the network machine we forget about that body. This is sickening us. This is producing pathologies. This is producing psycho-pathologies, social pathologies. So, cognitariat, the concept of cognitariat, means: 'remember, you – general intellect – you have a body'. This body is precaritized in present conditions.

What does the word precarious, precaritization mean? You see, what is work now-a-days? Work is becoming an ocean, an infinite sea of fragments of abstract time. Fragments, recombine-able fragments, fractals, I would say. Fractals of time, of working-time, of intellectual-working-time, joining, connecting together in the networked machine. So the capitalist does not need to buy you, your person. You have rights, you have a life, you have a family, you have a union. So capital does not need you anymore. He needs your time, your fragments of time. This is precaritization. Forgetting about the body, forgetting about the person, forgetting about the erotic needs and desire of the person. Forgetting about the unions, about the social and political rights of the person, and directly taking your time. Your time fragments, your time fractals, and recombining into a networked machine. Cognitariat is: remember that you have a body. General intellect is looking for the body.

Semiocapital

When capitalism connects with the general intellect it starts to produce in a different way – no more things, no more cars, no more iron and metal and steel. Well, iron and metal and steel and cars and things still are there, but

what we are really producing is not that. It's the concept, it's the sign, it's the semio, as the old Greeks said. Semiocapital is the new condition of capitalism in a world, in a situation, where the production is essentially semio-production. Production of projects, production of financial figures, production of words, production of concepts, production of simulation. Semiocapital is essentially about simulation. Simulated capitalism. This is semiocapitalism.

Actually, when you think about the present condition, you should be aware it's not so much about cognitive capitalism. Capitalism is not cognitive, capitalism is financial if you want, is abstract, is simulated. Work is cognitive work. And capital is becoming more and more the immaterial world of production of illusions.

Semiocapitalism is all about acceleration, acceleration of the info-sphere. The info-sphere is the environment filled and saturated with signs. We produce signs, we receive and consummate signs, and the acceleration of the info-sphere is increase and growth in capital value. More signs, more simulations, more and more. And this kind of acceleration is producing an affect of designification of the world. More signs, more information, less meaning. Remember that this idea of enmeshed information was an idea of William Burroughs. Burroughs said, 'more information, less meaning'. So what is happening is a kind of pathologization of the psycho-sphere. The acceleration of the info-sphere, the acceleration of the rhythm of information is producing an effect of contraction and of sickness in the psycho-sphere, or the sphere of our psychic and sensual relationships. So, you see, that this process of acceleration is producing an effect of suffering. Suffering is the main problem of the first Internet generation. Of the first generation which learned more

words from the machines than from matter. Psychic suffering. Depression. Panic. Attention Deficit Disorders. Epidemic of suicide. This is the mark of the last decade.

Thera-poetry

Giorgio Agamben, in a text about language and death, says that the voice is the meeting point of body and meaning. Interesting idea. And I would say that poetry is the meeting point of meaning and sound – meaning and music. Because music does not mean only sound, it means rhythm. And what we need is to find our singular rhythm. Singularity is all about rhythm. It is about recording your refrain, your ability to relate to the stars in the sky, to the ground, to the body of the other, to your own body. So I say the thera-poetry, and I think about the thera-poetic affect of my voice, of writing poetry, poetry, voice, body, coming back from what has been denied because of the acceleration of the info-sphere.

I have a dream, a dream of a website where you can click the link and the screen gets black. You cannot check your mail, you cannot check your Facebook profile, you cannot go anywhere in the net. You only can listen to my voice. This is thera-poetry in my mind. Bye bye.

Citation:

Notes

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[1] This article is best read in conjunction with the video discussed here. Please see this link for the video work: https://vimeo.com/74394747.

[2] Please see the Appendix for a transcript of the text in the video.

[3] This video was directed by Gary Genosko and produced by the Infoscape Centre for the Study of Social Media, Ryerson University.

[4] For the transcript of Berardi's talk please see the Appendix.

[5] *Performing Documents* Conference at Arnolfini (Bristol) on 14 April 2013.

[6] I have had a request from a director, who is filming a documentary on Berardi, whether he would be able to include an excerpt of *After the Future: A Homage to Bifo* in the film. This raises interesting questions around the dissemination of my artwork in the context of a documentary on the author.