ISSN 2002-3898

DOI: https://doi.org/10.7146/nts.v25i1.110916
Published with support from Nordic Board for Periodicals in the Humanities and Social Sciences (NOP-HS)

REVIEWS

Gabriele Brandstetter and Gabriele Klein (eds.)

Dance (and) Theory

BIELEFELD: TRANSCRIPT VERLAG, 2013, 324 PAGES.

> G. Deleuze: "Il n'y a plus de représentation, il n'y a que de l'action, de l'action de théorie de pratique dans des rapport de relais ou de réseaux […] M. Foucault: […] la théorie n'exprimera pas, ne traduira pas, n'appliquera pas une pratique, elle est une pratique." (From a conversation between Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze published in l'Arc 1972 under the title Les in-tellectuels et le pouvoir 8 p. 205).[1]

Mirroring a theoretical turn in European dance and dance scholarship prevalent since the late 1990s, the edited volume *Dance (and) Theory* presents the reflections of a multitude of artists and scholars from an array of disciplines related to the arts. Providing an overview of topical discussions and positions on dance (and) theory, it repairs an imbalance in the past two decades of dance theory publications in English that have favoured Anglo-American scholarship. Based on the international congress *Dance (and) Theory*, hosted by the Centre for Movement Studies at the Freie Universität in Berlin and the German Research Foundation (DFG) in 2011, the publication gauges the 'state of the arts' and its discourse in a wider political context, while centring the discussion on the productive, but also often troubled relationship between dance theory and practice.

Counting a total of thirty-eight contributions, the collection includes keynote lectures by three renowned dance scholars: Susan Leigh Foster ("Dancing and Theorizing and Theorizing Dancing"), Gabriele Brandstetter ("Dance Theory as a Practice of Critique"), and Gabriele Klein ("Dis/Balances: Dance and Theory"). Between these lectures are thematically structured sections on artistic research, aesthetics, politics, archives, and 'the next generation'. The majority of the contributors are based in academic institutions in Germany. The rest include voices from Austria, Bulgaria, Slovenia, Spain, the UK and a few from the US. References to the philosophy of arts recur throughout the articles.

Seen as a whole, the volume reflects the correlations and redefinitions of dance and (or with) theory – as actualized in the interweaving of performances and performative lecture demonstrations with presentations and lectures during the congress. The contributors voice quite diverse approaches to the thematically structured discussions on the danced practice of theory and the theorized practice of dance. In the following I focus on the three sections entitled Artistic Research, Aesthetics and Politics.

ARTISTIC RESEARCH: DIFFERENT FORMS OF KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTION?

Defining artistic research in its contemporary framework as being about transitions and combinations between different forms of knowledge production, the introductory article by the editors problematizes the focus on presentations of process over product as a somewhat inflationary outcome in recent years' research orientation in the performing arts. Concurring that presentation is

a shared characteristic between academic and artistic research, Gabriele Brandstetter and Gabriele Klein note that the proposed definition of artistic research had been repeatedly criticized during the congress for undermining artistic autonomy and positioning it as an exploitable commodity within the capitalist economy (p. 71). The otherwise inconclusive response to the presentations in this section notes that all the projects touched upon by the panellists focused on eliminating the privileged status of individual authorship in the arts, either through collective authorship or by eradicating the divide between spectators and performers in granting the audience an active role. Most radical in terms of rephrasing the concept of authorship in the production of arts and sciences is theatre director and founder of PerformingArtsForum (PAF) Jan Ritsema. Writing from a standpoint in speculative realism, he proposes displacing the central notion of the creator-subject with "connectiveness" (p. 67).

RE-FOCUSING THE AESTHETIC

Interestingly, several of the contributors to the section called Aesthetics argue for a re-evaluation of aesthetics as an analytical concept, transposing it from a formalist to an experiential category. In an historic outline of the position of aesthetics in relation to dance and other performing arts, the introduction by Gerald Siegmund points out that Anglo-American dance and dance scholarship since the 1960s has framed dance as a socio-cultural practice that is articulated in practices by communities, groups and subjects, while aesthetic positions have been frowned at. Arriving from a perspective within the notion of participation, Juliane Rebentisch juxtaposes the transcendental ideal of modernist aesthetics with Nicolas Burriaud's relational aesthetics and its transposition of art into life. Offering a third perspective, the category of aesthetic experience defines the work, in her mind, as a product emerging from the experiences it releases rather than an objective given (p. 101). Already in the 1930s, American dance critic John Martin's modernist conception of aesthetic autonomy of modern dance underlined its power to communicate through kinaesthetic empathy as a defining feature. His and other modernists' claims of essentials on the one hand and universals on the other have been rightly criticized (p. 109). Still, as Sabine Huschka maintains, dance as performance retains a perceptual dispositif with physical as well as theatrical properties. By displacing the focus from criteria inherent in the artwork or a property of taste to acknowledging the aesthetic as a central quality of dance works in performance, she suggests re-instating kinaesthetic empathy as a key to the perception of dance performance granting reflective access. The proposal is made with reference to neuroscience research in kinaesthetic empathy (mirror neurons et al.) as a sensory driven approach to knowledge.

DANCE AND POLITICS

Opening up the topic of politics, André Lepecki's introduction ties the discussion back to the quotation at the start of my review: Is the political extrinsic to the art form, or is dance rather a praxis of theorization in itself that inaugurates new configurations of the political? The section's repeated references to Jacques Rancière focus artistic-political acts as dissensual events constituent to the "aesthetic regime" (p. 153). Framed in this manner, dance is discussed in geopolitical terms and as a social field of production, while choreography's manipulation of bodies in relation to each other is posed as the very matrix of politics. Along similar lines, Bojana Kunst points to the projective temporality specifically associated with contemporary European dance as subjectively disempowering.

As the review hopefully communicates, *Dance (and) Theory* is a valuable collection of articles, rich in standpoints and condensed discussions. It is also generous in terms of bibliographical references and provides a good overview of the status quo regarding dance (and) theory.

Karen Vedel

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1 Gilles Deleuze: "There is no representation any longer, there is only action: the action of theory and the action of practice." Michel Foucault: "Theory is not the expression, the application, the translation of practice, it is a practice in itself" (p. 100 in the volume reviewed; translation by the editor).